

'Everyone gets to Play' Creating a Culture of **engagement**
'Come as you are' Creating a Culture of **Radical Welcome**
'Follow me' Creating a Culture of **discipleship**
'Give it away' Creating a Culture of **generosity**
'Play nicely' Creating a Culture of **honour**
'Before an audience of 1' Creating a Culture of **worship**
'Leadership = influence' Creating a Culture of **blessing**



Cultivate #4: 'Give it Away' Creating a Culture of Generosity

1. A life with God is a generous life
2. Money is an indicator
3. Money is a transformer
4. Its about more than just money

This is what Jesus says about generosity:

Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

God is generous. He created this garden for us to live in and steward. He is quick to pour out blessings on us. And he wants us to be generous too. He wants us to both give and receive with an openness and freedom.

Satan has cut into to destroy this freedom and generosity. He has done it with worry and doubt – which causes us to hold onto what we have for fear of losing it. And he has led us into slavery through our worship of money. Here at Vineyard we want to create a culture of generosity where together we can learn the freedom that God brings. We want that good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over to be poured into our laps.

Do you know where that comes from?

In the OT it tells landowners to leave a margin around the edge of the field and not to harvest there. Poor people, widows and refugees could then come and receive from the landowner. Jesus is saying come to God, lift up your robes and I will fill them with grain. Not just that but press it down, shake it together, we can fit more in there. Until its overflowing!

So God is a generous God and wants us to be generous too. How do we go about creating a culture of generosity?

Jesus was, amongst other things, the greatest teacher who ever lived. It was his teaching about God and about human nature - about the way that way that life works, about the way that life works, about relationships - that captivated a whole society and for over 2000 years now has been the focus of many of the greatest minds in the world.

There was never been a human being whose teaching has had the impact that Jesus' teaching had. And the greatest teacher who ever lived devoted more of his teaching to the subject of money, than any subject he ever spoke on outside of the Kingdom of God itself. More than he talked about anger, more than he talked about pride, more than he talked about sex, more than he talked about love.

What's the Kingdom of God like – it's like when a guy finds a pearl worth a lot of money in a field and he sells all he has to get it and he's thrilled.

What's forgiveness like – it's like when somebody owes you a lot of money and then you swallow the debt.

What's faithfulness like – it's like when an employer leaves you a lot of money and you handle it really well.

What's Satan like – he's like a thief who breaks into a house to steal a lot of money.

What's conversion like – it's like when a woman loses a lot of money and then finds it – finds the coin and she's thrilled and she throws a big party.

The greatest teacher who ever lived talked about Drachmas and Shekels and Talents and Gold, and the **obvious question is why?**

Why would the greatest teacher who ever lived put money as one of the two most frequent subjects he would ever speak about?

Was it because he was 'fund-raising'? Probably not! He was homeless, his ministry had no campus, none of the disciples were on salary, he paid taxes by pulling money from fish's mouths, and his entire finance department consisted of Judas.

Was it because money always gets people's attention that he talked about it so much? Well he certainly could use it that way, but he didn't have to, he was a master teacher, the master storyteller. He didn't have any problems at all holding people's attention.

So was it because his culture was so affluent? Was it because the people he was addressing were overwhelmed by appeals to consumerism and materialism? The vast majority of Jesus' audience, as you know, as well as the majority of his followers were peasants and they lived from day to day. Subsistence lives. They were about one drought, one famine away from disaster.

I believe that the primary reason that the greatest teacher who ever lived, made money one of the top topics of his teaching was quite simple.

Money has the unique power to reveal the real condition of the human heart.

Nothing else does that quite the way that money does, because money is the way that we assign value to reality. Money is the way that we keep score.

Money is the epicentre of the intersection between the spiritual and the material. It is the epicentre of that intersection. It is the primary resource that human beings look to outside of God for what we most crave.

We feel vulnerable, money promises to make us secure. For most people when they talk about security what they think of is financial security. When we feel insignificant, money promises to make us important. We all claim that wealth is measured by people's friends, but how many reality shows on television are there with titles like – 'Who wants to be a really good friend'.

- We feel insignificant – it promises to make us important.
- And money has the power to cause people to feel shame. It's not about moral character, it's about the failure to be successful - and money is how we keep score.
- We feel dissatisfied or bored, money promises gratification.

Jesus is not a naive dreamer on this subject. The greatest teacher who ever lived understood all about how the human heart is captured by money.

God doesn't need money – God's got everything he needs to make His kingdom come onto this earth – God doesn't need money - but God requires submitted hearts.

Money is among other things, one of the greatest tools for spiritual formation that exist in the world, because it expresses the commitment of the human heart.

This brings me to another reason why Jesus talked about money so much. The primary one is that nothing else reveals the condition of the human heart the way that money does, but a second reason goes very closely with it.

Money has the unique power to reveal the condition of the human heart and money has the unique power to be used by God to change the condition of the human heart, to reveal the condition and to change the condition of the human heart.

Again, amazing insight from the greatest teacher who ever lived, Matthew 6:19 he says 'Don't store up for yourself treasure on earth, where moth can corrupt. Rather store up treasure in heaven' and then this statement which I think is so brilliant. 'For where your treasure is there your heart will be also'. I think this is immense wisdom about the nature of human dynamics and how change happens.

We tend to think about it the other way. Give someone an emotional appeal, capture their heart and then their money will come along. Jesus says wherever you invest your treasure. You want your heart to be somewhere, start investing your treasure there; you will find your heart going along. Because the heart/treasure connection works that way.

So Jesus says to a rich young ruler who says 'I want to follow you'. 'OK go and sell everything you have and give your money to the poor and then come and follow me'. Of course the guy has a heart problem. But Jesus doesn't say, 'Straighten your heart out and then your treasure will get right.' He says to this man 'Change your treasure distribution and watch what happens to your heart'. And the man will not do it.

The money deal is a trust deal and Jesus understood when people give their treasure something happens to their hearts and they open themselves up to experiencing the reality of God in their lives, like no other way.

It's about more than just money

Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

I have to confess that I have taken this verse out of context. By reading it on it's own we don't get the true meaning.

37 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

Jesus is instructing those who follow Him to "give" forgiveness in the same amount we desire to be forgiven. We are to be as merciful as God is to us while judging, condemning and forgiving others in the same way we desire to be judged, condemned and forgiven by God.

The heart of generosity is set at the beginning of the world, at the end and through the middle.

We are created to live free in this wonderful Eden, walking in close relationship with God who loves us unconditionally and abundantly.

The end of the Bible sees us restored in the garden with God once again.

And in the middle the Bible says that God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whomsoever believes in him will not die – will not be cast out of the garden and out of relationship – even though that is the just punishment for our sin – but will have eternal life.

Because on the cross Jesus died, bearing our punishment for us, and in rising again from the dead showed us the way to also be raised to life in Christ to be reunited with our heavenly father once again.

Such love – such sacrifice – such kindness – such generosity. And it is this that enables us to forgive others, not judge others, not condemn. For we have been forgiven so much, we have been given so much, we have received so much – so we can be generous in turn.

- How much more generous he would be in giving in order to once more have relationship with us?

This much?, this much?, No: this much

God in the person of Jesus voluntarily stretched out his hands and those he'd created hammered nails through them.

God is a giver. The Bible says in John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave – his only Son."

Not just God the Father in giving us his Son, but Jesus too gave his own life for us:

In John 10, Jesus said "I lay down my life. No-one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord"

Phil 2 Paul writes: "your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus! Who gave up what belonged to him, and became a man. Gave everything a man can give – obedient to death even death on a cross!"

Extravagant generosity!

So as we take communion, and remember what Jesus has done for us – thank him, receive with thankful hearts the free gift of eternal life – but also let this be a time of reflection and repentance. Maybe we have some decisions to take, forgiveness to ask, changes to make.

But most of all come and receive:

"Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."