

November/December 2012—In the Habit/Guide—Week 2

economic struggles

Will Penner

For use with devozine meditations for November 5–11, 2012.

MAKING THE CONNECTION

“A few years ago, I launched a business that was a colossal failure. It sent me \$250,000 in debt, more than half of which I still owe, even though I was working 80–90 hours a week to make ends meet. In the midst of it, I was brought to a new plateau of reliance on God. I still wish I had more financial resources, but rarely do I find myself leaning on material things as my source of security or identity. After having my financial security ripped away, I realized that my only true source of identity was as a beloved child of God—of that I can be completely sure.” —Will

MEET THE WRITER

Will Penner has been in ministry with young people for more than two decades in Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches, in public and private schools, and as a popular speaker at youth retreats, camps, and conferences. He has served as the editor of both leading professional journals of youth ministry and has authored or edited numerous books and youth ministry curricula. But most important, he is the husband of Christine Penner, Children’s Minister at First United Methodist Church in Dickson, Tennessee, and the father of five children ranging in age from three to twenty-one.

STUFF YOU WILL NEED

- paper
- pens
- Bibles, copies of Luke 9:1–6, or the passage posted for all to see
- (optional) markers, construction paper, poster board, scissors, tape, and glue

PLUGGED IN

- + “The Simple Way” (<http://www.thesimpleway.org>) is a neo-monastic community in inner-city Philadelphia, founded by prolific author and speaker Shane Claiborne. At the heart of the movement is simplicity and social justice. How would your youth group be different if it embodied similar principles?

CHECKING IN

Distribute paper and pens. Ask people to spend a few minutes writing about how the economy has affected their lives in specific ways. The economy may have had a direct impact on them or their immediate family; or they may have seen firsthand the impact of the economy on a teacher, cousin, neighbor, friend, or someone else they care about.

After 2–3 minutes, invite a few group members to talk briefly about the impact the economy has had on them. They may prefer to speak a few words or phrases (“The economy makes me feel bad.”), but encourage at least one or two young people to tell stories that illustrate the affect the economy has had on them or on the people they care about. If the group is large, ask people to form smaller groups for this discussion.

Let the group know that many of the young people who submitted devotions for this week of **devozine** were obviously affected by the economy. The “Checking In” activity is a way to acknowledge and honor the fact that many participants in the group may also been affected in significant ways.

EXPLORING THE WORD

Scripture: Luke 9:1–6

Read or explain in your own words the following information:

Most experts would suggest that Luke 9:1–6 describes a bad business model for accomplishing just about any task, particularly one as important as the task given to the disciples. “Don’t take any luggage with you—not even a carry-on; in fact, don’t even take a change of clothes. Oh—and no food and no money! Just take off, completely unprepared, and start traveling. By the way, not everyone is going to be particularly accepting of you; but don’t let that worry you. Just dust yourself off and move on.”

Can you imagine a Saturday-morning church training seminar suggesting a similar plan for preparing people for ministry? “Learn how to be like Jesus’ disciples, completely broke and dependent on the generosity of other people to meet all your needs.” How many people in your church would sign up for that training?

Invite group members to imagine that they are part of the public relations department at a Christian college. They have been asked to come up with an advertising campaign to recruit students who want to learn how to be in full-time Christian ministry. The advertising campaign should include mention of tuition, room, and board and should use Luke 9:1–6 as the basis for what students can expect to do after they graduate. People may choose to work together as one large group, or they may form smaller groups and later present their ad campaigns to one another. You can choose a particular medium for the advertisements, or let the group members decide. They may want to put together a 30-second radio spot or TV ad, a billboard, an ad for a magazine, a poster or fliers to send to high schools and/or youth groups, a pop-up Internet ad, or a booth at a college fair.

Allow 10–15 minutes for the group (or small groups) to create an ad and to present it to the entire group. Then ask the group to discuss these questions:

What about the ads was appealing? Why was it appealing?

What about the ads was unappealing? Why was it not appealing?

Why is it hard for us to trust God to provide our needs?

If God asked you to give up some things in order to be a fully-committed disciple of Jesus, what would be the hardest thing for you to give up? Why?

Why would Jesus ask his first disciples to give up all their worldly possessions?

What lessons can we learn from this scripture passage? If we were to apply these lessons to our own lives, how would our lives change, beginning right now?

Say: *“Economies all over the globe are tanking, and many kids who didn’t used to think much about the economy are being affected a great deal. Many families who had been financially comfortable are now being forced to do without many of the things they once thought of as needs. Some people are mired in confusion and depression; others have found new blessings in the midst of the challenges.”* Then ask:

Why would the same situation produce opposite feelings in different people?

Say: *“Jesus had way more to say about our relationship to money than he did about most hot-button issues (alcohol, drugs, lying, cheating, sexuality) that people prefer to talk about these days. Money is the driving force of our culture, politics, and educational system; but God wants us to keep it from becoming the driving force of our souls.”*

SHARING IN PRAYER

Invite the group to pray together this prayer:

“Lord, we are grateful for all your many blessings. Even when we don’t have all we want, we still have more than we deserve. Help us, Lord, to avoid getting our sense of security or identity from your material blessings. Instead, help us to center our lives on you, allowing everything else, including financial security, to take its proper place among our priorities. We offer ourselves to you as Jesus’ disciples, and we are willing to go wherever and however you send us; in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

TAKING IT FURTHER

- Richard Foster’s seminal book *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* outlines twelve Christian practices that are crucial for faith development. Kelly Soifer offers a nice reflection on one of those disciplines: simplicity, which is at the heart of most economic struggles. Read the article “Simplicity: Spiritual Disciplines for Youthworkers” at <http://ymtoday.com/articles/3905/simplicity>. Think about what a rule of simplicity would look like in your life.

- St. Francis of Assisi is one of the most famous saints, partly because of his willingness to give up his birthright to wealth and privilege. Check out the kid-friendly explanation of his life at http://www.holyspiritinteractive.net/kids/saints/1004_francis.asp.
- While the “Peace Prayer of St. Francis” wasn’t actually written by him, it embodies many of his ideals. Consider reading this prayer every morning and evening for the next week. (<http://www.franciscan-archive.org/patriarcha/peace.html>)