45 While all the people were listening, Jesus said to his disciples, 46 “Beware of the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. 47 They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely.”

21 As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. 2 He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. 3 “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. 4 All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

20:45. Jesus turned once more to teach his disciples, but he had to do so in public. The crowd eavesdropped on his teaching, still hanging on his words.

20:46. Jesus assumed a prophetic teaching role, issuing a prophetic condemnation but directing it to his disciples rather than to the ones condemned. When the going gets rough, Jesus' disciples will be tempted to turn back to the familiarity of Judaism. Jesus reminded them how false this way of life had become. The teachers wanted to be seen for their extraordinary clothing. They wanted everyone to gush over them, eager to greet them and be seen with them in the market. They wanted seats of honor during worship so everyone could see and admire them for their wisdom. At social gatherings they
wanted to be seated with the honored guests. All this demonstrated one personality trait: pride ruled their lives.

20:47. The Old Testament emphasizes the necessity for the people, especially the religious leaders, to care for widows. The scribes probably had authority as executors of estates for widows. Certainly they had access to funds taken for charity. They may have gone so far as to use legal tactics to rob widows of their houses and other properties. Whatever method they used, they found ways to manipulate widows and their possessions so the scribes got richer and the widows joined the poverty lines. Having so mistreated the needy, they would then go to prayer time and make a public show of their piety.

After outlining their sins in prophetic fashion, Jesus then stated the judgment. They faced greater punishment than all the rest because they had greater responsibility and had not exercised it properly (cf. 19:11-27). To whom much is given, much is required. Yes, Jesus can affirm the reality of resurrection, but not a resurrection of blessing and joy for these religious leaders. They have their glory now. In the world to come, they would face a fate far worse than they imposed on the widows.

LUKE 21:1-4
21:1. In the temple, teaching as usual during these final days, Jesus noticed the rich dropping their offerings into the temple coffers. The way they did it, one could hardly fail to notice them. They did this as they prayed (20:47) for show, to be seen by others.

21:2. Jesus did not focus on the rich. He zeroed in on a poor widow. She had two lepta, each worth about one one-hundredth of a denarius, the coin used for a day laborer’s daily wage. Thus, her contribution to the temple was tiny in terms of monetary value.

21:3. But her two lepta had spiritual power. They form the subject for teaching Christian stewardship to this day. Why are they so important? Jesus valued these “worthless” coins as worth more than all the rich people had put in.

21:4. Jesus’ reasoning is simple. The rich gave from their abundance, leaving much more for themselves. The widow gave from abject poverty, leaving nothing for herself. They gave out of discretionary funds. She gave her bread money. Giving is judged by the degree of sacrifice.

MAIN POINT
There is no place for pretense in the kingdom of God. Righteous living goes beyond appearances.
INTRODUCTION
As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

What are some of the more common ways Christians in different professions publicly display their faith? Consider professional clergy, famous athletes, Christian teenagers, and so on.

What kind of reaction do you have to these public displays of faith? Admiration? Disapproval? Do your reactions vary? Why or why not?

Expression of one’s religious faith takes many outward forms. A male Jew may occasionally wear a yarmulke. A pastor or priest may wear an ornate robe while preaching. A Christian commuter may place an icthus on the back of her car. A football player may “Tebow” after a touchdown. Some may find these public displays of faith inspiring, while others may find them annoying. Often our reactions to such displays are dependent upon the level of sincerity we perceive in those people. A certain level of skepticism may be healthy, as Jesus warned that outward expressions are not be trusted either by those who practice them or by those who see them.

UNDERSTANDING
Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

- Ask a volunteer to read Luke 20:45-47.

According to Jesus, what common actions did the teachers of the law take to stand out from the rest? What might their motives have been for doing so?

What types of things do people do today to get the attention of their friends or the public at large? What might their motives be for doing so?

What do you think Jesus meant when He accused these teachers of the law of “devouring widows”?

Even though the scribes held authority and influence simply by virtue of their office, a prideful and selfish heart often led many to flaunt their faith and importance by dressing extravagantly or making much of their seats of honor in various assemblies. Many would “devour widows” by exploiting them financially, aggressively seeking donations from them in pursuit of a more lavish lifestyle. To the unwise, these outward expressions of faith, including long-winded prayers, seemed admirable. But Jesus warned such behavior was deadly.

Is it possible to tell the difference between someone whose faith is genuine and someone whose faith isn’t? Explain your thoughts.
Jesus further illustrated His point about trusting mere appearances by calling His listeners’ attention to a widow giving her tithe. In the process, He made an insightful point regarding giving.

Why did Jesus commend the widow? How much did she give?

Jesus saw different people giving at the temple. First He noticed the rich who put their money in the offering box. Then He noticed a widow who gave two coins, lepta, worth 1/128th of a denarius, the typical day’s wage. Jesus commended the widow for her generosity, not the people who were rich. The value of the gift was based on its sacrificial merit. The widow gave everything, even though it was a small offering compared to others. Her faith in God gave her the confidence to give everything, as she trusted that God would care for her needs.

What might Jesus’ commendation of the widow imply about His view of the gifts by the rich? How does this apply to our lives?

When you give, do you ask, “How much should I give?” or, “How much should I keep for myself and those dependent on me?” How might changing this perspective impact your giving?

If you had to summarize Jesus’ teaching regarding giving in one statement, what would it be?

Jesus’ point regarding giving is simply this: believers are to give in a generous and sacrificial way that does not call attention to themselves.

APPLICATION
Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Share an experience in which following Jesus cost you something.

Are there any public displays of faith you practice insincerely? In light of Jesus’ warning, what do you think you should do?

What are you sacrificing when you give to the church or other charitable organizations?

How can we encourage one another to be authentic in our faith and sacrificial in our giving?

How does the story of the widow point you to Jesus?
PRAYER
Thank God that we have a model for genuine sacrifice and generosity in Christ. Confess your tendency to want people to notice your “righteous acts,” and ask God to create a clean heart in you so that you might love Him genuinely and give to Him sacrificially.