

Seasons of giving

An all age worship service



All-age Worship

Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter

Bible Reading

Matthew 6: 19- 35 or any of the readings from one of the Seasons of Giving weeks

This session creates opportunities for people of all ages to

- To give thanks for all the good things that we enjoy
- To think about how generosity flows from thankfulness

Key Focus

The material for Seasons of Giving is designed as teaching material for peer group learning in different age groups. There is extensive bible study material which groups may be using during the week and there is also material for children to work on when they meet in age groups either during a Sunday morning or in a mid-week activity. However, the whole congregation are disciples, and the whole congregation will need to be involved in thinking about giving and exploring what it means to them.

This worship outline draws on the overview of the calendar year to look at a cycle of giving, looking at how generosity, thankfulness and changing behaviours flow from one another.

Although there is a Gospel reading suggested from the Sermon on the Mount, it would be possible to take any one of the readings from Seasons of Giving and use that as the basis for reflection.

Background Preparation

Read through the suggestions and consider how they will work in your context. If you are using this service to launch a teaching series, you will need to look through all the material and consider how much to introduce ahead of the weekly sessions. If using it as a closing service after a teaching series, you may be able to draw on some of the learning that has taken place in the different age groups.

Scene Setting

Create a display which reflects each of the four seasons. This could be done using visual images (you might like to show the clip from Notting Hill where the market scene changes through the year to the song 'Ain't no sunshine by Bill Withers, available on Youtube) or with a series of mini displays in front of the worship space.

Autumn Thanks

(This could be an opening worship activity)

You will need a selection of fruits, nuts, chocolate's to hand out to people as they arrive. Offer them at the door with a simple invitation "would you like one?" (NB Some people will refuse, but that's okay. Some will ask if they can eat what they have been given: it's their choice.)

You will need to have four readers in the four corners of the worship space.

As they say their words each reader moves towards the centre/front.

Reader 1: Our God is a generous God. Everything we need to keep us well has been provided. Our God is a generous God

All: Praise his name!

Reader 2: Our God is a loving God. Everything we need to give us joy has been provided. Our God is a loving God

All: Praise his name!

Reader 3: Our God is gracious God. Everything we need to put things right has been provided.
Our God is a gracious God.

All: Praise his name!

Reader 4: Our God is mighty God. Everything we need to keep us safe has been provided. Our God is a mighty God!

All: Praise his name

One or more of the readers: Enjoy the good things God has provided!

The leader asks those who have already eaten to stand up, then those who didn't take anything. Explain that sometimes we don't take time to enjoy all that God has given us, and sometimes we ignore his generosity all together. But now we are all going to share and enjoy as we give thanks to God

Leader: Let's Praise his name!

All: Praise his name!

Winter Wanderings

(This could be a confession activity)

You will need some scarves, hats and mittens. Hand these out to a few volunteers.

Invite everyone to imagine that it is winter. Read the following short reflection as appropriate music is played

(e.g. Walking in a Winter wonderland, instrumental)

The nights are dark now, the earth is hard
As frost creeps across the ground,
Painting icy sketches on walls and glass.

The sky is clear now, the sun is bright
As the day dawns and the air sharpens,
Tugging at our breath and biting at our noses.

Life is harder now, movement is slower
As the winter pushes on and the world slows,
Making us turn inwards and remember.

The leader then invites everyone to start walking as an antidote to the cold. Encourage people to stamp their feet and rub their hands for a few moments and think about all the times we have turned in on ourselves. If appropriate, continue as follows:

We remember all the times we have forgotten that God is with us, all the times we have turned away from other people and all the times we have been too busy to do the things that need doing. We ask forgiveness of God who makes our sins disappear like the morning mists or the frosts of winter.

Invite people to touch hands to head:

Forgive us Lord, for thinking too much about our own needs and worries.
Forgive us for forgetting to offer you thanks and praise.
Lord, have mercy

All: Lord have mercy

Invite people to touch hands to shoulders:

Forgive us Lord, for not helping others to carry the load they bear.
Forgive us for not trusting you to meet our needs.
Lord, have mercy

All: Lord have mercy

Invite people to touch hands to knees:

Forgive us Lord, for ignoring those who seem to have less than us.
Forgive us for failing to turn to you in prayer.
Lord, have mercy

All: Lord have mercy

Invite people to touch hands to feet:

Forgive us Lord, for being too busy to do the things we need to do.
Forgive us, for walking past those who are in need
Lord, have mercy

All: Lord have mercy

A minister could end with a prayer of absolution.

Exploring the Scriptures:

See the appendix for an alternative version of the Gospel reading.

There are two options to choose from at this point.

‘The Circle of Life’ (Activity/talk)

You will need two traditional hoops and four pictures to represent the seasons eg a daffodil, a beach in the sun; autumn bonfires, snowy landscape. You will also need four cards with the words give thanks, remember, start again, do something

(NB You can either do this activity from the front or split people into groups. If you split into groups you will need to have enough sets of images and words to give each group)

Take a few moments to get people rolling the hoops up and down the church. Then hold them still and see if anyone can identify the best starting point from which to roll a hoop (on the hoop).

If you are doing this in groups, invite people to look at the images of the four seasons and talk about which order to place them in and which of them is the most important. Alternatively, do the same thing as a whole congregation.

Then add the images to the hoop and roll it again. Talk about how they all have a place, and one season simply flows into another. Each one matters and none can be missed out.

Repeat this process with the four cards on which words are written: which of these is the starting point, and which might be the most important. Get some ideas and some feedback before attaching them to the second hoop, but talk about each word as you do so.

Talk about how we need to thank God for all the things we have – taking stock of the blessings in our lives and also aware of the beauty of the earth. Then move on to think about remembering to be generous and recalling which things matter most. The third word is about starting again, being able to live differently, before finally we can take action to be generous ourselves. Just as with the seasons, each one is important, and each one flows into the other.

Link this to the teaching Jesus gave about not worrying. Encourage people to discuss the image of the beautiful flowers and the lovely birds that don't work or worry or accumulate wealth, but only have what they need. Jesus wanted his disciples to think about their attitude to work and wealth – it is not an optional activity but a key part of being a disciple. Talk about how this is going to (or has) be worked out in the Seasons of Giving teaching.

The Selfish Giant

Alternatively, tell the abridged version of Oscar Wilde's story, *The Selfish Giant*, which can be accompanied by using four full colour illustrations. The story and the illustrations can be found at the Selfish Giant tab under Seasons of Giving in the Annual Review section at www.givinginGrace.org.

Spring Beginnings

(Prayer Activity)

This activity can either be done by setting up four prayer stations or led from the front by providing four bowls with the different materials and inviting people to come up as music is being played.

You will need four bowls containing wedding confetti, seeds, tiny stars, yeast.

You will also need either four empty bowls or four pieces of fabric (at least 1.5m square)

Either set these up in four different places, where each table should have a bowl containing one of the materials, an empty bowl and/or a large piece of fabric.

(NB If you are creating prayer stations try to make them look attractive by arranging things imaginatively and adding other items as appropriate)

Include text at each station as follows:

Wedding Confetti:

Confetti makes us think of weddings, which mark the start of a new life for a couple. Sometimes a new family is being formed as children also come together.

As you scatter the confetti on to the fabric (or place into the empty bowl) pray for family life, that families may be places of hospitality and generosity.

Seeds:

Seeds make us think of gardening, hiding things in the dark earth and then waiting patiently for signs of life.

As you scatter the seeds on to the fabric (or place into the empty bowl) pray for situations where people are waiting for a new beginning. Pray especially for your church and the coming teaching series on giving, and for the life of the church in the community.

Tiny Stars:

Stars make us think of space and impossible things. As you scatter stars (or place into the empty bowl) think about your own dreams and visions, and also the dreams and visions you have for the world. Pray for those in impossible situations, that they may find hope and that we may be able to start making things possible

Yeast:

Yeast is essential to bread making. It changes thing – by itself it is inedible but added to flour it works miracles. As you scatter yeast (or place into the empty bowl) pray that those who are in difficult situations will have the courage to wait patiently for transformation. Pray for those situations in your own life.

If you are leading the prayers from the front use similar themes, but invite people to come forward and scatter or place each item as it is mentioned.

Mission Challenge

Summer Actions

You will need either a small bookmark with a photo of a summer scene OR a small stone OR a bit of sand in a plastic tube to give to each person.

The challenge is to remember that summer is the time of fruitfulness and to keep the object in a place where it reminds you to be thankful, to be generous and to think about giving in a new way.

APPENDIX 1: The lilies and the birds and the treasure

You will need three people dressed up – a pirate, a farmer, a birdwatcher
A fourth person speaks the words of Jesus

- Jesus:** Don't worry about your life, about what to eat or drink, what to wear or what not to wear.
- Farmer:** Hey, that's good that is, really good.
- Farmer:** And it's obvious you never think about what to eat – just how much there is!
- Birdwatcher:** Sshh
- Jesus:** Look at the birds flying by. They don't work, they don't build houses, they don't make empires, but every day they have enough.
- Birdwatcher:** Told you so.
- Pirate:** It's all right for birds, they aren't out in all weathers trying to earn an honest living, fighting storms, putting right wrongs..
- Farmer:** You don't know anything. If you want to know what hard work is you should try being out in a field, sorting the wheat from the weeds, tilling the soil
- Jesus:** Look at the lilies, the colours, the beauty. They don't do anything.
- Farmer:** Too right there (under his breath)
- Jesus:** Not even Solomon in all his wealth was as lovely as these flowers. And to think, at the end of the day the farmer burns them up.
- Farmer:** That's right, blame me again
- Birdwatcher:** Sshh.
- Jesus:** So don't worry about things. Worrying never added a day to your life.
- Pirate:** I always liked sitting back and taking things easy.
- Jesus:** God knows all that you need to live so concentrate instead on storing up real treasure.
- Pirate:** Now you're talking! I love treasure.
- Farmer:** I'm quite fond of it myself.
- Birdwatcher:** Sshh
- Jesus:** (looks at them) Real treasure in heaven Not the money that rots, not the houses that fall down, not the fancy clothes and lovely furniture that moths eat, but the treasure of a life lived under God's love and care.
- Pirate/Farmer/Birdwatcher:** (Nod wisely)
- Jesus:** Put God first: Look for his ways
- Birdwatcher:** Not for birds first then
- Jesus:** Put God first: Look for treasure in heaven
- Pirate:** Not for gold and jewels first then
- Jesus:** Put God first: and don't worry about tomorrow
- Farmer:** Not so much stress then about the weather
- Jesus:** For where your heart is, that's where your treasure will be.