

Small Group Material - Jesus Gives 2

...His attention and recognition (Mark 12. 41-44)

Jesus was watching the poor widow give and knew her heart. His gaze is on us and he recognises when we give out of our poverty.

Leaders: please use this material in ways you think will suit your particular group or come up with ways of praying which you feel would be more appropriate.

Welcome (10 mins) What comes most naturally to you in terms of giving to God's work? What ways are hardest for you?

Worship (15 mins)

Here is a song to lead you into God's presence for your worship time: 'Here am I, Lord' by Keith Duke, Geoffrey Nobes and Margaret Rizza. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjKjSBW13m4>

Read Psalm 139.1 - 16 (either one person or take several verses each). Then, give people a couple of minutes to read the psalm quietly to themselves, perhaps letting their attention rest on any verse or phrase which particularly speaks to them. After a couple of minutes, you can invite people to share how God's word spoke to them or turn it straight into prayer.

Word (20 mins) I have prepared a visualisation of this story in Mark 12.41-44 which you will find on a separate page if you scroll down. People will be asked to 'become' one of the people in the story (one of the disciples, a by-stander, the widow or another 'giver'). You could either leave it up to group members to choose which they will be or write those characters on pieces of paper duplicating enough for everyone and ask them to pull them out of a basket.

Before you introduce the visualisation, tell people that Jesus had been warning the disciples about the false piety and ostentatious behaviour of the Pharisees. (Mark 12.38-40)

Witness (40 mins)

Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests... Be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.' Eph 6.17-18

Here are some suggestions of what you could do in this time of prayer. You wouldn't be able to do them all...

1. If you haven't considered James' letter as a group, you could read it together and pray over the points raised in it. You can listen to James' letter on the St Mary's website. I found there was a link to listen to it on the first page. <https://www.stmaryscnorton.com/>
2. Different members of your group will be involved in different aspects of the church's life as well as having different concerns for our life and ministry. You will probably know what these are. But, it's well worth asking people what they are concerned about and would like to pray for in the life of the church. You may not be able to pray for everything - so, agree on where to focus prayers this week. Ask yourself, 'What would we really love to see happen in this area?' Pray your dream...!
3. Imagine the Old Bank completed. What can you see going on in the building? Pray specifically for the development of the 'Building to Serve' project: for James and the working group, Alistair & Georgina. Pray these dreams into being...

As you pray, encourage people to pray 'conversationally'! By that, I mean, encourage people to pray *short prayers* and *stay with one topic* before moving on to another. And, you don't even need to say 'Amen'!! By not saying 'Amen' and keeping your prayers brief, it gives others the opportunity to 'chip in' what they think, rather as we do in a conversation with our friends. We also don't change the topic when we chat with our friends until it feels natural to move on. It's considered rude if we change the subject too early... So, home in on an issue or

area, letting everyone contribute. Experiment with this new way of praying. You'll find it dynamic!!
'If two of you agree on earth about anything, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven.' Mt 18.19

Visualisation of Mark 12.41-44

We are going to explore the story which we often call 'The Widow's Mite' by visualising ourselves into it. I will lead you and invite you to use your imagination. There is no one right way but do try to stay focussed rather than let your mind wander off. Some people find this kind of exercise easy, for others it's harder. That's fine.

Get comfortable in your seat. It might be helpful to remove things off your lap. As you settle become aware of the sounds around you. There may be sounds coming from outside the room...sounds from inside the room. Notice the sounds as they are. You don't need to name them... Turn your attention now to sounds from your own body. Just notice them.....

Now, begin to imagine you are in the temple Jerusalem. Begin to hear the sounds around you, the clamour of people, shouting, maybe merchants trying to sell their wares, the sounds of birds and animals ready for sacrifices.How hot is it?How smelly? You move from this outer court, the court of the Gentiles, through the Gate Beautiful, to the next court... to the Court of the Women. Some of the hustle and bustle dies down - but it's still busy. Hear the sounds around you... footsteps, chatter...

In this story, there is a poor widow, there's Jesus, the disciples and there are other bystanders as well as those also giving alms. Visualise yourself as one of the people in the story.... Who do you feel drawn to be? You could be the widow, or another giver, or one of the disciples.... Choose one now.

Jesus comes and sits down, opposite the collecting boxes. There were thirteen of them and were called 'The Trumpets' because of their shape. Crowds pass by, some people throw money into the Trumpets. Is there a crush of people or just a few? ... Where are you? What are you doing?... Watch people throw their money in. Notice all the different sorts of people... What are they like? What do you notice? What are you feeling?

Jesus is watching. A poor widow sidles up to the collecting box, puts in two coins and retreats. They were tiny coins, the smallest of all.... You notice Jesus' eyes on her, his gaze upon her. What do you see in his eyes? ... How do you feel as you see this?

Jesus now gathers his disciples around him. They cluster round him and you listen to his words. 'I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. They all gave out of their wealth; but, she, out of her poverty, put in everything - all she had to live on.'

Notice the reactions of the other disciples... What strikes you in what he said? Did anything surprise you? How did it make you feel?... Jesus turns his gaze to you... Does he say anything to you?... What would you like to say to him?

Give people a moment of quiet, then ask: Bring yourself out of the scene. Now look back over the prayer exercise. How did you feel as you did this?... Was it easy or harder? ... What seemed the most significant thing for you? Was it a feeling? A thought? Or something which surprised you?... Return to that again and relive it... stay with it... go deeper with it.

Thank God for what he showed you in this time of prayer.

Come gently back into this room... First of all, how did you find doing this exercise? Is there something you'd like to share? (You could do this in pairs especially if you have people in your group who might be shy in the whole group of sharing something quite personal).

Here are a few questions if you want to use them (either in addition to the visualisation or instead):

What was Jesus trying to teach the disciples?

In your opinion, why do most people give to churches?

What kind of faith did the widow possess? What motivated her?

How does the way you give financially reflect your faith?

Why do you give to God's work? What challenges you in this story?