

Bonus Questions for *Women of the New Testament* by Phyllis J. Le Peau

The Widow's Offering: Generosity Beyond the Tithe *Mark 12:38-44*

Hudson Taylor, a missionary to China and founder of the China Inland Mission, was called to a home to pray for a sick woman. He was chosen because, unlike other religious leaders of the day, he did not charge the family to pray for her.

The woman was very poor. When Taylor saw her poverty, he clutched the coin in his pocket. It was the only money he had. He wished that there were two so he could give one to her. After all, he had only two meals left at home for himself.

He knelt to pray for the woman, but found that he could not pray. God was asking him to give up his precious coin. He tried again to pray. How could he walk away with nothing to live on? Again he could not pray. Finally he gave her the coin, was released by God and felt great freedom and blessing as he prayed.

GROUP DISCUSSION. Describe a time when someone who appeared to be more needy than you (emotionally, spiritually, physically or financially) was generous to you.

PERSONAL REFLECTION. How is being generous difficult for you?

In this study we will look at true generosity that pleased Jesus. *Read Mark 12:38-40.*

1. Describe the teachers of the law. What seems to motivate them?

2. The kingdom of God is a primary theme throughout the Gospel of Mark. What do you learn about the values of the kingdom of God from what Jesus says about the teachers of the law?

3. In what situations is it difficult for you to be motivated by God's values in the way you live, act and serve?

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4. *Read Mark 12:41-44.* What were Jesus' observations as he watched the crowd?

5. What does Jesus do and why?

6. Why do you think the story of the poor widow follows the story of the teachers of the law?

What do the two stories have in common?

7. How does Jesus contrast the poor widow's giving with that of the rich people?

8. What do you learn about true generosity from this passage?

9. How should our giving be like that of the poor widow?

10. Why might it be more difficult for those of us who are wealthy to give freely than for those who possess less?

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11. How would you like for your giving to become more like that of the poor widow and less like that of the teachers of the law?

Ask God to help you grow in generosity. Pray about specific ways that you know you need to be more generous.

Now or Later

Look back on your financial records for the past twelve months. Write down the following:

- income for the year.
- amount given away and where it was given.
- amount spent on possessions.

Bring these figures before the Lord. Ask him if he desires change in the distribution of your income. Write down any changes that you sense you hear from him. Thank him for the privilege of giving and the joy of living by kingdom values.

Notes

The Widow's Offering: Generosity Beyond the Tithe. Mark 12:38-44.

Purpose: To learn how to grow in generosity and thus live by kingdom values.

Discussion Question. If the group finds this question difficult to answer, be ready with a story of your own.

Question 2. By looking at what Jesus condemned, we see what his values are. He said that the men who seek status and the attention of others, devour widows' houses (by continually demanding religious contributions from them) and pray only to make a show will be punished most severely. They loved power, and Jesus condemned loving power, position and wealth. He also condemned their show of piety when in reality they mistreated widows.

Question 3. Help the group to keep focused on what motivated the teachers of the law—power, position and wealth—as they think about what motivates them as they live, act and serve. This is a personal question, and it may be difficult for some to answer. Sometimes we do not know the motivation behind what we do. Our goal is not to become belly-button gazers or even to question everything we do. But we do need to be aware of and to help each other evaluate our motivation.

There are things we can do to better understand what motivates us. We should ask God for self-awareness and trust him to reveal our ungodly motivation. Accountability to and praying with others in the Christian community is also helpful. Openness and vulnerability about our lives is vital as is a desire to be motivated by kingdom values. You might follow question 3 by asking how we can become more motivated by kingdom values.

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Question 6. As the leader, you need to look carefully at the two accounts that we consider in this study. The story of the religious leaders and the poor widow do have some things in common. In the first story we are looking at leaders who are supposed to be concerned with the needs of others and giving of themselves to meet these needs. Instead we see that they took from the poor so that they could become rich and became obsessed with wealth, power and position rather than serving. In the other story we are looking at giving in relation to material possessions. Both have to do with giving and the motivation for giving. Both have to do with living by or rejecting the values of the kingdom of God.

Question 7. The *New Bible Commentary* says:

Here we have two contrasting pictures of those who reject and those who accept the values of God's kingdom. Those who reject are the teachers of the law who loved power and position and wealth. They made an outward show of religion, but "gobbled up" the property of helpless folk like widows, perhaps by continually demanding religious contributions from them. On the other hand, there was a poor widow, who willingly and gladly gave to God all the money she had, on which her life depended (44). We all know the amazing generosity of the poor in our Christian congregations. This is the sort of giving that Jesus would show at Calvary, and so this is the sort of giving that he asks from us. (p. 970)

Question 9. This can be a very stimulating question if handled thoughtfully. If it is okay to give less than everything, how is this widow a model for us? Are we ever to consider giving all that we have? What stops us from doing this? How can we know what we are supposed to do? All of these are potential questions for discussion of this issue. This question is not meant to be a way out for us. Our call is to leave everything and follow Jesus. Give serious consideration to what this means.

Question 10. Take the time to dig deeply into the question of what it really means to be generous from God's perspective. Consider what the difficulties are in living generously in this day and why it might be more difficult for the wealthy to give freely of what they have than it is for the poor. Note the contrast between the attitude, motivation and actions of the teachers of the law and those of the widow. Consider such things as the emphasis today of being financially responsible, "taking care of ourselves", self reliance versus God reliance, pride in what we have or even our identity being based on what we have, faith and the lack thereof—do those with little know how to trust God more and the issues of selfishness and greed.

Question 11. This can be a threatening question. Be prepared to speak from your own experience. Encourage positive input about how group members have lived by kingdom values in what they give. Then try to provide a safe environment for talking about areas in which growth is needed.

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Women at the Cross & Tomb: The Courage to Care
Matthew 27:45—28:10

It is an honor to be a woman! Not superior to being a man, but certainly not inferior; indeed, special.

GROUP DISCUSSION. From what you know about history and the Bible, what do you think it was like to be a woman in the culture in which Jesus lived?

PERSONAL REFLECTION. If you are a woman reflect on what it is like for you to be a woman in your Christian. If you are a man reflect on how you respond to women who are leaders in your Christian Community.

In an age when women were second-class citizens, this passage shows how women are esteemed by God and play a vital role in Jesus' life, his last hours and his burial. *Read Matthew 27:45-56.*

1. Describe what the women saw in Jesus' final three hours on the cross.

2. What is the significance of the darkness (v. 45)?

Why do you think Jesus cried out "My God" instead of his usual "My Father" (v. 46)?

What is the significance of the curtain of the temple's being torn from top to bottom (v. 51)?

3. Looking through the eyes of these women what is it like for you to be there?

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4. Read vv. 57-65. Contrast the response of Joseph of Arimathea to Jesus' death and burial (vv. 57-60) with that of the religious leaders (vv. 62-65).

5. The response of the religious leaders demonstrates the hardness of their hearts. In what ways might our hearts be hardened to the truth about Jesus?

6. What did the women have in common with Joseph of Arimathea?

7. Why did it take courage for the women to remain at the cross and the tomb?

8. How does it take courage today to live a life of devotion to Jesus?

9. *Read Matthew 28:1-10.* Continue looking through the eyes of the women. What happened at dawn on the first day of the week (28:1-8). What do you feel and think?

10. Finally they see Jesus! How did they respond to him (28:9)?

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11. What hinders you from truly “seeing Jesus”?

12. How does your response to Jesus compare to that of the women?

13. How does this passage demonstrate that women are honored by God?

Spend time worshiping Jesus.

Now or Later

Get a video that portrays the crucifixion. Before you watch it, ask God to make it as real to you, as if you were there. As you view it be aware of your thoughts, emotions and response to God. What would it have been like to be there? After the movie reflect in silence. Journal on the experience. End your time with singing or reading one or two hymns about the cross.

Notes

Women at the Cross & Tomb: The Courage to Care. Matthew 27:45—28:10.

Purpose: To see and know that women are honored by God and that they had the courage to care for Jesus in the midst of the precarious circumstances of his death and burial.

Question 1. Spend time on this observation question. Look at details. Important details will be discussed based on the observations made.

Question 2. The *New Bible Commentary* records something of the significance of what is happening in the final three hours that Jesus was on the cross, following the account in Matthew.

“Jesus remained alive on the cross from noon until about 3 p.m. *Darkness* at this time (not an eclipse, since the moon is full at Passover) was a sign of God’s displeasure (Am. 8:9). Jesus’ extraordinary cry in the darkness (using Ps. 22:1) shows the depth of his suffering as he gave his life as a ransom for many (20:28). This is the only time Jesus does not address God as “Father,” an indication that for a time even the intimate relationship of Father and Son (11:27) had been broken.

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The supposed appeal to *Elijah* rests on the sound of the word *Eli*, “my God.” Some Jews believed *Elijah* could be summoned from heaven to give help in need. The *wine vinegar* (the ordinary soldier’s cheap drink) was an act of kindness, mentioned because of the echo of Ps. 69:21.

Crucified men normally lapsed gradually into unconsciousness after many hours, even days, of agony. Jesus’ death, however, is described as if he was himself in full control: *gave up his spirit* is an unusual expression, suggesting an act of will.

Verses 51-53 (together with the darkness of v 45) indicate that this was no ordinary death. The huge *curtain of the temple* separated off the sacred interior, so that its destruction was not just an act of divine power (*from top to bottom*) but also a symbol of the opening of access to God through the death of Jesus. The earthquake too signified God’s power and judgment (Jdg. 5:4; Joel 3:16; Na. 1:5-6).” (p. 943)

Question 3. Now enter into the events of this passage through the eyes of the women who were there. Try to relive the emotions, the thoughts that might be going through their heads, their fatigue, their response to the earthquake, the untimely darkness and the curtain of the temple being torn in two. Discuss the possible effects of these events on them as they watched. What memories of Jesus’ words might have come back? What kinds of fears, hopes, do you think they had?

Though we do not know how much anyone, including the women, understood about the significance of all these events or exactly what they saw, thinking through the events in this way is an effective way to look at Jesus’ crucifixion

Question 4. It is significant that the religious leaders got the word, whether through Judas’s reports to them or by directly hearing Jesus’ claims, that he would rise up from the dead. Joseph responded to the truth about Jesus by becoming his disciple. The hearts of the religious leaders become hardened.

Question 5. Allow time for thought. This is a question we should constantly be asking ourselves. It may be difficult to answer because participants haven’t thought about it before, or it is difficult to articulate or threatening. Demonstrate honesty in your own response. If answering this question is the first time your group members consider this issue, it is worthwhile no matter what the verbal response. We Christians are in constant danger of becoming like the Pharisees in our response to Jesus, his truth and other believers.

Question 6. When most of the other disciples fled even before Jesus’ death (Mt 26:56), the women and Joseph hung around. They were concerned about and cared for Jesus’ body. They were his faithful disciples.

Question 7. It was a chaotic time politically and religiously. The women might have been afraid of physical danger while they stayed at the tomb. It was also emotionally hard to stay and continue to face the end of the dream that came with Jesus’ death. It must have been lonely—most of Jesus’ followers had left.

Question 11. “Seeing Jesus” with our spiritual eyes is much different from knowing about him. Talk about the impact on us when we see Jesus. What helps and hinders us? The prayerful lines of song “Open our eyes, Lord, we want to see Jesus” come to my mind in response to this question.

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