

The Giving Disciple

Living the Gospel through Generosity



The **SIXTH** in a Series of **6** Small Group Studies



MDPC

Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church





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1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.

2 Introduce every group member (15 min).

Go around the group and have every member answer the following questions aloud:

- What is your name?
- What is your connection to MDPC or to another Christian fellowship?
- What in the past seven days has been really good news for you?

(Please note each member's time should be brief. If 10 members speak for five minutes, you will have taken 50 minutes to introduce yourselves!)

3 Read aloud about *The Equipped Disciple Series*, *The Giving Disciple Course*, and group expectations (5 minutes).

The Equipped Disciple is a multi-course small group curriculum developed at Memorial Drive Presbyterian Church. Each course lasts six sessions, with each session approximately 60-70 minutes. (To take up to 90 minutes, simply extend the group's participation in one or more areas of the session's lesson plan as desired.)

There are six 6-session courses designed for *The Equipped Disciple*, including this course you are starting now.

- *The Growing Disciple*
- *The Witnessing Disciple*
- *The Studying Disciple*
- *The Praying Disciple*
- *The Serving Disciple*
- *The Giving Disciple*

Another multi-course series of small group curriculum, *The Maturing Disciple*, is scheduled to launch in 2022-23.

This course, *The Giving Disciple*, has the sub-title *Living the Gospel through Generosity*. Each session will focus on one specific aspect of giving that will enable you, with the Holy Spirit's help, to be a joyful, generous follower of Jesus Christ as you live out the gospel day to day.

Most sessions will include study and discussion on a biblical passage relevant to the spiritual practice of service. Also, each session will include opportunities to grow in your other spiritual practices, such as devotional reading and Scripture memory. Directions for those leading a group are found in the session materials themselves, not in a separate leader's guide.

So your group will be a fruitful and joyful experience, each member will strive to embrace the following:

- Commit to attend consistently.
- Contribute to a group climate of mutual trust, respect, honesty, and vulnerability.
- Discuss willingly. This is not a lecture. Your input is vital!
- Prepare in advance for the upcoming group session, barring unexpected events. (If such events occur, come to the session anyway.)
- Write in this guide. (But remember, this is not a writing class. Brief notes may suffice.)

- Bring your Bible every time. Ordinarily, biblical passages won't be printed in the guide.
- Anticipate that the Holy Spirit will do something in you during this time of focus.

4 Prepare and discuss as a group 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 (30 min).

Read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions and prompts below. When you meet as a group, read 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 aloud.

Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss with one another.

Paul is writing the Corinthian church about participating in an offering to assist the Jerusalem church. In so doing, he describes the response of Christians from the province of Macedonia (such as the Philippian church) to the need. What stands out to you about the Macedonians from Paul's description? Why?

Macedonian Christians consider giving to be a "privilege" (2 Corinthians 8:4, NIV). Often we consider such opportunities to be obligations or even impositions. How is your participation in what God is doing in the world through giving your time, talents, and treasure a privilege for you? What can restore the joy of your generosity?

Paul encourages the Corinthian Christians with their generosity in 2 Corinthians 8:7. How are the Macedonian Christians a helpful example to them? A helpful example to you? A challenging example to you?

2 Corinthians 8:9 is an especially profound verse. Describe briefly and discuss with your group how the generosity of the gospel is expressed through this verse.

What in the context of 2 Corinthians 8:1-9 leads you to think the riches discussed at the end of verse 9 are not primarily material or financial? If this is so, then what are these riches? If you are a follower of Jesus, how are you made rich in Him?

5 Read aloud about devotional Bible reading and responding (5 min).

We just finished a Bible study. Another encounter with Scripture that growing disciples need to practice often is reading the Bible devotionally. The consistent devotional reading of Scripture is an important way to experience the continuing presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For our 6-week course, we will read the story of Abraham from Genesis 12-25 together as our group's devotional reading. If you are unfamiliar with Abraham's story, you may find the 8-minute video overview of Genesis 12-50 from "The Bible Project" helpful. You can follow this link or type it into your web browser: <https://bibleproject.com/learn/genesis-12-50/>. (Note: if you are already a consistent reader of the Bible, well done! For the group's time together, please either add Genesis 12-25 to your present reading or substitute Genesis 12-25 for your reading plan.)

We will divide this meaningful Old Testament book in this way:

- Before Session 2, read Genesis 12:1 — 13:18
- Before Session 3, read Genesis 14:1 — 15:21.
- Before Session 4, read Genesis 16:1 — 18:15
- Before Session 5, read Genesis 18:16 — 21:34.
- Before Session 6, read Genesis 22:1 — 25:10.

You have great flexibility in how you schedule the passages from Genesis for your reading. For example, you may:

- Read a few verses each day.
- Read the first half of the assignment one day and the second half another day.
- Read the entire assignment at once.

Please do not read mechanically. Reflect upon what you read as you read, and prayerfully discern God's guidance for you. In your study guide's appendix, you will find Reading Response Forms to help you answer two questions of each reading from Genesis:

- "In what I read from Genesis, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?"
- "What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?"

Please write your responses in the space allotted. In the remaining group sessions, you'll have the opportunity to share how God has been working through your devotional reading time.

6 Read aloud this introduction to Scripture memorization (5 min).

I have stored up Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You. (Psalm 119:11, ESV)

Memorizing anything, especially Bible verses, gets little respect in our day. With the availability of search engines and smart phones, why bother? All you have to do is Google what you want, and there it is! However, Psalm 119:11 insists that storing God's word within our hearts (in other words, memorizing Scripture) can be an effective means of enabling and strengthening faithful Christian living. It is true Scripture memory will take some effort and determination. But it is well worth it.

Our memory verses for this course are 2 Corinthians 8:7 and 9. These verses neatly and effectively sums up the importance of God's generosity to us as the reason we can be

generous to others. Therefore we may freely give to others because we are sinners with so much given to us. We'll memorize this verse from the NIV, as we can help one another learn it more easily when we share the same translation:

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich (2 Corinthians 8:9, NIV).

Some helpful hints for memorizing are:

- Write out the verses in longhand. Something about writing imprints the words on your memory. For some, repeated writing in longhand is quite helpful.
- Write the verses on a 3"x 5" card. Carry the card with you and refer to the verses often.
- Say the verses aloud as you practice. Speaking also imprints the words on your memory.
- Break up the verses into their smaller units. Start with the first phrase and work on it until you are comfortable. Then add the second phrase. Continue to add phrases as you learn the verses phrase by phrase.
- Reflect on the verses' meaning. Connect the verses with their significance for your life.
- Do not forget to include the Scriptural reference and translation at the end, such as "2 Corinthians 8:9, NIV". (Studies have shown it can be helpful to know where to find the verses you memorize in the Bible.)
- Practice often and review regularly. "Overlearning" is often what is needed to break through.

Starting at your next gathering, you will practice your verses with others by dividing the group into pairs or triads (groups of three) and practicing with your smaller group. You will want to work on your verses in advance in order to take the best advantage of this opportunity.

7 Talk about what's needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the Bible study found in "Session 2: Time Stewardship, Not Time Management" and be ready to share.
- Read Genesis 12:1 – 13:18 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Start memorizing 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) and be prepared to practice with a partner at the next session.

8 Close in prayer.

- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 minutes).
- 3 Share from your personal Reading Response Form for Genesis 12:1–13:18 and discuss (10 min).
- 4 Read, study, and discuss as a group Psalm 39:4-5, Exodus 20:8-11, and Ephesians 5:15-16 (40 min).

Read Psalm 39:4-5, Exodus 20:8-11, and Ephesians 5:15-16 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read aloud Psalm 39:4-5, Exodus 20:8-11, and Ephesians 5:15-16. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

Respond to the following: “In the strictest sense, there is no such thing as time management, only time stewardship, because time passes regardless of what you do or do not do” (John Campbell, Idlewild Foundation). How is this true or not true in your personal experience?

The Psalmist asks God in Psalm 39:4-5 to “let me know how fleeting my life is,” for “the span of my years is as nothing before you” (NIV). Why do we rarely think or talk about this topic? Does an awareness of life’s brevity move you toward a better stewardship of your time? If so, how?

The Fourth Commandment, in Exodus 20:8-11, directs God’s people to observe a day of rest, worship, and focus on Him each week. Why do you think God makes this practice a priority for our time stewardship? Why is this command so hard to follow in today’s world? What is one step you can take to renew this priority in your life?

Paul instructs the Ephesians to “be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise” (Ephesians 5:15, NIV). Why is wisdom from God a singularly vital component of good time stewardship? How can you grow and mature in your practice of this wisdom?

Paul insists in Ephesians 5:16 that followers of Jesus should be “making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” (ESV). What does this mean? How are you “making the best use of the time” allotted to you? Give one example of opportunities taken. Give one example of opportunities missed, avoided, or denied. How does this all reveal your true (as opposed to your aspirational) practice of time stewardship?

Take an honest and discerning look at your smartphone calendar or appointment book for the next 30 days. How does your calendar express a mature understanding of time stewardship? What needs to change—either by addition, subtraction, or adaptation?

We often make our time stewardship a strictly individual concern, neglecting the valuable assistance of our Christian community. In what practical—and mutually accountable—ways can we help one another with faithful time stewardship?

5 Divide into pairs or triads (groups of three) and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) If you have memorized 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV), congratulations! If you have not memorized this verse yet, don’t worry! Say what you can. Continue to work on 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV). You will have an opportunity next time to show how far you have come.

6 Talk about what is needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the Bible study for “Session 3: Doing All to the Glory of God” and be ready to share.
- Read Genesis 14:1 – 15:21 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) and be prepared to practice with a partner at the next session.

7 Close in prayer.



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your Personal Response Form for Genesis 14:1—15:21 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Read, study, and discuss as a group 1 Corinthians 10:19-33 (40 min).

Read 1 Corinthians 10:19-33 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read aloud 1 Corinthians 10:19-33. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

1 Corinthians 10:19-30 discusses an issue causing great turmoil in the Corinthian church. What is it? How would it cause divisions within the congregation? What might be contemporary parallels with what causes divisions within churches in our day?

From the very particular issue addressed in 1 Corinthians 10:19-30, Paul moves to a universal concept in 1 Corinthians 10:31 centered on stewardship. What is this concept? Please write it in your own words. Then share your versions with each other.

How do verses 32-33 amplify and illustrate what Paul says in verse 31? What is the long-term goal as expressed at the end of verse 33? What other Scriptures state and support this long-term goal? How does your life correlate with this goal?

The phrase “the glory of God” from verse 31 sounds churchy, but it is used often in Scripture and carries much significance. What do you think the phrase means? Where are other places in the Bible where it is used? How would you define and explain the phrase to a friend unfamiliar with Christian lingo?

The statement “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (ESV) reveals our chief purpose as humans. What is this purpose, and how does this purpose then direct and guide you as you use your talents? What happens when you fail to exercise your talents in light of this purpose? Be specific with examples from your experience.

How does “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” inspire you? How can your sustained excellence through your talents give God glory at home, at work, at church, and in the community? In comparison, how does the pursuit of perfectionism actually work against what God wants to do in your life?

How does “whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” define success for you? Compare and contrast this understanding of what constitutes success with some of the world’s multiple definitions. What definitions of success have been governing your life and why? What, if any, changes or alterations should you make?

5 Divide into pairs or triads and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) If you have not memorized this verse yet, do what you’re able. Continue to work on 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV). You will have an opportunity next time to show how far you have come.

6 Talk about what is needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the Bible study for “Session 4: Giving Cheerfully” and be ready to share.
- Read Genesis 16:1 – 18:15 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Continue memorizing 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) and come prepared to share your verses with the entire group!

7 Close in prayer.



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your Personal Response Form for Genesis 16:1—18:15 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Read, study, and discuss as a group 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 (40 min).

Read 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 in a Bible translation of your choice, then respond to the questions below. When you meet as a group, read aloud 2 Corinthians 9:6-15. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

What universal principle does Paul endorse in 2 Corinthians 9:6 as he talks with the Corinthians about participating in a special offering for Christians in Jerusalem? How have you seen this principle at work in your experience? How have you seen this principle misunderstood or misapplied?

Our motivation for giving matters, according to 2 Corinthians 9:7. Why? In general, how are inward motives and outward actions supposed to intersect in Christian living? Regarding giving: When have you been generous for the right reasons? For the wrong reasons?

In 2 Corinthians 9:8-11, Paul establishes a distinctly Christian perspective on the relationship between giving and receiving. What is this perspective? How is it different the way our world often sees this relationship?

According to 2 Corinthians 9:12-14, God receives glory and honor through our generosity in several ways. What are these ways? How do we put these into practice in the church? In your life?

Paul cannot keep from bursting out with praise and thanksgiving in 2 Corinthians 9:15. As you reflect on God's faithful supply of your needs and your opportunities to share with others, how might you praise God in your current circumstances? Discuss with the group.

We typically read Paul's comments in 2 Corinthians 9:6-15 as being only about money. Is this true? What other resources may these comments address? How may you then share these resources, according to the guidelines of 2 Corinthians 9:6-15?

Many MDPC members and friends have abundant resources in their lives, especially compared with much of Houston and the rest of the world. How does this abundance guide and motivate you in your stewardship? What is your next best step, so you can grow in your practice of generosity as you seek to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ?

5 Divide into pairs or triads and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) No doubt you have made progress on memorizing 2 Corinthians 8:9. Wonderful! If you are struggling, remember God is with you as you memorize this verse. Go as far as you're able. You will have an opportunity next time to continue your work.

6 Talk about what's needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the Bible study for “Session 5: Tithing and Proportionate Giving” and be ready to share.
- Read Genesis 18:16—21:34 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Continue your work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV), and be prepared to practice with a partner at the next session

7 Close the gathering in prayer.

- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your Personal Response Form for Genesis 18:16—21:34 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Read, study, and discuss as a group Leviticus 27:30-34, Matthew 23:23-24, and 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 (40 min).

Read Leviticus 27:30-34, Matthew 23:23-24, and 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 in a translation of your choice, then reflect upon your responses to the following questions and prompts. Feel free to write down comments, thoughts, and notes in the spaces below. When you meet as a group, read aloud Leviticus 27:30-34, Matthew 23:23-24, and 2 Corinthians 9:8-11. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

Leviticus 27:30-33 discusses the Old Testament command of the tithe (usually defined as the giving of 10 percent of resources). According to these verses, what makes the tithe worthy of being lifted to such importance? What larger issue about a relationship with God does the tithe underscore? How might this command, given first in an agricultural society, be understood in modern times?

Leviticus 27:34 emphasizes the covenantal basis for the tithe for the Israelites. How does the tithe connect with the “big picture” of Israel’s story of moving from bondage in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land?

As is often the case, God’s people take a command from God and twist it over time, away from its primary purpose. How does Jesus expose the Pharisees for doing this very thing in Matthew 23:23-24? What are the “weightier matters of the law” (v. 24, ESV)? How do they rank in comparison with the tithe?

As we review the Gospels, we note Jesus talks about the tithe rarely, with only three references that all focus on the Jewish leadership’s hypocrisy regarding it (Matthew 23:23-24 above; see also Luke 11:42; 18:12). How does Jesus both affirm the tithe and yet place the tithe into a different perspective?

Paul does not mention the tithe in his letters in the New Testament. Instead, he discusses what many call “proportionate giving” in 2 Corinthians 9:8-11. Review these verses from last session’s study. Put 2 Corinthians 9:8-11 into your own words and share it with your group. Why is “proportionate giving” an appropriate name for Paul’s teaching here?

Paul’s teaching on proportionate giving helps us understand tithing more completely. In proportionate giving how might tithing be considered a starting point for your deliberations rather than a long-term goal? How does proportionate giving expand your horizons about stewardship and help you avoid hypocrisy and legalism as you give? Discuss.

Respond to the statement on giving by C. S. Lewis from Mere Christianity and discuss its implications for your life: “I do not believe one can settle how much we ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small” (p. 86).

5 Divide into pairs or triads and practice saying the memory verse without notes (10 min).

(NOTE: If you are meeting via Zoom, your host will need to set up the “breakout room” feature.) No doubt you have made progress on memorizing 2 Corinthians 8:9. Wonderful! If you are struggling, remember God is with you as you memorize this verse. Go as far as you’re able. You will have an opportunity next time to complete your work.

6 Talk about what’s needed for next time (5 min).

Review the homework:

- Please prepare the Bible study for “Session 6: Trusting God in Daily Stewardship” and be ready to share.
- Read Genesis 22:1 – 25:10 and complete the Reading Response Form in the Appendix.
- Continue your work on memorizing 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV), and be prepared to practice with a partner at the next session.

7 Close the gathering in prayer.



- 1 Welcome everyone and open with prayer.
- 2 Greet and “check in” with group members (5 min).
- 3 Share from your Personal Response Form for Genesis 22:1—25:10 and discuss (15 min).
- 4 Read, study, and discuss as a group Luke 12:13-34 (40 min).

Read Luke 12:13-34 in a translation of your choice, then reflect upon your responses to the following questions and prompts. Feel free to write down comments, thoughts, and notes in the spaces below. When you meet as a group, read aloud Luke 12:13-34. Then take one question at a time as a group, share your responses, and discuss your answers with one another.

What shouted request in Luke 12:13 prompts Jesus to talk about stewardship in verses 14-16? How does Jesus reply? Elaborate on how His teaching runs counter to so much of what 21st-century popular culture emphasizes.

In the parable Jesus tells in verses 16-20, what is the rich man’s situation? How does he respond? How do the man’s priorities and actions backfire on him to the point Jesus calls him a “fool”? What parallels with this parable do you see in today’s world? Or in your life?

At the parable’s conclusion, verse 21 states, “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God” (NIV). What are the characteristics of a life focused on being rich toward God as compared to the characteristics of a life focused on material wealth? Assess honestly your daily stewardship at present with regard to these characteristics.

With words that echo the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), what does Jesus say not to do in Luke 12:22-25? How do you distinguish between legitimate concern about a specific issue you’re facing and illegitimate worry about it? What examples does He supply in verses 24-28 to support His point? What experiences from your life remind you of God’s enduring care for you?

The financial anxiety Jesus describes in these verses is often oppressive and transgenerational, from retirees nervous about nest eggs to young adults struggling with debt, and is also a primary cause of marital discord. Why do you think finances in particular provoke such enormous anxiety for most of us? How can we start to address this problem comprehensively from a faith-based perspective?

According to Luke 12:29-31, what does Jesus say will happen when you seek God's kingdom? What are the "these things" (NIV) the passage talks about in verse 31? Name one specific area of your daily stewardship that would look noticeably different from the way it looks now if you intentionally trusted God's promise. Please describe and discuss.

In verses 32-34, Jesus summarizes His teaching for those who follow Him with both bold assurances and bold steps of faith. State what He says in your own words. In response, how can you move ahead in your stewardship with either a big step forward, or the first step in a series of smaller, sequential steps, as you seek to live out the gospel daily?

5 Share your successful memorization of 2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) with the entire group (10 min).

Celebrate your successes! If you have not memorized this verse, please do as much as you're able, and then continue to work on it. If there is time, please share with one another what you learned from this process.

6 As you close in prayer at the end of this final session, please state to your group at least one benefit you have experienced from participating in *The Giving Disciple*. Give thanks to God for His grace and encouragement (10 min).

7 Close the gathering in prayer.

Reading Response Forms for Genesis 12-25

For Session 2 • Genesis 12:1 – 13:18

In what I read from Genesis, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

For Session 5 • Genesis 18:16 – 21:34

In what I read from Genesis, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

For Session 3 • Genesis 14:1 – 15:21

In what I read from Genesis, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?

For Session 6 • Genesis 22:1 – 25:10

In what I read from Genesis, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

For Session 4 • Genesis 16:1 – 18:15

In what I read from Genesis, what has made the deepest impression upon me and why?

What may God be communicating to me as a result? How might I respond to God's leading?



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