

WORKING GROUP STUDY GUIDE

THEOLOGY OF PROPERTY AND MONEY

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

God is love, has created us in love, and calls us to be a people of love:

At the very heart and centre of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is love. All that God is and calls us to be flows out of God's loving desire that we be in fellowship with God, with one another, and with the world God has created.

Read and prayerfully reflect on John 17:24-26.

In his prayer, Jesus reveals two astounding truths: (1) that from before the beginning of creation the thing that sits at the very heart and centre of the triune God is loving relationality and (2) that it is Jesus' desire that we be incorporated into, and participate in, this same loving relationality.

How can we – both as individual Christians and as the Presbyterian Church – know and experience this love more fully?

How might this change the way we think about money and property?

Read and prayerfully reflect on 1 John 4:7-21

Twice in this passage John declares, “God is love”. This describes the essence, nature and being of God’s very Godness – not just what God does, but what God is.

If we were to put “God is love” at the very centre of all our thinking and behaving concerning the Church, the mission, of God, the world, and our wealth – what differences might we notice?

John describes God’s love in terms of God’s redemptive self-giving on behalf of all humanity – sending Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (v10) and to be the saviour of the world (v14). God’s love, therefore, is more than simply a warm feeling toward us – it involves actual behaviour on behalf of others that comes at a cost.

How have you benefitted from God’s redemptive self-giving love and how do you sense God calling you to pass onto others what you have received?

John says, “Anyone who does not love his brother or sister who he has seen cannot love God” (v20).

How can we better “see” our brothers and sisters and how can we better love them in practical ways?

**All things exist by and for Jesus Christ
(Colossians 1:15-20 and Psalm 24:1-6)**

All that exists – land, animals, plants, property, money, church buildings and our very own lives – exist by and for Jesus Christ. All we have is a loan from God that we hold on trust for Jesus.

Read and prayerfully reflect on Colossians 1:15-20

In this passage Paul declares that “all things” are created by and for Jesus and that in Christ “All things” hold together so that in “Everything Jesus might have the supremacy”. Paul doesn’t simply have in mind physical things like property and money; but also ideas, and therefore our concepts of possession and use.

If we were to genuinely take to heart Paul’s statement that in “All things Jesus has the supremacy” how might this change the way we think and behave about things that we typically describe as being owned by us?

Most of us Presbyterians are migrants, or children of migrants, to Aotearoa New Zealand.

What can we learn about concepts of land, property and ownership from our Māori brothers and sisters as tangata whenua – in particular our Māori indigenous theology of Kaitiakitanga – guardianship for future generations?

"Kaitiaki and kaitiakitanga

'Kaitiaki' and 'kaitiakitanga' are Māori concepts which have been translated... as loosely meaning 'guardians'/'stewards' and 'guardianship'/'stewardship' respectively. However, such a meaning does not convey the full meaning of the Māori concept of kaitiakitanga... Both Miller and Marsden (1992, p 15) agree that in traditional Māori society there was no concept of ownership, just "user rights", and therefore defining by reference to stewardship (which connotes guarding someone else's property) is incorrect. Marsden explains the meaning of kaitiakitanga as follows: The term 'tiaki', whilst its basic meaning is to guard, has other closely related meanings depending on its context. Tiaki may therefore also mean to keep, to preserve, to conserve, to foster, to protect, to shelter, to keep watch over. The prefix 'kai' with a verb denotes the agent of the act. A 'kaitiaki' is a guardian, keeper, preserver, conservator, foster-parent, protector. The suffix 'tanga' added to the noun means guardianship, preservation, conservation, protecting and sheltering... It is the intergenerational responsibility inherited at birth to care for the environment, which is passed down from generation to generation. The purpose of kaitiakitanga is not only about protecting the life supporting capacity of resources, but of fulfilling spiritual and inherited responsibilities to the environment, of maintaining mana over those resources and of ensuring the welfare of the people those resources support... The purpose of kaitiakitanga is to ensure sustainability (of the whānau, hapū or iwi) in physical, spiritual, economic and political terms. It is the responsibility of those managing resources to ensure survival and political stability in terms of retaining authority over an area. Included in kaitiakitanga are concepts concerning authority and the use of resources (rangātiratanga, mana whenua), spiritual beliefs ascertaining to sacredness, prohibition, energy and life-force (tapu, rāhui, hihiri, and mauri) and social protocols associated with respect, reciprocity, and obligation (manāki, tuku and utu)."

*Ministry for Environment, 2010. MĀORI VALUES SUPPLEMENT, A supplement for the Making Good Decisions Workbook, New Zealand,

God provides for us with a radical open-hearted generosity that does not stop to count the cost

(Exodus 16, Matthew 5:43-48, and John 12:1-8)

God generously provides for us morning by morning. Like the manna in the wilderness, money and property is a river – rather than a pool – that flows to us from the loving provision of God. God does not provide these resources so that we can store and control them; instead they are a provision from God to meet current needs, as we entrust ourselves to the goodness and faithfulness of God for the future.

Read and prayerfully reflect on Exodus 16.

God provided for the people according to their need. Some were very skilful and motivated and gathered more than they needed, but others were less so and didn't gather as much. Nevertheless, in the providential wisdom of God a mysterious redistribution occurred such that despite all this human effort, the outcome was that "Each one gathered as much as he needed" (v18).

How do you think this might apply to us in our contemporary context?

Read and prayerfully reflect on Matthew 5:43-48.

Jesus describes God as the one who "Causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (v45) and on this basis urges us to be the sons and daughters of God by showing loving generosity to all people.

When thinking about sharing the wealth – where should we draw the line concerning the limits of our generosity?



Read and prayerfully reflect on John 12:1-8.

Mary engaged in an extravagant act of radical generosity motivated by love of Jesus – and perhaps also motivated by an intuitive understanding that it was Jesus’ mission to die; something the other disciples had consistently failed to see. Supposedly wiser heads were scandalised by what they could only see as waste. But Jesus reveals a deeper purpose and honours Mary saying: “She has done a beautiful thing... whenever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told in memory of her” (Mark 14:6-9).

In what ways should extravagant acts of radical generosity motivated by the love of Jesus sit at the very centre of our sharing of the gospel?

Pause Point:

What has stood out to you so far?

What else does God say about; God is love, everything belongs to God, and God provides for us with radical generosity?

God calls us to be a people of radical open-hearted generosity that looks first to the leading of the Spirit of God before counting the cost

(2 Corinthians 8:1-15 and Luke 15)

In love, God grants us great freedom about how we use the resources provided for us. However, this freedom sits within Christ's guiding principle of God's mission. Over time, resources risk being channelled into areas that stand in contradiction to God's mission. As the Church, we are called to correct this.

Read and prayerfully reflect on 2 Corinthians 8:1-15.

Paul rejoiced in the radical open-hearted generosity that motivated the Christians in Macedonia to give so abundantly to the churches in Judea who were experiencing great need saying: "They did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will" (v5).

How might "giving ourselves first to God" look in our context?

How does Paul connect his context to Exodus 16 and God's provision of the manna in the wilderness (v13-15)? What does this suggest to us concerning how we might connect our context today to Paul's situation and that of Exodus 16?



Read and prayerfully reflect on Luke 15.

Leaving 99 sheep in the open while embarking on a hazardous and uncertain search for one that is lost is not best practice livestock management. Turning a house upside down to search for a lost coin of modest value and then inviting the neighbourhood to a street party to celebrate its finding is not rational Economics 101 behaviour. In both cases the cost of the search far outweighs the value of what is lost – that is, as we typically value things!

How do we in our context find that place of compassionate wisdom as we seek to be children of God by following God's call to be a people of radical open-hearted generosity who look first to the leading of the Spirit before counting the cost?



Honouring the past and looking to the future

(1 Chronicles 17:1-15 and Luke 12:13-21)

The resources we currently hold have largely come to us from our forebears who gave them in faith, hope and love. In doing so, they were giving first and foremost – not to us their children – but to God, so that through their generosity we might come to know and love the God that they knew and loved. We honour them, therefore, not by preserving this wealth in the same form they felt led by God to shape it into, but by us recognising what they recognised – that these things come from God and belong to God. This calls us to shape this wealth, not according to what God has done in the past, but according to what God is doing now.

Read and prayerfully reflect on 1 Chronicles 17:1-15.

David very much wanted to build a temple for God but was told that this was not for him to do.

How do we discern between large scale projects that grow out of well-meaning but misdirected human intentions and those that grow out of a genuine desire to do the right and God-honouring thing?

Under what circumstances might we be able to say that we have heard a new word from God that is different to the word our ancestors in the faith heard?

How do you respond to the idea that God is calling us to use the resources bequeathed to us by our forebears in ways that are different to the ways God called them to use them?

Read and prayerfully reflect on Luke 12:13-21.

In this parable Jesus says, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed” (v15).

What are all the different kinds of greed we need to watch out for in our context and in relation to how we use our collective wealth?



Storing wealth risks becoming a failure of trust in the provision of God

(Exodus 16, Matthew 6:19-24, and James 5:1-6)

God's provision of property and money enables us to flourish as we faithfully respond to God's calling. However, when these things are hoarded out of a fear that God will not provide for us in the future as God has done so in the past, this puts us at risk of the wealth rotting, becoming our true master and testifying against us.

Read and prayerfully reflect on Exodus 16.

It was God's intention that the people learn to trust in God's provision on a daily basis. However, some chose to store the manna to use the next day thinking they could take control of God's provisioning into their own hands. We read that the following morning the stored manna was "Full of maggots and began to stink" (v20).

How do we learn to walk the path of faith that acknowledges both our need to trust daily in the provision of God and also that God calls us to be wise stewards of the resources God entrusts to us?

Read and prayerfully reflect on Matthew 6:19-24.

To what extent do you think we in the Presbyterian Church have been "storing up for ourselves treasures on earth" (v19)?

To what extent do you think we have been trying to serve "two masters" (v24)?

Read and prayerfully reflect on James 5:1-6

To what extent do you think these words of James concerning our wealth “corroding and testifying against us” speak into our present context?

Hans Urs von Balthasar reminds us that the guiding principle that must govern all Church change is the mission of God.

“The Church will suffer the loss of its shape as it undergoes a death and all the more so, the more purely it lives from its source in Jesus Christ. To the extent that the Church does live more and more purely from its true source, it will be less and less interested in preserving its shape. In fact when the Church does live only from its true source in Jesus Christ it will not concern itself with affirming its shape, but with promoting the mission of God in the world. As for the particular shape in which God will raise the Church from its death – the Church will be content to entrust that to the Holy Spirit.”*

*Paraphrase from Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Three Forms of Hope*, quoted in G. Weigel *Soul of the World*, William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996, 41.

In what ways do you think it might be true that the Presbyterian Church is undergoing a death?

What evidence are you able to point to that encourages you to believe that God is raising the Church from its death?

Are you content to entrust the particular shape in which God will raise the Church from its death to the Holy Spirit?

What is your dream concerning how we should use the land, property and money we have?

WHAT NEXT

We value what you have to say about the draft Theology of Property and Money.

Let us know what you think. We would love to hear from anyone (individual, group or parish) who has something to add to the conversation.

Email responses to: TMP@presbyterian.org.nz
or mail to Knox Presbyterian Church Waitara,
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Please get back to us by 31 December 2019.