

One BRMC Small Group Study

Stewardship Sunday

Leader's Guide

Please note that this study guide accompanies the pulpit sermon on 26 July 2020. The suggestions below are not model answers but to help guide your study.

Scripture Passage:
Ecclesiastes 11:1-5 (NKJV)

Context:

Today, we observe Stewardship Sunday. Stewardship Sunday is when we take some time to reflect and examine how we have used our resources, whether be it time or money. Have we been keeping these tight-fisted or have we been using these to further the kingdom of God? Take some time during this study to reflect both individually and as a group on how we have been using the resources that God has given us.

Introductory

1. In Ecclesiastes 11:1-2, the author gives 2 examples of how to be wise with the crops that a farmer has grown. What do you think the author was trying to convey about wisdom?
 - The book of Ecclesiastes calls us to not focus on the pleasures of the present but to focus on being wise in light of the future.
 - These 2 verses give us 2 examples set in an agricultural society of what it means to be wise with our resources in light of the future.
 - The farmer that grows wheat would be smart and business-minded to not use up the bread and servings of food immediately by cooking up a great feast in the present.
 - A wise farmer would save up the food for the winter or would invest it to further grow his business, to ensure stability in the future.
 - Whether we are adults with working incomes or youths with allowance, we understand this wisdom of keeping money for the future. We do not spend the money we immediately receive on a big-ticket item but we carefully portion out the money to ensure there is enough for the days to come.
 - COVID-19 is the perfect example of how uncertain our futures are. Think back to December 2019 and the grand plans that you may have made for the future, whether be it plans to move your company forward in the new year, an exciting overseas trip for the family or even plans to study overseas. Many of these plans have been shelved or delayed.
 - Take this time to share with your small group what are some of the plans for 2020 that have been upended in COVID-19. Have you been able to weather the storm confidently or has it been a struggle facing the uncertainty?

2. In Ecclesiastes 11:3-4, the author provides examples of the flow of natural consequences: rainclouds collect and pour out rain, a tree that is cut falls in the direction that it is cut, and a person who watches the wind and looks at clouds will not sow or reap. These natural consequences flow from both the design of God and the action (or inaction) of man. Where do you put your confidence or hope in: entirely in the natural design of God, in the will and action of man, or is there a balance?
- A question that might be helpful to encourage discussion, is whether these two verses resonate with those in the group?
 - We are often told we need to “do”, to take action. Yet, there is also an aspect of the certainty of God’s actions which will occur. On the other hand, if we do nothing, we will end up fruitless (i.e. we do not sow or reap). What is our approach to this?
 - The passage also brings out the issue of taking steps of faith which is needed at every decision and at times of uncertainty. Are we then watching God and placing our trust in Him?
 - While the future may be uncertain, we can trust in the certainty of some things even if they may not be so obvious at first glance. One certainty which we often forget but that we can hold fast to is in the love of God. And that God is our Provider.

Reflection

3. How does the unpredictable future change our attitude towards our wealth?
- Both the passage and our present situation with COVID-19 reflect how unpredictable our future is. Our reliance on our current investments may dry up, no matter how secure they have been in the past.
 - In his sermon, PIC shared these 2 truths: Life is unpredictable and, in a twinkling, it might become nothing. But remember that God is watching over you and He will take care of you when life hits you hard.
 - Amidst the fluctuations of life, there are times when we feel secure and comfortable and times when we feel anxious and fearful. But this is the true reason why we do not place our confidence in the securities of wealth or the comforts of this life. Instead, we place our hope in God.
 - Matthew 6:19-21 says ‘Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.’
 - When we store up our treasure in heaven, it is a sign of placing our trust in God and acknowledging that we give him our hearts wholeheartedly. When we trust in God’s sovereignty and wisdom, we can let go of our wealth and not hold it so tight to our chests.
 - The Bible is full of promises that we can be certain will be true no matter what our present situation looks like. This should give us hope for our future because if we build our houses on a solid rock foundation, our houses will stand firm in the storms of life.

4. How can we be wise for the future, yet look past our present circumstances to ensure that we are storing up treasures in heaven? What sacrifices might you need to make to ensure that you remain committed to being part of God's work on earth?
 - Taking the wisdom from the past 5 verses, it is wise to look to our future and consider the future in whatever we do.
 - However, as Christians, we do not just look to the future of this life, but we remember that we have eternal life. Considering this eternal life should vastly change the way we live our lives on this Earth.
 - Just as we save for our future on Earth, such as retirement or our children's education, we remember that these things are temporal and it is even more important to save up and invest in our future for eternity. Storing treasures in heaven may require to spend our earthly resources sacrificially to further the Kingdom of God on Earth.
 - Take some time with your Small Group to discuss what it means for you to use your resources to further the Kingdom of God. If it is a sensitive topic, perhaps you can break up in smaller groups to discuss this. As a leader, remember to create an atmosphere of love and care. Don't judge if someone is giving a smaller portion of his income but recognize the commitment and faith he is showing.

Application

5. Knowing that God takes care of us in our struggles, how does that change the way we steward our provisions from God? Do we become more generous or less generous?
 - Amidst financial difficulties, which many of us are experiencing in this time, the natural response or reaction is to give less and keep more for ourselves.
 - However, knowing that God takes care of us in our difficulties, we know that He will not leave us to struggle when we give generously and cheerfully.
 - We can trust that God sees our generosity and will not short-change us.
 - As Christians, we can hold fast to the truth that giving liberally will not set us back but open up ourselves to the blessings we can receive from God.
 - In Mark, we studied the passage of the widow who gave of her 2 copper coins and Jesus recognized the sacrifice that she made.
 - Although it may be financially challenging amidst the economic downturn of COVID-19, will you take a step of faith to still commit to giving to the Lord? Though the portion given may be small, God recognizes what you are giving.
 - Take some time to make an individual commitment to the Lord to give in this time. It may be difficult on your part but God sees your struggle and you can trust that He will reward your giving.

Prayer

6. Write out a prayer for yourself based on what you have heard and learned from this session.
 - (a) What is in your heart for yourself?

- Perhaps you need to confess that you have fallen short in your confidence in the Lord. Bring it into the Light of Christ and surrender your insecurities and anxieties to God:

“Father in heaven, I confess that I have been burdened by my circumstances and I have not truly placed my trust in You. Father, I am sorry for what I have done in trusting in myself rather than in You. I now surrender these anxieties and insecurities to you trusting in Your word: to cast my burdens onto Jesus because He cares for me. Fill me with the assurance of Your everlasting love.
In Jesus’ name. Amen”

(b) What is in your heart for others?

- Perhaps you feel led to pray for those who are struggling under these difficult times. Give them to the Lord and pray also for ways in which you can provide practical help:

“Merciful Father, I thank you for *(name/s of family and/or friend/s)* Lord I trust that you are Sovereign over their life. I commit *(name/s of family and/or friend/s)* urgent needs to you and rely on Your promise that You will cause all things to work for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your purposes. Give me wisdom as to how to minister to them and show them how much You love them. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

- It is always useful to collate these prayers and to refer to them for thanksgiving and sharing next week.