

ICNU DEVOTIONALS

PART 4: THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES

DAY 1

SCRIPTURE: 1 JOHN 3:16-18

“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has not pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.”

OBSERVATION

John was the beloved disciple of Jesus. He was one of the three who were closest to Him. He saw firsthand how Jesus gave of Himself to serve others. This sacrificial love should be the standard we look to in walking out our faith.

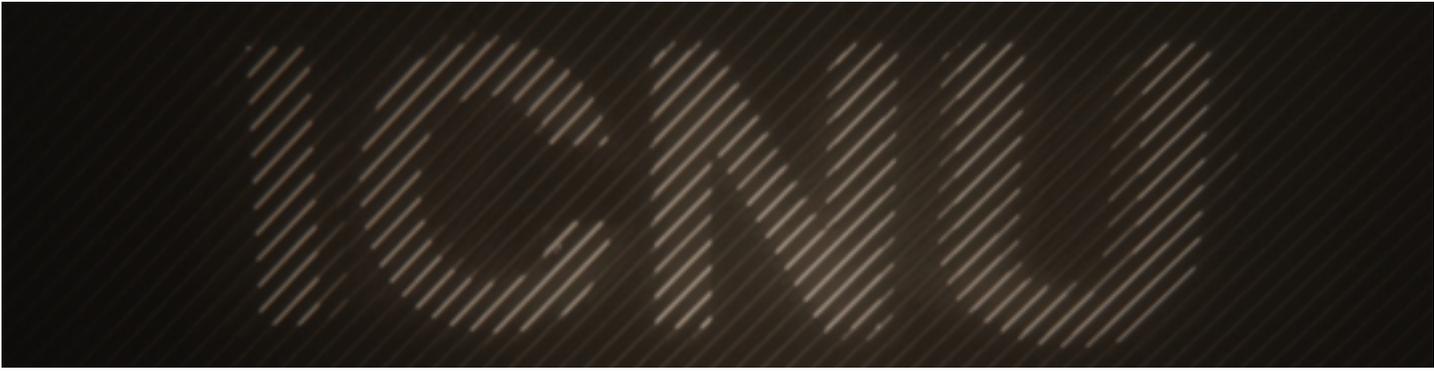
APPLICATION

Giving generously, helping someone in need begins in the heart. Scripture tells us that God loves a joyful and humble giver. Both of these qualities come from our hearts. A joyful giver is one who gives out of a great love for God not obligation or duty, from a place of gratitude for God not stinginess, from a place of experiencing God’s amazing grace not out of trying to get something from God. A humble giver is one who gives out of deep love for God not trying to win approval, praise, or favor from men/women. A humble person does not expect anything in return or try to control how the receiver uses that gift. When you truly grasp all that God has done for you - His grace, forgiveness, His spirit, eternal life, and all the gifts in your life - you can’t help but be filled with His love and an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Then giving a tithe or helping someone in need is really such a small amount.

PRAYER EXERCISE

Make a list of all the things God has done and has given you. Spend some time in gratitude and thanksgiving. Ask God if there is a ministry or person in need and how you can help in a practical and tangible way. Remember to do so from a joyful and humble heart.

Lord, words cannot begin to express the gratitude I feel for all You have done and all You have given me. Show me how I can give to You by helping a ministry or a person in need. Help me do so with a joyful and humble heart. Amen.



ICNU DEVOTIONALS

PART 4: THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES

DAY 2

SCRIPTURE: PHILIPPIANS 4:16

“...for even when I was in Thessalonica, you sent me aid more than once when I was in need.”

OBSERVATION

Paul was thanking the Christians in Philippi for helping support him as he preached the gospel message. The Philippians supported him when he was preaching in their city and even in other surrounding cities.

APPLICATION

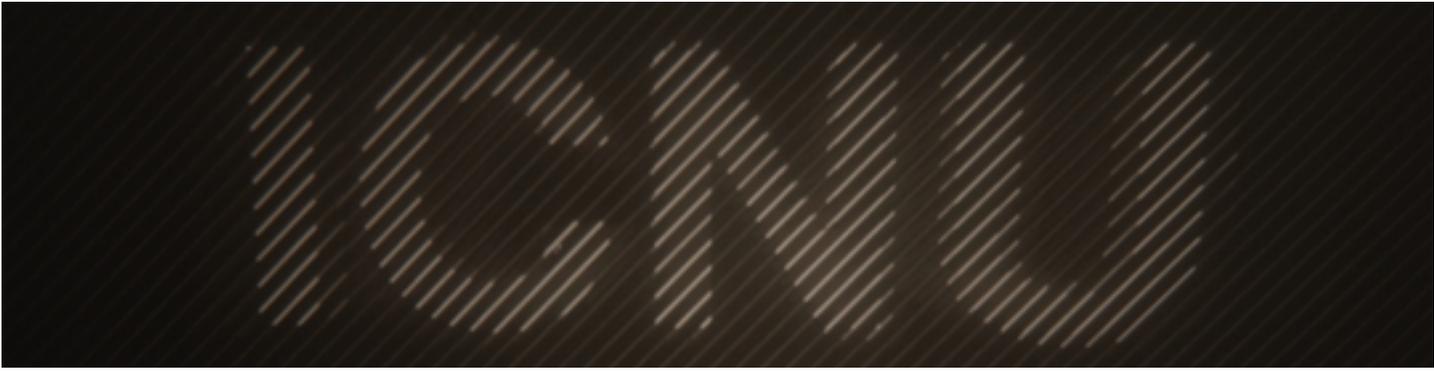
Just as Paul relied on financial support, so do our ministry leaders today. Our local churches have bills to pay just as we do. Our ministers need to eat just as we do. They are called to serve, preach, teach, and need to be paid, to earn a living just as we do. Giving to those in ministries, whether they are in our local church or out in the mission field needs to come from the heart. God loves a joyful and humble giver.

Through the generous support of Christ-followers Paul was able to travel extensively to plant churches and encourage the believers. Our personal generosity should always flow from the understanding of how generous God is with us. We are all called by God to be on mission to spread the Gospel. For those whom God has called to vocational or full time ministry, we should also support them as they are reaching and influencing people who are beyond our own sphere of influence.

Our attitudes toward money and generosity are often formed in our childhood. What did you learn about money and generosity from your parents or other significant people? Do you feel money (and other resources) is something that is evil, neutral, or good?

PRAYER

Lord, create in me a generous, joyful and humble heart when it comes to sharing my finances with those who are in ministry. Help me look for practical ways I can be a good steward of what You have given me so I will have more to share with others. I am so grateful for the roof over my head, food on the table, clothes on my back, and all the loved ones in my life. And I am especially grateful for Your love and acceptance of me. Amen.



ICNU DEVOTIONALS

PART 4: THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES

DAY 3

SCRIPTURE: DEUTERONOMY 15:7-8

“If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.”

OBSERVATION

This is in the middle of the command for the Israelites to forgive all debts every seven years. It is saying that it is important to help the poor and needy without considering if or when they will pay it back. The implication is that giving should be based on compassion for those in need, not on selfish calculations of what is in it for us.

APPLICATION

The same is true for us today. God wants us to be joyful and humble when we give, not hardhearted or tightfisted. Some people may be fearful about giving; that there won't be enough to take care of themselves or that the ministry may be misusing the funds. Some may give expecting something in return or wondering what is in it for them. Continue to trust God to supply all your needs and that He will hold the ministry leaders accountable for how they manage what they have been given.

Ask God for wisdom and insight. Speak honestly to Him as he desires to hear from your heart. He will not judge you. He deeply loves you. Journal these questions:

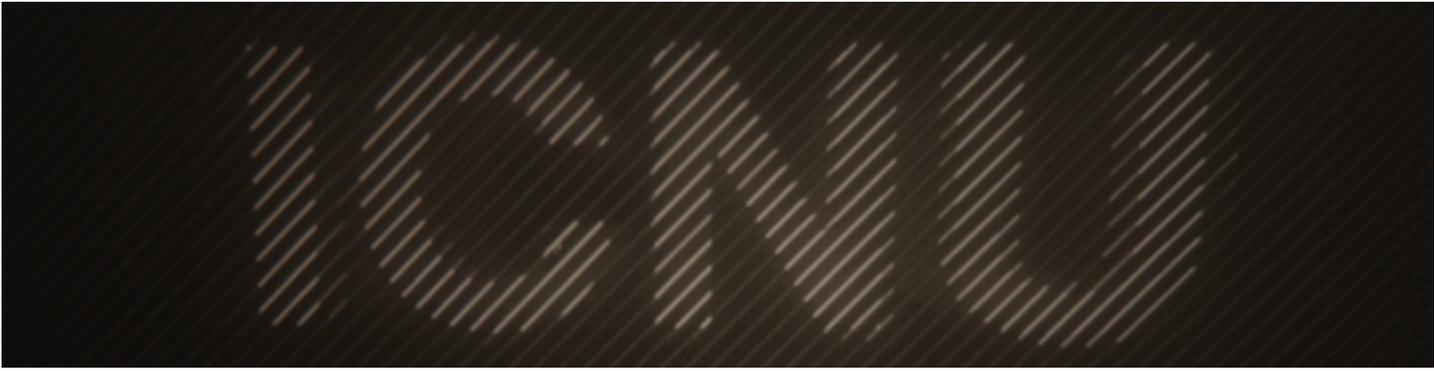
Am I hardhearted about giving? Why? (If you are not sure, ask someone who is close to you). What am I really afraid of or concerned about? Can I give without expecting something in return? Do I give to gain favor or approval from God or other people?

How am I tightfisted? What am I trying to control? What I am trying to hold onto? Why?

What would help me to become more soft hearted and freer to give? How can I begin to slowly unlock those tight fingers and offer an open hand of what I own to God?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to give from my grateful heart to Your ministry. Grant me the wisdom to discern when I help someone, if am I really helping or if am I enabling them. Search my heart, O God, show me if there is any tightfisted or hardness in my heart. Help me understand where this comes from and what You want me to believe. Help me let go of any fear, control, or false beliefs about money and giving. Help me see that everything I own comes from You, to release it and offer it with open hands. I thank You for all the blessing in my life and for accepting me where I am with my struggles about giving. Amen



ICNU DEVOTIONALS

PART 4: THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES

DAY 4

SCRIPTURE: EPHESIANS 4:32-5:2

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ, God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

OBSERVATION

Paul is giving instructions on Christian living and how it is different than how non-Christians live. Christians are to imitate God. One way to imitate God is to have a forgiving spirit.

APPLICATION

Love, Grace and Forgiveness. We hear this throughout Scripture on how much God truly loves us, became human flesh in Jesus and gave His life for us so we can have eternity with Him. Yet we often don't fully believe it in our hearts. He also gives us His Holy Spirit to help us be kind, compassionate and forgiving of others and of ourselves. When we forgive and let go, we become more free; to become who we are each uniquely created to be and to treat others as we want to be treated. This is a lifelong process.

First, it is important to understand what forgiveness is and what it is not. It is not condoning the other person's wrong behavior against you. It is not forgetting. Reconciliation may or may not happen. It is not taking revenge or getting even. Forgiveness is a process and may take time if it's a deep offense. It is about letting go and letting God handle it. It is about being free internally so you can experience more of God's love and love for others.

IMAGINATIVE PRAYER EXERCISE

Imagine you are with God and you are His beloved child. If you are comfortable, sit by His side. David lamented and he was a man after God's heart. If David can lament, so can you. Remember, it's a process and it may take time before you can completely let it go. God honors your willingness to step out and enter in the process. He will help you along the way.

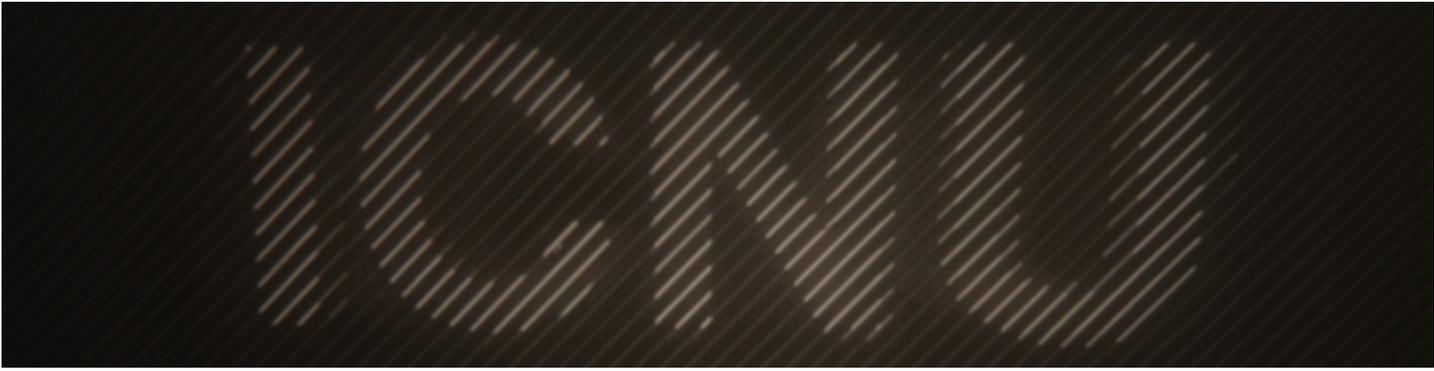
Tell Him what happened, where you hurt, and exactly how you feel. He won't judge you. He desires an honest heart so feel free to let it all out. Express or write your lament to Him.

Allow the person who hurt you to come and sit at God's other side. Now look at them and tell them how they hurt you.

When you are ready, try to hear their side, their perspective of the situation. Try to see their wounds as wounded people hurt others. We all have wounds and are works in progress. Try to see them as the beloved child of God, same as you, with gifts and flaws.

When you are ready, release them and the offense to God. Trust that He will take care of it. Feel the chains of bitterness, hurt, and anger being released. Offer compassion to the other person by praying for them.

Now ask God to show you your part in the offense. Try to show compassion for yourself, for sometimes we respond out of our own woundedness. Ask for forgiveness and healing over your part. Don't beat yourself up anymore. Live free as His beloved!



ICNU DEVOTIONALS

PART 4: THE MACEDONIAN CHURCHES

DAY 5

SCRIPTURE: LUKE 10:33-35

“But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’”

OBSERVATION

Jesus tells this story to explain how we are to treat someone who is in need. In those days the Jews did not like the Samaritans and did not interact with them (racial tension)³². As you read the whole story, both a priest and a Levite passed by the wounded man and did nothing. They were both religious leaders. Jesus emphasized that the Samaritan is the one who took compassion on the man regardless of their socio-economic differences. He saw someone in serious need and went above and beyond to help him.

APPLICATION

We are encouraged to help those in deep need regardless of their color, status, religion, and so on. In the story of the Good Samaritan, this was a “911.” The wounded man could not help himself, he truly needed someone else to rescue him. When someone has experienced a true “911” moment, we should want to be able to help them. There are so many reasons (or excuses) we can think of to justify withholding help. In each situation, ask God to have a discerning heart. If He asks you to help, do what you can, whether it’s a little or a lot and do it with joy and humility.

Can you think of a time in your life when you were the priest? The Levite? The Good Samaritan? The wounded man/woman? What happened? What did God teach you or lead you in this?

PRAYER

Lord, help me stop and be aware of someone who is in deep need. Is this enabling? Or is this a deep weed? Grant me the wisdom to know the difference between the two. If I am to help, show me how much, what, and when. Whatever I do, I lift this wounded person up to You. Heal them, take care of them, love them, as You have so graciously done for me. Amen