

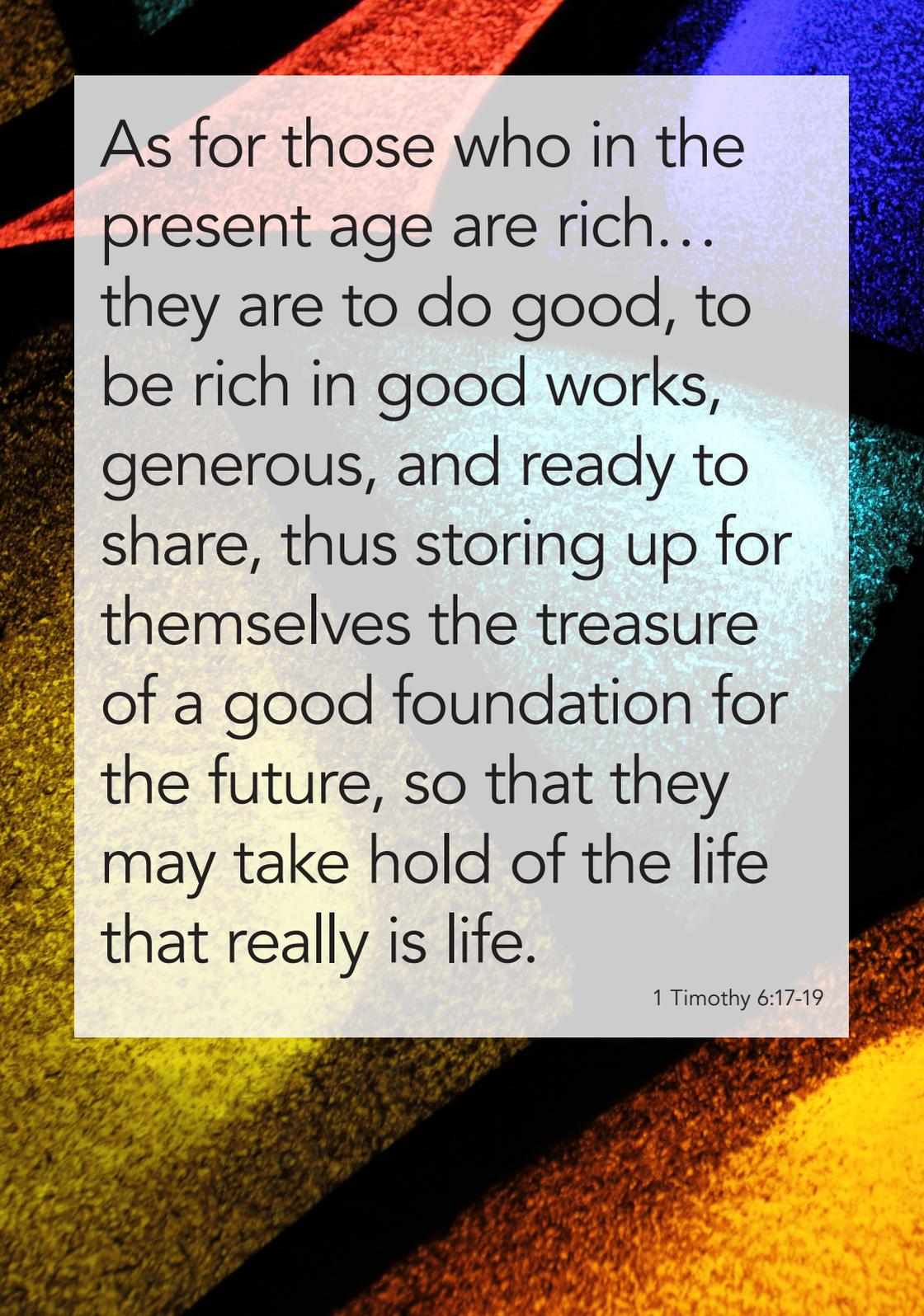
Overflowing faith and generosity

A six-week study course



DIOCESE of **OXFORD**

A Christ-like Church for the sake of God's world



As for those who in the present age are rich... they are to do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of the life that really is life.

1 Timothy 6:17-19

About this course

The words of St Paul opposite call the Christian to a faith that is actively generous, building up spiritual rather than earthly treasures. Generosity can be the foundation of a lived-out faith because it seeks to mirror the generous love of God for the world.

But how does this apply to 21st-century Christians? What does it mean to live a generous faith? Does it just mean money, or are there other ways to be generous?

Over this six-week course we will take some time to consider how Jesus calls his followers to be generous. Each week has a theme:

- 1. Following Jesus' example**
- 2. Charity**
- 3. Prayer**
- 4. Money**
- 5. Mission and evangelism**
- 6. What next?**

Each week you will explore a different way Christians are called to be generous, discuss the theme in your group and find suggestions for what that form of generosity might look like as part of a lived-out faith.

Weekly sessions

Each session follows the same format:

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle and have time to reconnect with one another. Sharing what we've been up to during the week builds a sense of community and shared understanding. You might like to have some snacks available and set people up with a cup of tea so they feel welcome before the main session begins.

Opening prayer

A short prayer to help the group get ready for the time of spiritual reflection.

Video

A short testimonial film to inspire thoughts about the theme of the day. The videos have different speakers with unscripted personal reflections, providing a fresh perspective on the theme of the week. They are designed to open up participants' thinking about the theme without being prescriptive or too theological. They are followed by questions to help stimulate people's responses and lead into the main part of the session.

You can view or download the videos via these links:

1 [Following Jesus' example](#)

2 [Charity](#)

3 [Prayer](#)

4 [Money](#)

5 [Mission and evangelism](#)

6 [What next?](#)

Bible reading

A Bible passage that helps connect the theme for the day to scripture. You may like to ask one of your participants to read the passage out loud.

Reflection

After the Bible reading there is a reflection that connects the passage with the week's theme. When we read the Bible we are all differently moved by the Spirit in understanding what we have read, so it is important to say that the reflection is in no way a fixed interpretation. Instead, it's intended to provide some food-for-thought for the discussion. You might like to ask one of your participants to read this out loud.

Discussion

It's important to allow people the space to ask their own questions and feel free to discuss the week's theme openly, particularly when it comes to emotive topics like money.

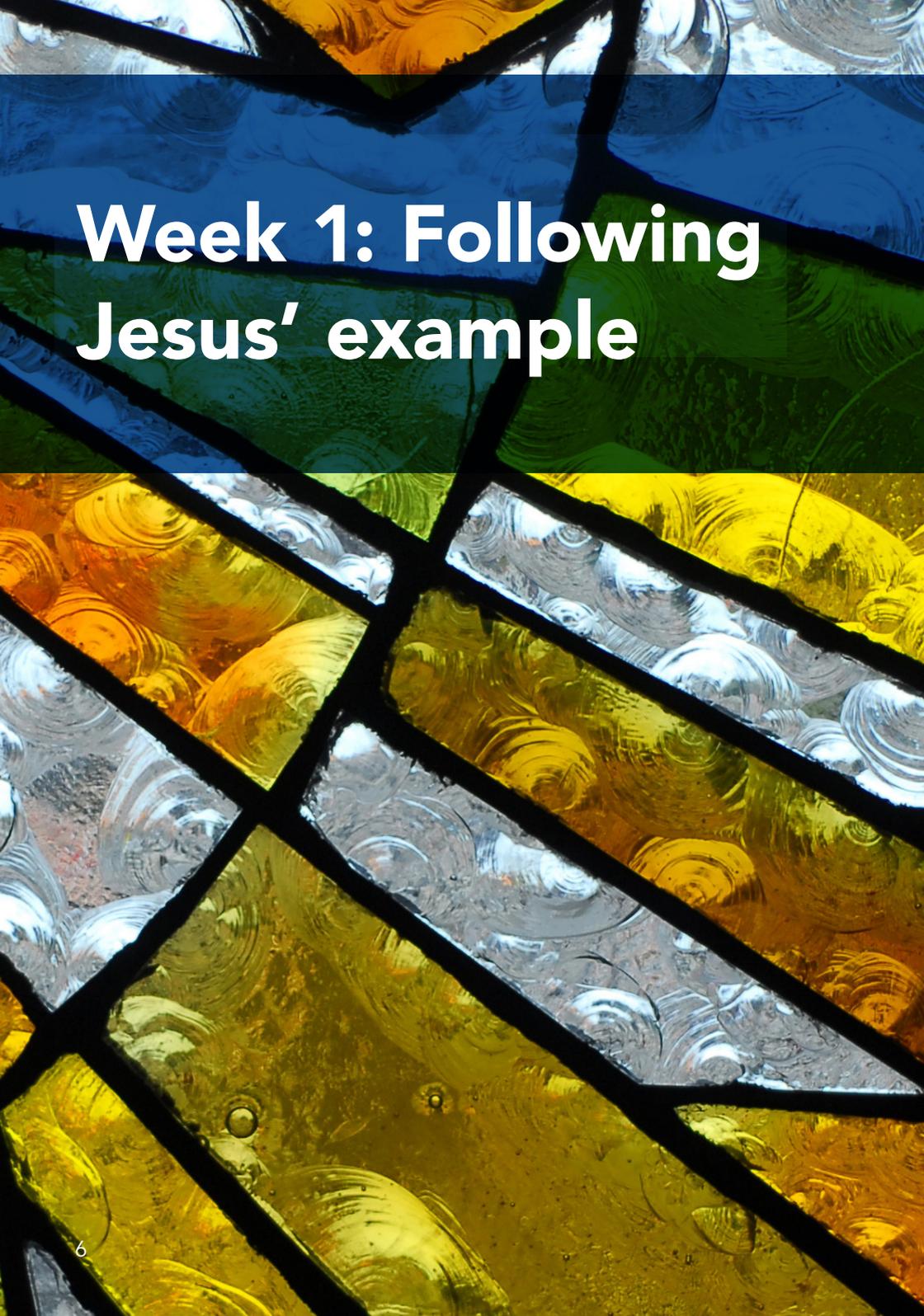
You may feel the group needs something to stimulate the conversation, so there are optional questions to help you do that. Don't feel you have to work your way through the list of questions – see them as support, not an agenda. Often the liveliest conversations begin from a single thread, so allow the conversation to go in the most helpful direction for the group. Some of the questions are introductory and others are designed to go a little bit deeper, depending on the experience of the members of your group.

Closing prayers

Prayer time draws the discussion to a close. You are encouraged to follow the usual pattern of your group for closing prayers (for example, a period of silence or free prayer). There is a short summary prayer for you to finish with.

Take-away for everyday faith

We have to be active in living out our faith. The take-away at the end of each session offers you a relevant activity for the upcoming week. There is time allocated to find out how you all got on with these activities in the following session.

The background is an abstract composition of thick, expressive brushstrokes in various colors including blue, green, yellow, and orange. These brushstrokes are overlaid with a network of thick, black, irregular lines that create a grid-like or stained-glass effect. The overall texture is highly textured and dynamic.

Week 1: Following Jesus' example

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle; take time to reconnect; hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for this time to come together and learn as a group. We ask you to send your Spirit among us today and over the next six weeks to help and guide us as we consider your call to be generous in faith. Amen.

Video and opening questions

- What did you think of the person's story?
- Over the next six weeks we'll be looking at generosity. What do you think generosity means?
- Looking at the themes for the six weeks, is there anything that you're looking forward to talking about? Is there anything that you're concerned about?

Bible reading

During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me

Teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

John 13:3–15

Reflection

The theme for this week (*Following Jesus’ example*) is by far the broadest of all the sessions. You could point to any act or teaching of Jesus and talk about generosity. But this passage from John is particularly helpful because it gives us a practical example of a humble mindset being the foundation of generosity.

This story includes different kinds of humility:

First the disciples are shocked that Jesus, their Lord, wants to wash their feet – a job typically done by a servant. The disciples are baffled that Jesus is doing something they think is beneath him. They haven’t yet realised that they need to be washed clean by God in order to truly have a part in Jesus’ kingdom. This washing is something that Christians participate in at their baptism; we are washed so that we can have a place in the kingdom of God.

But it’s not just that the disciples have failed to see that they need to be washed by Christ, they’ve also failed to realise that God *wants* to wash them, that God takes on this role of servant (which the disciples think is beneath him) so that we can have a relationship with him. The Christian God is the God who so loves the world that he becomes a human being, suffers and dies in order that we can enter into resurrection life. This is why we call Jesus the servant king, because despite being the creator and ruler of the universe, God loves us so much that he takes on the role of a humble servant to make sure that we can have a relationship with him.

At the end of the story Jesus asks the disciples to demonstrate the same humility and become the servants of others, as he has been their servant. This is the example that he sets for us – a mindset of humility. This is something we see a lot in the gospels; elsewhere Jesus says “whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave.” (Matt. 20:26–27).

So the example and teaching of Jesus sets the foundation of generosity in an attitude of practical humility that seeks to serve others. In these sessions we will look at some ways we might follow this example and live a generous Christian life that is founded on practical service. We hope that through doing this you will have the opportunity to refocus your perception of Christian generosity and begin to explore what that means for your own life.

Discussion

This is where participants can ask their questions about generosity and giving. If you need some pointers to generate further conversation, try one or more of the questions below.

- How did today's reading and reflection make you feel? What struck you most?
- What do you think Jesus is asking us to do?
- What do you think about Jesus' reaction to the disciples?
- What does "humility" mean to you?
- Do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable with the idea of servant humility as a model of generosity? Why is that?
- Are there other Bible passages about humility that come to mind?
- Do you think Christians are good at practising humility?

Closing prayers

Son of God, thank you that you loved us and gave your life for us. Help me to practise Christ-like humility so that I may commit my whole self to your service and the service of your world. Amen.

Take-away for everyday faith

Today's Bible passage asks a lot of us, but it is important to remember that God will always be there to help us. Over this coming week, whenever you get the chance to pray, try to read through Psalm 130. This is a hymn of wonder at God's unfailing forgiveness and demonstrates the beginning of humility (which the disciples missed in today's reading) as the acknowledgement that we need God, and an openness to be washed clean by his love.

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.
Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,
Lord, who could stand?
But there is forgiveness with you,
so that you may be revered.

I wait for the LORD, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;
my soul waits for the Lord
more than those who watch for the morning,
more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the LORD!
For with the LORD there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.
It is he who will redeem Israel
from all its iniquities.



Week 2: Charity

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle; take time to reconnect; hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Father, your desire is for a world of peace without suffering. Help us, your servants, to build your kingdom as a place of love and care for each other in the power of the Comforter, your Holy Spirit. Amen.

Video and opening questions

- What did you think of the person's story?
- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the take-away for everyday faith?
- How are you feeling about the rest of the course?

Bible reading

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me." Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?" Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."

Matthew 25:31–45

Reflection

The Parable of the Sheep and Goats is perhaps one of the most famous of Jesus' teachings. The Gospel of Matthew includes it as the finale of a series of parables told by Jesus about everyday faith. It presents us with a black-and-white image of good vs. bad. Christ outlines two groups of people: the caring and the uncaring. To one he gives the kingdom as an inheritance; the other group are condemned.

Now, there's no doubt that Jesus is a fan of using grand statements to make a point (remember the camel going through the eye of a needle), so how literal Jesus is being about the eternal fire is debatable. His point, though, is to tell his followers how he wants them to behave.

Christians have very varied ideas about how God wants us to behave based on all sorts of interpretations of scripture and wider society, so it can be difficult to focus on what Jesus wants us to do. As Christians we can often worry about not sinning and being a good person in terms of "not breaking the rules". In this passage Christ reminds us what God truly cares about by providing us with a clear list of things he considers to be signs of a generous Christian life, a list which we could summarise as active charity towards people that need our help. This is a generosity that sees people in need and actively tries to help them.

Maria of Paris was a 20th-century saint who died in the Nazi gas chambers. She was a nun who was famous for doing things like smoking and skipping church to spend time helping people in and around the slums of Paris. Because of this she was often criticised for not living like a nun *should* but her

response has gone down in history. She said: “the way to God lies through love of people. At the Last Judgement I shall not be asked whether I was successful in my monastic prayers. Instead, I shall be asked: did I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick and the prisoners? That is all I shall be asked.”

So this week we are called to think about how Jesus wants us to behave. Last week we spoke about an attitude of servant humility. This week that becomes the action of caring for those in need. This, Jesus says, is what sets Christians apart and what he looks for in his followers – the generosity to see those in need and to actively try to help them.

Discussion

This is where participants can ask their questions about generosity and giving. If you need some pointers to generate further conversation, try one or more of the questions below.

- How did today’s reading and reflection make you feel?
- What struck you most from the reading and reflection?
- What does Jesus want from us here, and what does it say about generosity?
- Why do you think Jesus wanted to tell this story?
- How does this compare with your own ideas about what it means to be a “good person”?
- How does it compare with our wider culture’s idea of a “good person”?
- How does it compare with the Pharisees’ idea that keeping within the Jewish Law is what makes someone righteous?

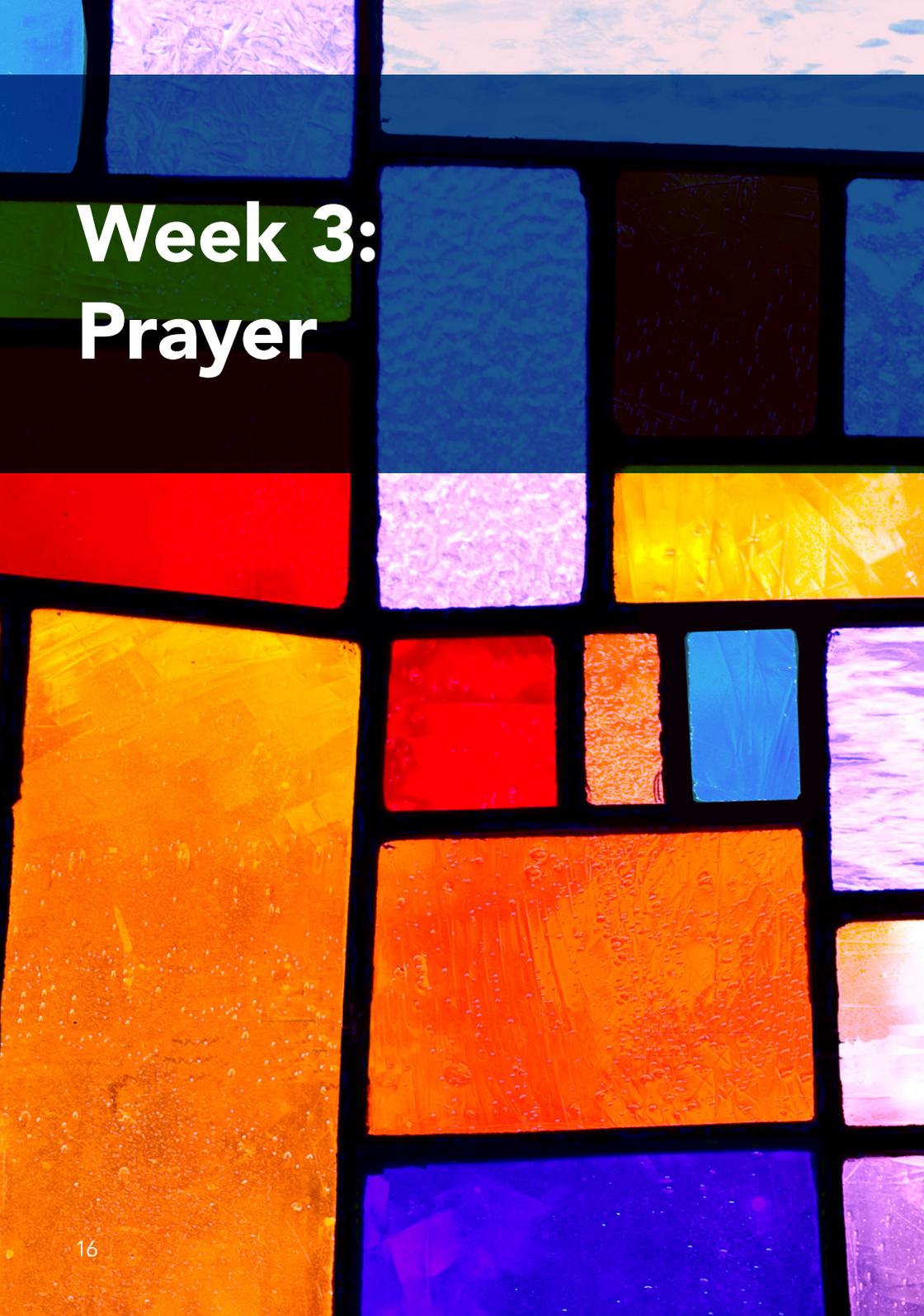
Closing prayers

Father, thank you for loving humanity unconditionally. Give me the spirit to love unconditionally all those whom you love and the strength to be generous in giving from what I have, to those that need it more than me. Amen.

Take-away for everyday faith

There are two options for something to do this week. Both try to actualise the kind of faith Jesus talks about in today's reading:

1. Double up: work out the value of all the food you eat on one day and, if you can afford to, donate the same value to [the Trussell food bank charity](#).
2. A fast: if you want to go further, and it would be safe for you to do so, you could try not eating lunch and donating the value of the food you would have eaten to [the Trussell food bank charity](#). Fasting is an important spiritual exercise that reminds us of the blessings we have which others may not have.



Week 3: Prayer

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle; take time to reconnect; hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Father, you have given us the gift of prayer as a tool to build your kingdom in the world around us. Guide us in our prayer so that we may speak with your voice as your faithful servants. Amen.

Video and opening questions

- What did you think of the person's story?
- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the take-away for everyday faith?
- How are you feeling about the rest of the course?

Bible reading

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

James 5:13–18

Reflection

Last week we talked about caring for those in need as a way to love the world, just as God loves it. If we compare active love with this week's theme of prayer we might, perhaps, find ourselves wondering if prayer is as "helpful" as charity.

In fact, prayer is sometimes criticised for being passive – something that doesn't require us to show the active caring that we were called to last week. Earlier in his letter James writes "if one of you says to [someone in need] 'Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?" (2:16).

It is possible for prayer to become a way to ask God to help someone in need and then forget about them.

How can prayer be more than this, and become a generous act that is just as loving as charity?

Within the context of encouraging people to pray for healing and to trust that God will do what we ask, James gives us a perspective of prayer in today's reading as mutual connection that heals both the one who prays and the one who receives the prayer.

When we pray in our hearts for someone, we become like God who cares in his heart about the needs of every single person. And just like God, when we care like this in our hearts, we initiate a spiritual connection with other people because we begin to see them as God sees them – as his children, unconditionally worthy of love. This can allow us to start to look at people not simply as problems to be solved through charity but as people with whom we share a relationship under God's love.

In praying for someone we open ourselves up to a spiritual connection with them through the realisation that we are one community of God's children. This is why James doesn't just talk about praying to "fix" someone who is ill or suffering but also mentions singing together when we're happy. Prayer happens as part of a community in which we share each other's ups and downs. In a community that loves each other we can rejoice in each other's happiness, as well as pray for each other when we're struggling.

Prayer, of course, isn't only for people but also for the world around us, that it may be transformed into the likeness of God's kingdom. This too is an offer

of spiritual connection because when we pray for the world and its needs, we take these things into our heart and become a community that encompasses the whole of creation.

So prayer is equally as important for generosity as charity because it is the offer of spiritual connection, the offer to love people and the world around us just as God loves them and to enter into Christian community with them, a community founded on the mutual sharing of God's love. This week, then, we are called to hear that commandment to love that is at the heart of the Christian message: to love God and to love our neighbour. Prayer is the foundation of that love because it is the groundwork that opens our hearts up to a true, Christ-like love of the world and people around us through spiritual connection.

Discussion

This is where participants can ask their questions about generosity and giving. If you need some pointers to generate further conversation, try one or more of the questions below.

- How did today's reading and reflection make you feel?
- What struck you most from the reading and reflection?
- What do you think Jesus would say about this idea of prayer?
- How does this compare with the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:9–13 and Luke 11:1–4)?
- Does this idea of prayer alter your view of generosity?
- What impact does this idea of prayer have on how you live out your own faith?
- What does spiritual connection mean to you?
- Do you feel able to pray for strangers in a way that opens yourself up to community with them?
- Can you think of a time when prayer expressed a sense of community for you?
- Does your church see prayer as something that builds the community?

Closing prayer

Father, thank you for your love for us. Help us to see those around us as our brothers and sisters, and give us hearts open to being a community of your children that loves each other as you love us. Lord, send your Spirit, that he may reshape us as a Christian community founded on spiritual connection. Amen.

Take-aways for everyday faith

During this week we want to try to show love for our brothers and sisters through our prayer. Every day, try to notice someone that you don't normally pray for (maybe a stranger or an acquaintance from work).

1. Start by praying for God to be actively present in their lives.
2. Move on to ask God to help with any difficulties they might be facing in their lives.
3. Finally, thank God for his love towards you and towards this person and ask for his help to love the person as he loves them.



Week 4: Money

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle; take time to reconnect; hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Lord Jesus, as we face the difficult topic of money today, we pray that you may give us hearts and minds open to the knowledge and love of you and of your hope for this world. Amen.

Video and opening questions

- What did you think of the person's story?
- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the take-away for everyday faith?
- How are you feeling about the rest of the course?

Bible reading

Then someone came to him and said, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honour your father and mother; also, You shall love your neighbour as yourself." The young man said to him, "I have kept all these; what do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me." When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it will be hard for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." When the disciples heard this, they were greatly

astounded and said, "Then who can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible."

Matthew 19:16–26

Reflection

This is easily one of the most challenging passages in the gospels because it seemingly demands so much. The man comes to Jesus asking how to be saved and is told to keep the commandments (the Jewish Law) and to "love your neighbour". But the man insists that he already does these things, so Jesus then says to him: sell everything and give it to the poor.

The reality of the command "sell everything" is quite distressing; the young man in the story was certainly distraught. But the point of this story isn't that we should give everything away, otherwise that would have been Jesus' answer to the man's first question. The point of the story is that the young man is a hypocrite. He started the conversation confident that he was doing what he was supposed to do to be righteous but Jesus knew what was really in his heart (love of money instead of faith) and he knew exactly what to say to highlight his hypocrisy. The young man isn't really faithful and humble, he just wants other people to *think* he's a good person.

So what does this story tell us about financial generosity?

Christian generosity is not about giving away all of our money. In the last few weeks we've talked about being generous in ways that affect us both inwardly and outwardly, and we need to see money within this framework. Christian generosity is about honestly asking ourselves how we use our money and whether this corresponds to the way Christ calls us to live out our faith. This will undoubtedly involve giving our money, where we can, out of loving care for the world. But there's no prescription about what we give, we are simply called to respond in loving, active faith. That is, to let our faith honestly and openly guide us to respond to the needs of the world, including financial giving.

This is why Christians give to church, as well as to other charities and directly to those in need. Giving to church is a commitment to the life, worship and mission of the community of Christians to which we belong. It is a commitment to living out our faith together in our community and ensuring the sustainability of that community. Last week we talked about the

importance of prayer, and one of the most important things churches do is to be a presence in the heart of the community praying for each other and those around them. Many churches will also provide charitable support to their community too. Church is our faith, lived out together, and giving to church ensures that the Christian presence of active faith remains into the future.

But what are we meant to do about all this?

As believers it can be difficult for us to be honest with ourselves about whether our financial giving to church, as well as to other charities, reflects a real prioritisation of our faith. This isn't about how much we give because different people can afford to give different amounts. It's about asking ourselves whether we allow other priorities to come before a faithful commitment to sustaining the life of the church and our active living out of a loving faith in community. We all have financial priorities in our lives, such as mortgages, bills, family costs, but do we add loving faith to that list or do we treat it as a secondary priority?

The question is really: do we allow active faith and the life of Christ's church to become a priority that guides us in deciding how we use our money?

Discussion

This is where participants can ask their questions about generosity and giving. If you need some pointers to generate further conversation, try one or more of the questions below.

- How did today's reading and reflection make you feel?
- Are there any ways in which you feel that you were particularly challenged by today's reflection?
- What priorities can get in the way of financial giving?
- Do you think you prioritise giving to church as part of your own faith?
- How do our cultural ideas of personal finances differ from the Biblical view?
- Do you think there is a connection between financial giving and the Christ-like humility that we discussed in week one?

- Some churches ask their members to tithe (give a percentage of their income). How do you think that fits with this passage?
- The Church of England suggests that members should aim to tithe 5% of their post-tax income to church and 5% to other charities. How do you feel about that? Would you do that if you could?

Closing prayers

Lord Jesus, thank you for showing us the way of love. Give me the faith to hold nothing back from you, and the strength to use my money and possessions as you would want me to. Amen.

Take-away for everyday faith

Part 1: During this week we're going to think about how we use our money and what our priorities are. When you have time, consider where/how you have spent your money over the last month and write this down as a list. The money different people have for giving will vary, and it may be that you are unable to give to church right now, but it is still good to ask the question: what does your list say about your financial priorities? Most lists will usually include things like paying the bills (which are, of course, absolutely necessary) but the question is, is there anything in your list that communicates your Christian faith and, if not, is there space to include something?

Part 2: If you regularly give to church or another charity, think about how much you give (or if you don't currently give, think about an amount that you would be happy to donate). Now imagine you had to explain those amounts to Jesus and try to ask yourself openly and honestly: would Jesus feel that your giving is a true reflection of a faithful commitment to the life and mission of his church?



Week 5: Mission and evangelism

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle; take time to reconnect; hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Lord, we thank you for this time together as friends and believers. Help us, as your ambassadors in the world, to be sharers of your love and welcoming to those who want to know you. Amen.

Video and opening questions

- What did you think of the person's story?
- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the take-away for everyday faith?
- How are you feeling about the rest of the course?

Bible reading

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot. You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:1–16

Reflection

Depending on your background, perspective and confidence-levels, talking about Christianity with non-Christians can either be a source of energy or a source of anxiety. The latter can certainly be true of Brits, with our natural embarrassment when talking about anything personal.

But most of us will feel that we have been given a great gift in our personal relationship with God, and it's a gift that we hope others will want to share. This is beautifully expressed in the Church of England's baptism service, which says: "Faith is the gift of God to his people. In baptism the Lord is adding to our number those whom he is calling. People of God, will you welcome this candidate?"

These words summarise our faith as a gift and our membership of the church as membership of the community of believers. They are a call to seek out and welcome those who are exploring a relationship with God.

But, going back to that embarrassment that many of us feel when we try to evangelise, one of the problems is that sharing our faith can feel like "telling" people about Jesus rather than allowing them the space to find out for themselves what a relationship with God can look like.

Today's reading reminds us that evangelism isn't simply telling people about Jesus, it's just as much, if not more, a case of showing people what a relationship with Jesus means. In his words Christ reminds us of a message we

have already heard in these sessions – that he cares most of all about what we do. But he builds on that to say that what we do can reveal God to others too.

St John Chrysostom, one of the most influential writers in the early church, once spoke about the spiritual change that Christians can bring into the world by the love they show towards those outside the church, and particularly those in need. Showing love in this way reveals the love that is found in the kingdom of heaven and through that, as Christ teaches us in today's reading, shows people what it looks like to have a relationship with Jesus.

Evangelism, then, need not simply be telling people about Jesus, it can be showing God's love to the world. Just as a lamp that is put on a high stand can illuminate a whole room, what we do as Christians can illuminate the whole world with the love of God and, because of that, what we do as Christians can invite the whole world into a relationship with that love.

That's why generosity is so important. In living out the active, servant faith that we have discussed over the past few weeks we become sources of God's light in the world. We build the kingdom and we invite people to know God. What we do as Christians matters because it will show people the kingdom of God, and if we can be generous and lead an active faith of love then we demonstrate, rather than tell people, that above all else, God is love.

Discussion

This is where participants can ask their questions about generosity and giving. If you need some pointers to generate further conversation, try one or more of the questions below.

- How did today's reading and reflection make you feel?
- What struck you most from the reading and reflection?
- What does evangelism mean for you? Is it different to the style of evangelism we have heard about today?
- Do you think evangelism can be a type of giving? What might it be "giving"?
- Do you know of any examples of evangelism, historical or modern, that demonstrate generosity?

- Do you think it's important how people see Christians behaving?
- Would you be embarrassed to tell people you were doing something or behaving in a certain way because of your faith? Why or why not?
- Based on the reading and the previous weeks' sessions, what kind of behaviour do you think Jesus might be talking about when he calls people to let their light shine?

Closing prayers

Father, we thank you that you have sent your Son and Spirit into the world so that we can have a relationship with you. Help us show the world what it means to have a relationship with you as the lover of all. Amen.

Take-away for everyday faith

Today is all about love and kindness as a way of showing people the kingdom of God. If you can, try to find a quiet moment to yourself when you can pray about this week's theme.

You might like to start by thanking God for his gift of relationship with him and then ask for the opportunity and the courage to show his love to those that need him. During the week keep your eye open for an opportunity to show the love of God in what you do and, if you can, try to act on that.



Week 6: What next?

Gathering and reconnecting

To help people settle; take time to reconnect; hear how people are.

Opening prayer

Lord, thank you for this time to consider generosity. Thank you especially for the time we have had to come together as a group to grow in love and faith. Help us to continue to grow as we come to the end of this course. Amen.

Video and opening questions

- What did you think of the person's story?
- How did you feel after last week's session?
- How did you get on with the take-away for everyday faith?
- How are you feeling as we reach the end of the course?

Bible reading

We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us – and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.

1 John 3:16–24

Reflection

In the first session we talked about Christ's example of humility and how we are called to an active expression of humility in our own lives. Since then we've talked about ways in which we can give ourselves into the service of God and the world, such as caring for those in need, forming spiritual connection through prayer, committing our money to building our community of faith, and witnessing to the gospel by the love and kindness we demonstrate in Jesus' name.

Central to all of these is the active nature of generosity – actively serving, actively praying, actively funding, and actively witnessing – because Christian giving reflects not just word and speech but the truth and action of the Christian faith.

In this final week we can take a bit of time to wonder: what next?

Today's reading asks us to do three things:

- Follow God's commandments
- Live our lives for others
- Dwell in love.

These are all themes from our discussions over the last six weeks. If we can do these things we can fulfil *the greatest commandment* to love God and to love our neighbour as ourselves. John promises us that if we are able to live our lives according to these principles of faith and generosity, we can have confidence that the Holy Spirit is alive within us.

Writing to the Christian community in particular, John reminds us that how we live our lives is not separate from being part of the church community but rather comes from it. He says in his introduction to the letter: "if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7a–b).

Following Jesus' example of generosity, walking the path that he laid out for us and which we have considered in this course, is something we do together as members of our shared community of faith, the church.

This is why shared worship is the core of the Christian faith and, as we saw in week four, it's why we give our time and money to support the work of the

church as a community of believers. By committing all aspects of our lives to God's church we build that fellowship and enable our community as a whole to live lives generously dedicated to God.

So, as we come to the end of this course and begin to think about what next, the question for each of us is: how can we live our lives according to the principles of generosity John has given us today, both as individuals and as a community of faith?

The answer is for you to decide.

Discussion

This is where participants can ask their questions about generosity and giving. If you need some pointers to generate further conversation, try one or more of the questions below.

- How did today's reading and reflection make you feel? What struck you the most?
- What is the main message you will take away from this course?
- What will you change in your life to try to be more generous?
- How can you further commit your life to the fellowship of the church?
- What could your church community do to better live this week's principles of generosity?

Closing prayers

Lord Jesus Christ, you gave your whole self so that we might have life. Help us to live in generous faith as examples of your love in the world. Amen.

Take-away for everyday faith

In our first activity we looked at Psalm 130, which reminds us that in all we do God will support and love us.

Take some time this week to read 1 Peter 1:13–16 and reflect on the ways you are called to live out a generous faith of active love in your own life, and how you might be able to respond to that call in new ways.

Therefore prepare your minds for action; discipline yourselves; set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

1 Peter 1:13–16



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