

A Set of Lesson Plans
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“Capitalism, the Crash, and Christianity”

Lesson One

Title: “Capitalism, the Crash, and Christianity”

Concept

The purpose of the lesson is not (necessarily) to debate the pros and cons of capitalism. The purpose of this lesson **is** to consider how, given our country’s capitalist economic structure, we might live as the Body of Christ together, working in and through the principalities and powers that sometimes seem contrary to the Christian way of being. The lesson will challenge participants to consider the current economic situation through the lens of Scripture. Participants will begin thinking about ways of being that allow us to work within our current structures, while at the same time being true to God’s W/word, both in Scripture and in the life and teachings of Christ.

Timeframe

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, adjustments can be made to accommodate particular situations as needed.

Goal

The goal of this session is a) to give participants a clearer understanding of the current economic crisis, b) to encourage participants to wrestle with the apparent futility of creating a “perfect” economic system, and c) to begin considering ways in which we might live as the Body of Christ amidst economic turmoil.

Objectives

Participants will:

1. Explain the overall purpose of the lesson.
2. Identify, from the Christian perspective, the two “easily available answers to the failures of economic systems.”
3. Explain the difference between “greed” and “idolizing wealth.”
4. Describe the driving force behind a capitalist economy.
5. Identify at least “three types of economic practices for Christian life” within the current chaos.
6. Discover ways in which their own lives reflect the “three types of economic practices for Christian life.”

Preparation

1. Participants should have read Mark Douglas’ lead article, *“Capitalism, the Crash, and Christianity.”*

2. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for four to six people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room
3. Write the following statement on the board: **“As we gather, share with one another the ways in which you or those in your family have been personally affected by the current ‘economic crisis.’ Discuss changes you might have made in your day-to-day life as a result of the economy’s downturn.”**

Materials

1. Bible
2. White / Chalk board and pens / chalk
3. paper and pen/cil/s at each table

Sequence

1. Opening – (See question on board) As participants gather, have them share with one another the ways they have been affected by the economic downturn, and the changes they have made in their daily lives as a result of the financial crisis. After a brief period of time for sharing, ask the groups to summarize their conversations. **Have a scribe write key phrases on the board for later reference.** Before moving on, it might be helpful to read aloud the “Concept” section of this lesson plan so participants might understand the purpose of the day’s lesson.
2. Explore – Assign the following passages for small group consideration. Instruct each group to read the assigned text together, and then discuss what each might be saying to us in today’s context.
 - a. 2 Chronicles 1:7-13
 - b. Jeremiah 17:5-11
 - c. Psalm 49
 - d. Luke 8:11-15
 - e. Revelation 18:1-20
3. Encounter –
 - a. Ask participants to share their initial reactions to the lead article. Make a list of the points that Douglas makes, and rate each one with 1 to 5 stars, depending on how much agreement there is among the class with the statement or point made.
 - b. Invite participants to discuss in small groups which of Douglas’ “three types of economic practices for Christian life” is more personally applicable or appealing. Encourage them to share ways in which they or their family members have engaged in one or more of these practices.
 - c. Encourage participants to consider which of the three practices, if any, is reflected in each of the above texts.

4. Respond –
 - a. Return to the list of key phrases created at the lesson’s opening. Make a note of which of the three practices listed by Douglas is at work in the lives of participants as they continue to live into the current economic crisis.
 - b. Discuss ways in which our reactions to the current economic turmoil might not reflect the faith we profess. Follow this time with a collaboration of ways in which we might lean more towards faithful discernment, hopeful engagement, and / or loving patience that Professor Douglas references in his article.

5. Closing – End with prayer, using the following words, or relevant words of your own choosing: “Gracious and merciful God, forgive us for the times when we are tempted put our ultimate trust in anything or anyone but you. As we continue to live into these uncertain times, keep our hearts and minds on that which is most certain—your love for us in Jesus Christ. Give us strength in the coming days to practice faithful discernment, hopeful engagement, and loving patience in all that we say and do. Amen.”

Lesson Two

Title: “Disciplining the Disordered”

Concept

The purpose of this lesson is to challenge participants to consider their own desires in light of their participation in a community of faith. Learners will be challenged to think about how their life as a community of faith reflects “disciplined desire” in its day to day life together. Furthermore, participants will be encouraged to consider how their own desires might reflect “disorder,” and urged to think about ways in which they might begin to discipline those “disordered desires.”

Timeframe

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, adjustments can be made to accommodate particular situations as needed.

Goal

The goal of this session is a) to give participants a clearer picture of how each of us is susceptible to “disordered desire,” and b) to begin to move towards more “disciplined desires,” relying on Scripture, and more specifically, the book of Proverbs, to guide us along the way.

Objectives

Participants will:

1. Identify at least five intangible resources that the Christian community possesses.
2. Explain the difference between “disciplined desire” and “disordered desire.”

3. Identify ways in which their particular community of faith engages in behavior that reflects the intangible possessions of a Christian community.
4. Recognize ways in which their own desires might be “disordered,” and in need of “discipline”

Preparation

1. Participants should have read Timothy J. Sandoval’s response article, *“Training Desire in Proverbs,”* as well as *“A Reply of Gratitude,”* by Professor Douglas.
2. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for four to six people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room.
3. Write the following statement on the board: **“As we gather, read Proverbs 1:10-19, and make note of any phrases that you find particularly interesting or meaningful. Read it again slowly, and if you have time, rewrite these verses in your own, more contemporary language.”**

Materials

1. Bible
2. White / Chalk board and pens / chalk
3. paper and pen/cil/s at each table

Sequence

1. Opening –
 - a. (See question on board) As participants gather, encourage them to reflect silently on the passage on the board. If time allows, invite some to share all or part of their paraphrase of the verses.
 - b. Introduce the phrases “disordered desire” and “disciplined desire.” Make a list of words or phrases that reflect each phrase.
2. Explore – Have participants select one of the following passages to consider, making sure that each passage is chosen by at least one person. Allow three to five minutes for reading of the passage with the following question in mind: What do these verses suggest to us about “disordered desire” and / or “disciplined desire?”
 - a. Proverbs 31:3-18
 - b. Proverbs 11:28
 - c. Proverbs 13:6-9
 - d. Proverbs 22:1-2
 - e. Proverbs 23:1-5
 - f. Proverbs 27:23-27

Invite participants to share their thoughts on the above question with regard to their particular passage. Continue with the listing of characteristics or phrases that reflect “disordered” and / or “disciplined” desire begun in the lesson opener.

3. Encounter – In his first paragraph, Sandoval suggests that as Christian communities, we “possess much.” He then goes on to list the following “possessions” we have as a community of faith. Divide participants into five smaller groups, and assign each group one of the following five “possessions” to consider. Then have the groups discuss ways in which their particular community of faith reflects those gifts of Christian community.
 - a. A long history of Christian doctrine
 - b. Meaningful rituals
 - c. Struggles and pitfalls of community life
 - d. Communal prayer
 - e. Gathering around Scripture
4. Respond – Sandoval makes the argument that the book of Proverbs makes an attempt to retrain our desire, “away from the pursuit of wealth and toward the quest for wisdom.” Douglas responds to Sandoval positively, suggesting that his response is likely the “most useful for the church,” in that it forces us to “come face-to-face with a text that has guided...the church for thousands of years because it is wise, practical, and...’inspired by God...useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.’” (1 Timothy 3:16) Invite the participants to share how the time spent studying Proverbs and engaged in Sandoval’s response might begin (or continue) the process of “disciplining” their desires in the days and weeks to come. If time allows, encourage participants to commit to one or two ways of seeking to “discipline” a particular desire by writing it down on paper. Keep it for them until the end of the study and invite them to reflect on their progress.
5. Closing – End with prayer, using the Lord’s Prayer, or a prayer of your own choosing.

Lesson Three

Title: Consumed By God

Concept

The purpose of this lesson is to present participants with the idea of a connection between our celebration of the Lord’s Supper and our own participation in an economic structure. The lesson will challenge participants to think anew about their own participation in the Lord’s Supper and how it functions to retrain consumption, both within the church and within the greater society. Using the Lord’s Supper as a springboard, participants will begin to see the way/s in which the world relies on the church, as well as ways in which the church relies on the world.

Timeframe

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, adjustments can be made to accommodate particular situations as needed.

Goal

The goal of this session is a) to give participants a richer, fuller understanding of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and its role in our "consumer" culture, and b) to begin to imagine ways in which the church and its life and rituals shape our thinking and our living within society at large.

Objectives

Participants will:

1. Verbalize their own understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper.
2. Identify a Reformed understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper.
3. Recognize the way in which our participation in the life of a community of faith helps to re-order our desires by turning our consumption "inside out."
4. Name at least three ways in which the church shapes and directs both our thinking and our living in times of economic crisis.
5. Identify at least two ways in which their own community of faith serves as a model for the wider economic life of society.

Preparation

1. Participants should have read Todd Cioffi's response article, "*The Economic Crisis and the Church*," as well as "*A Reply of Gratitude*," by Professor Douglas.
2. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for four to six people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room
3. Write the following statement on the board: **"As we gather, reflect on the significance of participating in the Lord's Supper for you. Spend a few moments sharing with others until we are ready to begin."**

Materials

1. Bible
2. White / Chalk board and pens / chalk
3. paper and pen/cil/s at each table
4. Resources on a Reformed understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper from a theology textbook (such as Dan Migliore's *Faith Seeking Understanding*) or literature from the PCUSA's Office of Theology and Worship, available online at www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/.
5. A copy of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving

Sequence

1. Opening – (See question on board) As participants gather, encourage them to share with one another their own personal reflections on the significance of the Lord's Supper.
2. Explore – Allow participants five to seven minutes in smaller groups to peruse the gathered resources on the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Encourage them to write down new information they encounter, or any words or phrases that strike a chord for

them. Call the group back together and have them share and discuss their findings and reactions to what they read, shared, and learned.

3. Encounter – Cioffi maintains that we in the church are consumers as we “partake of the Lord’s Supper, take in the preaching of the Word, embrace the fellowship of the Christian community...” However, our consuming is “turned inside out.” He continues: “As a social production divinely orchestrated, the church’s ongoing practice of the Lord’s Supper trains our desires and thereby trains how we see and desire the world around us, giving us the needed vision to see things aright.” In light of his remarks, spend some time in discussion around Cioffi’s discussion questions. Invite participants to work in smaller groups, assigning one question per group, followed by a time of summarizing their discussion / responses.
 - a. Do you see the church, indeed your local church, as the Body of Christ, as Christ’s presence in the world? What difference does this make to see the local church as Christ’s body?
 - b. If the church is at least a glimpse of *true society*, what difference does this make in how we see our local congregations?
 - c. How does seeing the church as the Body of Christ and God’s true society shape and direct our thinking and lives during this country’s economic crisis?Gather back as one group and invite a group representative to share / summarize their discussion and / or responses.
4. Respond – Continue wrestling with Cioffi’s discussion questions as a large group by considering the following together:
 - a. If the church is called to live out economic life as God intends, what would have to change in your local church? What should remain the same?
 - b. How can we begin to offer up our churches as models for the wider economic life of our society? Indeed, how can we offer up our churches as models for social life in general?
5. Closing – End with a version of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving, commonly prayed at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, or a prayer of your choosing.

Lesson Four

Title: Our Economy, God’s Economy

Concept

The purpose of this lesson is to encourage participants to consider the notions of both greed and idolatry. The lesson will challenge participants to expand their own, perhaps limited, previous notions of each of these words, broadening their scope and blurring the difference between the two. Using these terms as a springboard, participants will be encouraged to consider them in light of their own experience with debt and credit, as well as their own experiences as a member of “God’s economic system,” as reflected in one of Jesus’ parables.

Timeframe

The lesson is written for a 45-minute class period. However, adjustments can be made to accommodate particular situations as needed.

Goal

The goal of this session is to a) allow participants to reflect on their own personal experience with credit, greed, and idolatry (of wealth / prosperity), and b) to begin to imagine new ways in which we can live as good stewards and faithful disciples amidst a world of greed / idolatry, knowing that God's economy is closer to perfect than any economic system at work in the world today.

Objectives

Participants will:

7. Define "greed" and "idolatry" for themselves, then for the class as a whole
8. Identify changes that have occurred over time in our understanding of "greed" and "idolatry."
9. Recognize ways in which their own lives have reflected both greed and idolatry with regard to material consumption and use of credit.
10. Name at least two ways in which they can give more attention to their Christian commitments with regard to their own consumption in the days and weeks ahead.
11. Name at least two ways in which their community of faith might give more attention to its Christian commitments with regard to its own consumption in the days and weeks ahead.

Preparation

4. Participants should have read Cam Murchison's response article, "*A Response to Capitalism, the Crash, and Christianity*," as well as "*A Reply of Gratitude*," by Professor Douglas.
5. Arrange the room in a way that is conducive to both large group discussion and small group sharing, ideally with tables for four to six people that are easily accessible and arranged to face a common space in one area of the room
6. Write the following statement on the board: **"As we gather, spend time sharing together an early "credit" experience. For instance, share responses to the following questions: When did you get your first credit card? When, if ever, did you first get "in trouble" because of a credit card? How has your philosophy of credit evolved over time? If you are a parent, how are you educating your children about credit?"**

Materials

4. Bible
5. White / Chalk board and pens / chalk
6. paper and pen/cil/s at each table

Sequence

6. Opening – (See question on board) As participants gather, invite them to enter into conversation with one another revolving around the questions on the board. As the beginning time approaches, encourage people to share their experiences with the larger group as they are comfortable.
7. Explore – Invite participants to work in pairs or groups of three for two to three minutes to come up with their own definitions of a) greed, and b) idolatry. Encourage them to share their definitions, and consolidate them to agree on a collective definition that is acceptable to the whole group. Then, share the following with them:

In the **1983** edition of its *New World Dictionary of the American Language*, Webster defines *greed* as “excessive desire, esp. for wealth.” Likewise, its 1983 definition of *idolatry* is “excessive devotion to or reverence for some person or thing.”

By **2009**, the Merriam-Webster website defined greed as “a selfish and excessive desire for more of something (as money) than is needed,” and idolatry as “the worship of a physical object as a god,” and “immoderate attachment or devotion to something.”

Paul clearly imagines these two terms as synonymous (cf. Eph 5:5, Col 3:5). Invite participants to consider the following questions, either together or in smaller groups, depending on your class size:

- a. Has there been a shift in meaning of the terms “greed” and “idolatry” over the past 16 years, from 1983 until 2009? If so, describe the shift that seems to have occurred. What might be a reason for any apparent shift in definition / meaning?
 - b. Do you agree with Paul’s assertion that greed and idolatry are synonymous? Why or why not?
 - c. Return to your own recollections of earlier experiences with credit. Share if / how greed and idolatry were at work in your life at that time.
8. Encounter – Invite someone to read Matthew 18:21-35 aloud. Consider together how this parable might speak to us today as Christians amidst “the crash.” What does it say about our own economic system of capitalism? What does it say about God’s economy?
 9. Respond – Murchison suggests that, as Christians seeking to respond faithfully in a time of economic crisis, we might begin to consider ways in which our “consuming is consistent with both our resources and our discipleship.” Perhaps, he suggests, we should “give more attention that was necessary in the days of easy credit to what things (we) buy, and how (our) buying does or does not reflect (our) Christian commitments.”

How do / might you, as an individual reflect this awareness in your own life? How does / might your community of faith reflect this awareness in its life?

10. Closing – End with prayer, using the Lord’s Prayer, or a prayer of your own choosing. If you do opt for the Lord’s Prayer, before you begin, decide as a group whether or not you will use “debts/debtors,” “sins / those who sin against us,” or “trespasses / those who trespass against us.” How has this study changed your preference for and / or understanding of that phrase?