GIVING AND GENEROSITY

Collect

If you had all the wealth in the world, what would be your first purchase? What does how we spend our money and time tell others about us?

Can you think of any songs or movies that money has a prominent role? What message was it trying to tell us about money?

These starter questions are designed to make talking about money easier and begin the discussion that will follow on our attitude and response towards money.

Read Luke 12: 13-21

Context

Inheritance and 1st Century Jewish Culture

Land was a family's most important economic asset. It could be bought and sold, but inherited land was special. In the ancient Near East, if a family sold inherited land for its full price, ownership passed permanently into the hands of the buyer. If a family sold it for a lower price, due to economic hardship and the need to sell quickly, family members were generally allowed to redeem (repurchase) the land at the same or a similarly low price. It was important to give families the chance to keep their inheritance (see, for example, the story about Naomi's land in Ruth 4).

Upon the father's death, his heirs could divide the estate immediately, or they could keep it intact for a time, perhaps while waiting for a younger son to come of age. When it came to the act of dividing, the father's estate was apportioned into equal shares. Assigning specific shares to each heir was likely done by casting lots. Deuteronomy 21:17 suggests that typically the eldest son received two shares and other sons one each.

Have members of the group ever been through the process of receiving an inheritance? What was that process like – challenging? Calming?

We can assume that the person in this crowd in Luke 12 who asks Jesus this question simply was dissatisfied with his 'lot' and desired more. He was attempting to use Jesus' platform to shame his brother to giving more than was customarily given. Jesus' initial response cuts to the heart of the question (see verse 14-15).

John D Rockefeller, America's first ever billionaire, was once asked 'how much money is enough?' and he replied, 'just a little bit more'.

How strong is the desire for more? How do we find satisfaction in our 'lot' rather than always desiring more? Is this just monetary or are there other desires for 'more' that are equally unhealthy?

Join // Walk // Read // Pray // Commit

Content

Greed as addressed in this parable leads us to forget the right things and remember the wrong.

Firstly, the owner of the field remembered HIMSELF. In the space of 3 verses (17-19), the first-person singular is used **nine times**. Greed is truly seductive and is a quiet influence in our lives, however one outworking is the focus on self. Remind yourself of the Lord's prayer one chapter earlier, in those three verses (Luke 11:2-4), how many uses of the first-person singular are there?

What does that tell us about the shape a Jesus-led life may take. In pairs or threes discuss: Where in your life have you turned 'inward'? Is there some area of your life you enjoy selfishly? How do you create a balance between self-care and selfishness? How did Jesus create that balance?

Secondly the owner forgot OTHERS. Verses 18 and 19 paint a bleak picture of what selfishness can lead to; a content and easy life yes, but devoid of human relationship and real joy which can only be found in God.

How does the challenge in verse 20 translate to your own circumstance? What do you think is inferred by the phrase 'rich toward God' in verse 21?

Challenge

In small groups, discuss: How has your life been affected by the generosity of others? Consider financial, relational and time-based generosity. Are there areas in your life you are resistant to being generous with?

Connect

Spend some time praying in twos and threes for any area of challenge that this may have brought up. Finish with these words from St Ignatius:

Lord Jesus, teach me to be generous;
teach me to serve you as you deserve,
to give and not to count the cost,
to fight and not to heed the wounds,
to toil and not to seek for rest,
to labour and not to seek reward,
except that of knowing that I do your will.

Amen.

N.B This discussion may have raised some difficult issues HTB offers The Money Course (https://www.htb.org/themoneycourse/) which is run by an external charity who specialise in helping people through financial difficulties.