



September 10, 2023 – October 22, 2023

Grace Lutheran Church – Arlington, TX



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# Foreword

When I receive a gift, I quickly open it, eager to see what the giver has blessed me with. Some gifts are practical, like a tool. Some gifts are fun like a game or puzzle. Other gifts create fellowship and bring me great joy, like tickets to an experience with my wife or family. Other gifts inform me, for example, books. Some gifts are meant to be shared, like the Butcher Box of meat my daughter sent me for Father's Day. This is how gifts from God work also. Some gifts bring us great joy, some inform us, some are meant to be shared, and some gifts are very practical.

In this series we will explore how we are each "Gifted" by God in many ways. Each week we will anchor from a specific Bible passage, then expand out from there to some related passages which help us explore a certain area of our giftedness from the Almighty creator. Over the course of seven weeks, we will begin to understand, believe, remember, and do ministry because of these gifts. Our topics are as follows:

Week 1-Sept. 10: Ephesians 2:8-10 – *The Gift of Grace*

Week 2-Sept. 17: Romans 12:3-8 – *Your Spiritual Gifts*

Week 3-Sept. 24: Genesis 39:4-6, 19-23 – *Wow, God's Gifted Me*

Week 4-Oct. 1: Matthew 25:14-30 – *Your Bag of Gifts*

Week 5-Oct. 8: 2 Corinthians 9:7 – *Gifted for Generosity*

Week 6-Oct. 15: Philippians 2:14-18 – *Gifted for Love*

Week 7-Oct. 22: 1 Peter 1:3-9 – *Gifted for His Glory*

Lessons 1, 2, and 5 have been written by Pastor Widger, while lessons 3, 4, 6, and 7 are adapted from a Concordia Publishing House resource intitled: "God's Trustees" written by Gerhard Michael Jr. and David Belasic (2008). All readings are taken from the New International Version (NIV), unless otherwise notated.

I pray God will bless you richly because of this study! You, people of Grace Lutheran Church, are indeed GIFTED people.

Sincerely,



Pastor Doug Widger



Read the following excerpt from PROOF by Timothy Paul Jones and Daniel Montgomery - "Because I'm Yours:"

I never dreamed that taking a child to Disney World could be so difficult — or that such a trip could teach me so much about God's outrageous grace.

Our middle daughter had been previously adopted by another family. I [Timothy] am sure this couple had the best of intentions, but they never quite integrated the adopted child into their family of biological children. After a couple of rough years, they dissolved the adoption, and we ended up welcoming an eight-year-old girl into our home.

For one reason or another, whenever our daughter's previous family vacationed at Disney World, they took their biological children with them, but they left their adopted daughter with a family friend. Usually — at least in the child's mind — this happened because she did something wrong that precluded her presence on the trip.

And so, by the time we adopted our daughter, she had seen many pictures of Disney World and she had heard about the rides and the characters and the parades. But when it came to passing through the gates of the Magic Kingdom, she had always been the one left on the outside. Once I found out about this history, I made plans to take her to Disney World the next time a speaking engagement took our family to the southeastern United States.

I thought I had mastered the Disney World drill. I knew from previous experiences that the prospect of seeing cast members in freakishly oversized mouse and duck costumes somehow turns children into squirming bundles of emotional instability. What I *didn't* expect was that the prospect of visiting this dreamworld would produce a stream of downright devilish behavior in our newest daughter. In the month leading up to our trip to the Magic Kingdom, she stole food when a simple request would have gained her a snack. She lied when it would have been easier to tell the truth. She whispered insults that were carefully crafted to hurt her older sister as deeply as possible — and, as the days on the calendar moved closer to the trip, her mutinies multiplied.

A couple of days before our family headed to Florida, I pulled our daughter into my lap to talk through her latest escapade. "I know what you're going to do," she stated flatly. "You're not going to take me to Disney World, are you?" The thought hadn't actually crossed my mind, but her downward spiral suddenly started to make some sense. She knew she couldn't earn her way into the Magic Kingdom — she had tried and failed that test several times before — so she was living in a way that placed her as far as possible from the most magical place on earth.

In retrospect, I'm embarrassed to admit that, in that moment, I was tempted to turn her fear to my own advantage. The easiest response would have been, "If you don't start behaving better, you're right, we won't take you" — but, by God's grace, I didn't. Instead, I asked her, "Is this trip something we're doing as a family?"

She nodded, brown eyes wide and tear-rimmed.

"Are you part of this family?"

She nodded again.

"Then you're going with us. Sure, there may be some consequences to help you remember what's right and what's wrong — but you're part of our family, and we're not leaving you behind."

I'd like to say that her behaviors grew better after that moment. They didn't. Her choices pretty much spiraled out of control at every hotel and rest stop all the way to Lake Buena Vista. Still, we headed to Disney World on the day we had promised, and it was a typical Disney day. Overpriced tickets, overpriced meals, and lots of lines, mingled with just enough manufactured magic to consider maybe going again someday.

In our hotel room that evening, a very different child emerged. She was exhausted, pensive, and a little weepy at times, but her month-long facade of rebellion had faded. When bedtime rolled around, I prayed with her, held her, and asked, "So how was your first day at Disney World?"

She closed her eyes and snuggled down into her stuffed unicorn. After a few moments, she opened her eyes ever so slightly. "Daddy," she said, "I finally got to go to Disney World. But it wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours."

*It wasn't because I was good; it's because I'm yours.*

That's the message of outrageous grace.

Outrageous grace isn't a favor you can achieve by being good; it's the gift you receive by being God's. Outrageous grace is God's goodness that comes looking for you when you have nothing but rebellion to offer in return. It's a farmer paying a full day's wages to a crew of deadbeat day laborers with only a single hour punched on their timecards (Matthew 20:1 – 16). It's a man marrying an abandoned woman and then refusing to forsake his covenant with her when she turns out to be a whore (Ezekiel 16:8 – 63; Hosea 1:1 — 3:5). It's the insanity of a shepherd who puts ninety-nine sheep at risk to rescue the single lamb that's too stupid to stay with the flock (Luke 15:1 – 7). It's the love of a father who hands over his finest rings and robes to a young man who has squandered his inheritance on drunken binges with his fair-weather friends (Luke 15:11 – 32)...It's one-way love that calls you into the kingdom not because you've been good but because God has chosen you and made you his own. And now he is chasing you to the ends of the earth to keep you as his child, and nothing in heaven or hell can ever stop him...

But here's what's amazing about God's outrageous grace: This isn't merely what God the Father *would* do; it's what he *did* do. God could have chosen to save anyone, everyone, or no one from Adam's fallen race. But what God did was to choose a multi-hued multitude of "someones," and — if you are a believer in Jesus Christ — one of those "someones" was you. God in Christ has declared over you, "I could have chosen anyone in the whole world as my child, and I chose you. No matter what you say or do, neither my love nor my choice will ever change." That's grace that's truly amazing. (Pgs. 81-84)

4. How does this short story impact your understanding of God's gift of grace to you?



## **BELIEVE...** His gift of grace is for you.

5. Do you believe you are part of God's family? What makes you a member of His eternal clan? Referring to Ephesians 2:8-10 – what is the source of "faith"?

**The Apostles Creed** ... is our most common statement of belief in the Christian church. It is our family creed. The three paragraphs are a compilation of what the early church believed about who God is, Father, Son and Holy Spirit according to how he has revealed himself in the Bible. Each week we say, "I believe" and these words shape our souls. Meditate (read slowly and thoughtfully) on the wonders revealed in this Creed now.

**I believe** in God, the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried.  
He descended into hell.  
On the third day He rose again from the dead.  
He ascended into heaven  
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.  
From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

**I believe** in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Christian Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

6. Where do you see God's grace in this Creed? Go back now and make some notations, thanking God for His grace!

### REMEMBER... God's gift of grace.

There are ways our brain makes connections which help us to recall and remember His work in our lives. One way to cement this basic truth about the GIFT of faith through grace is through creative writing. For example, you might take a favorite tune from a hymn and write your own verse about the gift of grace! You might write a poem or a short story... **be prepared to share your creative work with your small group on Sunday.**

EXAMPLE:

Amazing Grace with a new verse...

### DO... Grace in your daily living!

The ultimate goal of each of these studies is to help us become obedient to God's Spirit - and do something. Doing this is not to earn His favor, but rather as a result of His lavishing outrageous grace and mercy upon us. Our natural response is to thank Him, praise Him and serve His creation.

Read again Ephesians 2:10

*For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Martin Luther famously said, "God does not need our good works, but our neighbor does." What might God have prepared in advance for you to do? He is orchestrating divine appointments for each of us constantly. Who in your circle of friends, neighbors, co-workers, and acquaintances are in need of outrageous grace? Listen, pray, encourage, help, befriend, serve, and love them – so they might experience the good grace of a loving God.

7. Pick one person and one way you will "do good works" rooted in grace this week.

## GOING DEEPER...

For those who wish to go deeper into the scriptures each week there will be provided additional Biblical references and activity ideas.

The word "grace" is used a total of 124 times in the NIV translation of the Bible. Only 10 times is the word used in the Old Testament. Grace is used 114 times in the New Testament. In three of Paul's letters grace is used more times than in the entire OT. In the letter of Romans Paul uses this word 18 times; in 2 Corinthians and Ephesians 11 times each. Pick one of those books and do a word study on grace.

Go to [BibleGateway.com](http://BibleGateway.com) and type in "grace" in the search bar, then look at one of these books and gain a greater understanding of the meaning of this extremely powerful word.

Write your learnings and observations below:

# Lesson 2

## Your Spiritual Gifts

As a result of this study, you will:

- **Understand** God's spiritual gifts to you.
- **Believe** He has gifted you for ministry purposes.
- **Remember** God's gifts to you.
- **Do** put God's spiritual gifts into action.

**UNDERSTAND...** God's spiritual gifts to you.

Read Romans 12:3-8

*<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. <sup>4</sup> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup> if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.*

1. Go back and circle all the spiritual gifts listed in verses 6-8. How many do you see listed in this passage?

Now read two other passages which have to do with spiritual gifts according to Paul:

1 Corinthians 12:27-31

*<sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. <sup>28</sup> And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. <sup>29</sup> Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? <sup>30</sup> Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? <sup>31</sup> Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.*

2. Circle the gifts in this passage.

Ephesians 4:11-13

*<sup>11</sup> So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

3. Circle what Paul has identified as spiritual gifts for the building of the body of Jesus in this passage.
4. Now go back through all three passages and look at all the circled words. Where do you see your own giftedness? What do you see as your primary gifts and secondary gifts?
5. What do you understand these passages to mean regarding your giftedness for the greater good of the kingdom of God?

Read the following excerpt from author Joe Chebat:

Have you ever experienced the performance of a world-class symphony? I don't mean listening to music through tiny white earbuds, or even your fancy home theater system. That would be listening to the music. I'm talking about experiencing it!

There is a major difference between listening to a recording of Mozart and experiencing it live at the symphony hall. The notes may be the same, but our awareness of the conductor and each of the members of the orchestra, and the distinct movements and sounds of various instruments is completely lost when we only hear a recording of the sounds. There is something about seeing the music created before our eyes that results in a sense of wonder and exhilaration. Rather than thinking of music as a technically satisfying product, we experience it as a profoundly incredible work of art.

I took my wife to the Pacific Symphony for a Christmas concert last year. Famous songs I had heard hundreds of times before came to life as I watched the 50-piece orchestra create the melodic sounds of *Silent Night* and *Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas*. It was amazing to pan across the stage and see each of these unique and gifted musicians, playing individual notes on their instruments that resulted in this incredible symphony of sounds that filled the concert hall.

When they did *Sleigh Ride* and they got to the second verse where you hear the "*Giddy up, giddy up, giddy up let's go. Let's look at the show. We're riding in a wonderland of snow.*" I noticed the percussionist using two wooden blocks to make the clop, clop sound of horses running that you hear in the background of the song. I wouldn't have even noticed this guy hidden way in the back with his wooden blocks in hand, except that he was featured on the giant video screen in the hall as the camera zoomed in on him making his clop, clop sound. I had never realized how important this little additional sound in the background was to enhance the rich texture of the melody and the life-like experience of the song.

6. How does this short story impact your understanding of the importance of your spiritual gifts and the role you play in God's eternal symphony?

**BELIEVE...** He has gifted you for ministry purposes.

I thought about this as I was reading Paul's description of different parts of the body this week. The percussionist was not in a prominent position. He didn't play the violin in the 1st chair right next to the conductor. He was tucked in the back, relegated to slapping two wood blocks together. Yet without him adding his unique sound to the mix, the music would have been incomplete.

Similarly, understanding how spiritual gifts work melodically in a church body takes more than just listening to the harmony the members make when tuned in to their gifts. It takes seeing each member of the church as an essential individual instrument, vital to the whole body. And it takes an appreciation for the work of the Great Conductor, the Holy Spirit - who gifts and guides each individual and the body according to His will and according to His purpose: the building up of the body of Christ.

7. Do you believe that each member of the body of Christ is gifted and plays an important role in making His music and message known to the world? What makes your combination of gifts unique and important? Where do you see your purpose in the kingdom of God?





**DO... put your spiritual gifts into action!**

- 12. Identify your top three spiritual gifts from the lists at the start of the study and share them with your small group.**
  
13. Take time to brainstorm ways that each could use their gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.
  
  
14. Make a plan towards implementing your gifts for the good of the church!

### **GOING DEEPER...**

For those who wish to go deeper into the scriptures each week there will be provided additional Biblical references and activity ideas. This week we have a Survey activity to help you identify and learn more about what your spiritual gifts might be!

Click on the following link to take a "Spiritual Gift Survey"

[grace.lc/spiritual-gifts-survey](https://grace.lc/spiritual-gifts-survey)

Click on the following link to see a list which help define "Spiritual Gifts"

[grace.lc/spiritual-gifts-list](https://grace.lc/spiritual-gifts-list)

You can type these links into your internet browser (Google Chrome, Safari, etc.) to get to these resources. You can also access this pdf on our website grace.lc and click the links from there.

# Lesson 3

## Wow, God's Gifted Me

As a result of this study, you will:

- **Understand** God trusts you with all you have been gifted.
- **Believe** God has gifted you in amazing ways.
- **Remember** all of life is an expression of your gifted nature.
- **Do** turn your gifts into smiles.

**UNDERSTAND...** God trusts you with all you have been gifted.

Read Genesis 39:4-6, 19-23 in your Bible.

The Old Testament story of Joseph gives us an example of a steward carrying out his duties, serving an owner and many others. Identify the verses indicating that (1) Joseph was the chosen steward/manager, (2) he had freedom to manage the household for Potiphar, (3) he was trusted, (4) he was accountable to his boss, and (5) he was condemned and removed from his stewardship because he was judged unfaithful (although unjustly).

1. How is your life like that of Joseph? What has God put you in charge of? Households, children, grandchildren, businesses, partnerships, bank accounts, credit cards, your body and health... list out some of the big stuff..

Read the following excerpt from Gerhardt Michael and David Belasic, "God's Trustees."

At the dinner table a little boy says, "Dad, I just had an idea. Let's build a birdhouse tonight just for the fun of it." Dad agrees. The little boy gets some wood from the garage, but it's the wrong piece of wood for a birdhouse. But since they are doing this together for the fun of it, they mark the lines and use the board. Dad turns on the power saw and the boy is about to push the board across the whirling blade, when Dad calls, "Hold on a minute. This could be dangerous. Let me help you." He puts his hand over the boy's hand and proceeds to cut out the pieces for the birdhouse. The little boy wiggles a bit so some of the pieces do not match perfectly. If Dad wanted to build a perfect birdhouse, he could have set the boy on a stool just to watch while he built it. *That would have destroyed the joy of the partnership!*

They put the birdhouse together, and the boy gets out the blue and gold paint cans. He spills a few drops on the paper, but completes the paint job and looks at the new birdhouse with great admiration.

The next day the boy is really excited as he heads to school with the birdhouse. One of his classmates says, "Where did you get that neat birdhouse?" He answers proudly, "My Dad and I built it. We do things like this all the time—just for the fun of it!"

2. How does this short story impact your understanding of God's gifts?
3. Sometimes God places things in our life which seem heavy and ominous (think Egypt). Other times the things He has entrusted to our care are light and easy (think birdhouses). Where are you at on the spectrum from ominous and heavy to light and easy at this stage of your life?

In the days ahead, think of the partnership we have as God's gifted people. Remember how He guides our hands and our lives and brings joy to the lives of others. God in Christ has chosen to draw a world of people back to Himself through His Son's death on the cross. Each one of us, baptized, blessed, in the name of Christ becomes a co-worker in His plan. We are not slaves driven by a self-serving God, but rather we are committed partners in our heavenly Father's desire to help people here and everywhere live a life with meaning and purpose. *"The purpose of life . . . for all of us who are baptized in the name of the triune God . . . is to make a contribution to others in the name of Jesus Christ."* It's how we see our mission as God's gifted people.

4. Do you agree or disagree with that last statement and why?

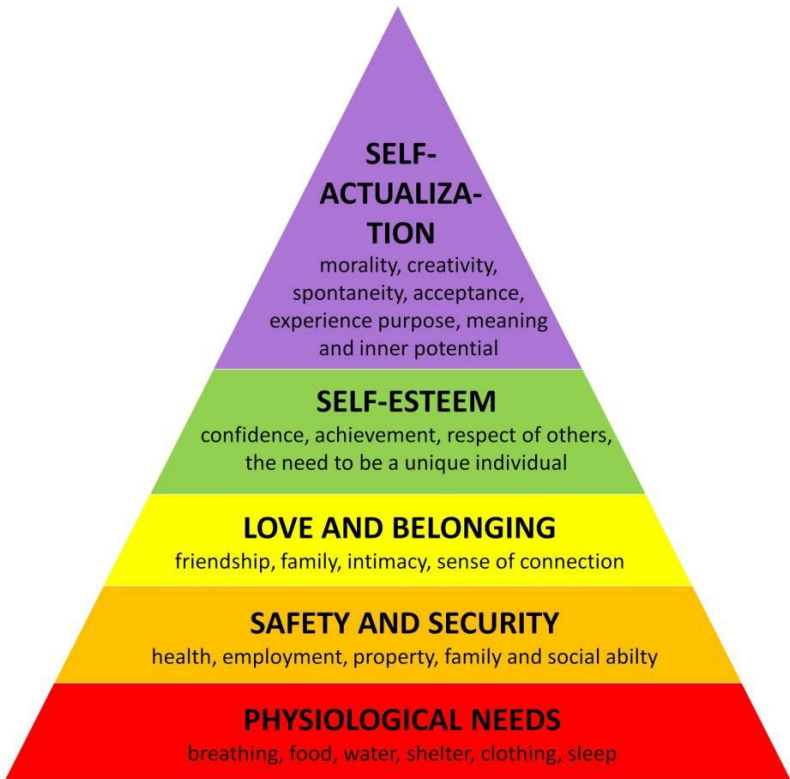
Luke 12: 48b says, *"For everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."*

5. What do you believe about the amount you have been entrusted? How do you see our church - have we been entrusted much or little? Write a few sentences about this.
6. **Write your reaction to our Grace Lutheran "Mission Statement"**. It reads as follows: "Grace Lutheran Church exists to develop passionate Christ followers who bring His life-changing love to our community."

7. How do you describe your personal mission?

**BELIEVE...** God has gifted you in amazing ways.

Take stock of the myriad of ways you are blessed and gifted by God in the temporal realm... using Maslow's hierarchy:



There are many things which are not included in this hierarchy. Especially salvation and a sense of transcendency we gain from faith. While many might include these as part of "self-actualization," I think of them as in another dimension - the spiritual realm. The spiritual realm impacts every level of this hierarchy, and our spiritual needs are present throughout.

8. What are some things that God has blessed you with in the spiritual realm?

**REMEMBER...** all of life is an expression of your gifted nature.

The words joy, joyful, and rejoice appear a total of 424 times in the Bible. Most times these words are connected to God's provision and rescue.

9. Take a few minutes and write down specifics about his provision and rescue in your life. Make a list of what is bringing you joy in the current season!

## **DO... turn your gifts into smiles!**

When you think about the abundant blessings of God in your life you can't help but smile. When you smile the people around you begin to smile.

10. How can you share the joy of the Lord with people this coming week?

You are gifted, so smile!

## **GOING DEEPER...**

For those who wish to go deeper... Consider the following Bible passages as you gain insight into living as God's gifted child. Jot down a few thoughts on what God is saying in his word and how he is calling you to live as his trustee.

Matthew 28:18-20

John 3:14-17

John 15:12-17

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

2 Corinthians 5:14-15

Ephesians 2:11-16

1 Peter 2:9-12

# Lesson 4

## Your Bag of Gifts

As a result of this study, you will:

- **Understand** God has a purpose in mind for the gifts He entrusts to you.
- **Believe** God is the giver of all good gifts.
- **Remember** all the different ways you are gifted!
- **Do** grow in developing, using, and managing resources entrusted to you.

**UNDERSTAND...** God has a purpose in mind for the gifts He entrusts to you.

Read Matthew 25:14-30

*<sup>14</sup> “Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his wealth to them. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five bags of gold, to another two bags, and to another one bag, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. <sup>16</sup> The man who had received five bags of gold went at once and put his money to work and gained five bags more. <sup>17</sup> So also, the one with two bags of gold gained two more. <sup>18</sup> But the man who had received one bag went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money.*

*<sup>19</sup> “After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.’*

*<sup>21</sup> “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*



<sup>22</sup> “The man with two bags of gold also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two bags of gold; see, I have gained two more.’

<sup>23</sup> “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’

<sup>24</sup> “Then the man who had received one bag of gold came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. <sup>25</sup> So I was afraid and went out and hid your gold in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’

<sup>26</sup> “His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? <sup>27</sup> Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest.

<sup>28</sup> “So take the bag of gold from him and give it to the one who has ten bags. <sup>29</sup> For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them. <sup>30</sup> And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

Note the specific verses for some of the following points:

- The owner entrusted property to his servants to manage for him in his absence.
- Their stewardship included the freedom to make responsible decisions for the owner.
- Accountability was required when the owner returned.
- The owner commended the faithful and rejected the faithless servant.

1. Focus on verse 15 from the previous passage, to "each according to his ability." What does this say about expectations? What light does it cast on the parable (an earthly story with a heavenly meaning)?
2. Who determines what you get, and how much you get?
3. How does the language of "grace" and "gift" help us look at our stewardship in a new way? What is that way?
4. How do these parts of the Bible foster a sense of "teamwork" and of being the "body of Christ," the Church?

2 Corinthians 12:9–10

*<sup>9</sup>But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. <sup>10</sup>That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

5. Put into your own words how Paul is led to handle his own bodily weaknesses. What does that say about stewardship?
  
6. In conjunction with your body, please consider the talents, skills, abilities, and interests God has given you. Make a list of what you feel those gifts are. Since God gives them, we can be realistic in identifying them. The gifts that I believe God has given me include:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. Continue with the creation around you. Read Genesis 1:29. Reflect on the variety God has put into creation for us to enjoy! Think about the air, the water, the land, the parks, the colors, the change of seasons. What aspects of creation do you enjoy most?

**BELIEVE...** God is the giver of all good gifts.

Sometimes religious people denigrate the material side of life. 1 Timothy 4:4–5 says, *“<sup>4</sup>For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup>because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.”*

8. What is the appropriate attitude he teaches? What can also help us to enjoy God's goodness while not having our enjoyment ruined by greed?

1 Timothy 6:6–10 tells us, “<sup>6</sup> But godliness with contentment is great gain. <sup>7</sup> For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. <sup>8</sup> But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. <sup>9</sup> Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

#### John D. Rockefeller, The First Billionaire

The very first person to reach the status of billionaire was a man who knew how to set goals and follow through. At the age of 23, he had become a millionaire, by the age of 50 a billionaire. Every decision, attitude, and relationship was tailored to create his personal power and wealth. But three years later at the age of 53 he became ill. His entire body became racked with pain and he lost all the hair on his head. In complete agony, the world's only billionaire could buy anything he wanted, but he could only digest milk and crackers. An associate wrote, "He could not sleep, would not smile and nothing in life meant anything to him." His personal, highly skilled physicians predicted he would die within a year. That year passed agonizingly slow. As he approached death he awoke one morning with the vague remembrances of a dream. He could barely recall the dream but knew it had something to do with not being able to take any of his successes with him into the next world. The man who could control the business world suddenly realized he was not in control of his own life. He was left with a choice. He called his attorneys, accountants, and managers and announced that he wanted to channel his assets

to hospitals, research, and mission work. On that day John D. Rockefeller established his foundation. This new direction eventually led to the discovery of penicillin, cures for current strains of malaria, tuberculosis and diphtheria. The list of discoveries resulting from his choice is enormous. But perhaps the most amazing part of Rockefeller's story is that the moment he began to give back a portion of all that he had earned, his body's chemistry was altered so significantly that he got better. It looked as if he would die at 53 but he lived to be 98. Rockefeller learned gratitude and gave back from his wealth. Doing so made him whole. It is one thing to be healed, it is another to be made whole.

9. Reflect on this story. Have you or someone you know had, or been impacted by, a similar experience?

**REMEMBER...** all the different ways you are gifted!

10. Consider the gift of the Gospel: God's forgiving, empowering, eternal life-giving love through His Son, Jesus Christ! What has Jesus done for you? Describe in your own words what your relationship with God in Christ means to you.

Reflect on how the following resources, gifts of God to be used and enjoyed, can help us live more meaningfully and significantly as God's trustees, "stewards of the Gospel"!

- Holy Baptism (Matthew 28:16–20; Romans 6:1–11; Galatians 3:26–29 and 4:4–7),
- Holy Communion (Matthew 26:26–29; 1 Corinthians 10:16–22).
- God's Family, the church, body of Christ (Romans 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-14, 27)
- The Word of God (John 1:14-18; Is. 55:4-6; Romans 1:16-17; 1 Cor. 1:18-25)
- The Forgiveness of Sins (John 8:1-11; Luke 15:11-24)

Each of us gets one day at a time—sixty minutes in an hour, twenty-four hours in a day! Our time management is vital—a nonrenewable resource. Time can fly or drag. No matter how we use it, it is a gift of God. Regular time for Scripture reading and prayer can mightily influence how we use the rest of our time.

11. Do you know of anyone who tithes (gives ten percent) of their time to God each day or week in a direct way? What do they do? What are they like? **Write below and share in your group ways in which you might improve your stewardship of time.**

**DO...** grow in developing, using, and managing resources entrusted to you.

12. Select two items from this study that you will endeavor to apply to your life as God's gifted child. What gifts which God has given you would bring the most satisfaction if you were to share them over the next twelve months?

## GOING DEEPER...

For those who wish to go deeper... Read the following passages which talk about "sharing faith." Read and make a few notes on the following passages:

1 Peter 3:15

Romans 1:12

Colossians 4:5-6

Mark 16:15

Romans 1:16

John 14:16

2 Timothy 4:2

Philemon 1:6

Hebrews 13:2

Matthew 5:16

Romans 10:17

Reflect on the gift of people who have taken these passages to heart and who have helped introduce you to faith in Christ. Take a moment to list the names of five people whose care, mentoring, spiritual leadership, and friendship have enriched your life.

# Lesson 5

## Gifted for Generosity

As a result of this study you will:

- **Understand** you have been gifted to live generously.
- **Remember** the joy that comes from giving.
- **Believe** God wants you to have a plan for giving.
- **Do** create a giving plan.

**UNDERSTAND...** you have been gifted to live generously.

God so loved the world that He gave \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_... go ahead finish the sentence. That's right, John 3:16 tells us that God gave that which was most precious to Him – His one and only son. He is extravagantly generous towards us. His gift was the first gift, our return gifts are in response to His generosity. As His followers we are called to imitate Him with extravagantly generous lives.

The practice of giving to the church in the Old Testament was called "tithing". What does this term mean, and where did that language come from? Let's take a peek and see what we can learn from God's Word.

A "tithe" is, simply, a "tenth." The first instance of tithing or the tenth comes in Genesis 14, when Melchizedek blessed Abram, he responded by giving Melchizedek "a tithe of all".

Read Genesis 14:18-20

*<sup>18</sup>Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, <sup>19</sup>and he blessed Abram, saying,*



*“Blessed be Abram by God Most High,  
Creator of heaven and earth.*

*<sup>20</sup> And praise be to God Most High,  
who delivered your enemies into your hand.”*

*Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.*

1. Fascinating that “tithing” actually began *before* it was commanded. Why do you think Abram accepted Melchizedek’s blessing, and then offered a tithe to him afterwards?

Later on in the Old Testament, God first commands the tithe in Leviticus 27:30 where he says through his servant Moses, “*A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.*” He goes on to explain that if this tithe were converted into money, an additional fifth was to be added.

Again, later, in Deuteronomy 14:22 we read, “*Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year.*” Over and over throughout the Old Testament God commands a tenth.

When the Children of Israel were faithfully serving the Lord, the tithe and offerings were not burdensome—it was their delight to serve the Lord in this way. On the other hand, when the Children of Israel stopped trusting and serving the true God, their response of thankful obedience to His Law (tithe) and their overflowing thankfulness (offerings) waned into nothing.

Read Malachi 3:7-8

*<sup>7</sup> Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.*

*“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’*

*<sup>8</sup> “Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.*

*“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’*

*“In tithes and offerings.”*

2. How do people rob God in tithes and offerings?

Now read Malachi 3:9-11

*<sup>9</sup> You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.*

3. What does God promise to his people who bring the tithe into the storehouse? What might this mean for His people today?

A lack of love-prompted tithes and offerings was a symptom of spiritual decline. Even when they were made, if it was done as unloving mechanical obedience to the Law, God rebuked them (for example Amos 4, Matthew 23:23).

At times of spiritual renewal, the tithes and offerings were also restored. Such a renewal took place under King Hezekiah, who *“commanded the people... to contribute support for the priests and the Levites... As soon as the commandment was circulated, the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of grain and wine, oil and honey, and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything”* (2 Chronicles 31:4-5).

In our day, the terms “offering” and “tithe” are used in different ways among Christians, and the clarity of God’s Word does not always accompany their usage. In your conversations with others over matters of Scripture, it is always good to first come to an understanding in the definition of terms. Then the conversation can go forward and the doors that the Lord may open from that point are many.

God still desires for us to understand that He is the owner of all (Psalm 24:1) and we are the receivers of his good gifts with the opportunity to honor Him with thanksgiving. *“Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the firstfruits of all your increase”* (Proverbs 3:9-10).

Just as the Old Testament tithe not only provided for the Levites but also those in need, so God says to us: *“Let us not grow weary while doing good. . . As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith”* (Galatians 6:9-10).

## **REMEMBER...** the joy that comes from giving.

The famous preacher Charles Spurgeon in a message titled: “Christ’s Poverty, Our Riches”, in 1880 said the following:

“But you are not under a system similar to that by which the Jews were obliged to pay tithes to the priests. If there were any such rule laid down in the Gospel, it would destroy the beauty of spontaneous giving and take away all the bloom from the fruit of your liberality! There is no law to tell me what I should give my father on his birthday. There is no rule laid down in any law book to decide what present a husband should give to his wife, nor what token of affection we should bestow upon others whom we love. No, the gift must be a free one, or it has lost all its sweetness.”

Our flesh can get caught up in doing “its duty”—giving a set amount without meaningful thought, giving just what is needed to balance the budget—almost as if it is a bill from God, and feeling satisfied that the job is done. But remember the Israelites’ joy in giving abundant gifts out of thanksgiving—offerings that went beyond what the Law commanded them to give.

There is genuine joy in giving of ourselves to the Lord Who first loved us (1 John 4:19), has redeemed us, and provides such rich blessing to both body and soul, day by day.

4. Have you ever gone 'over the top' with a gift or service (to a loved one, acquaintance, stranger, or as an offering)? How did this make you feel? What was the response, if you observed one?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Have you ever been shown extravagant generosity through a gift or service? How did this make you feel? What was your response, if you had one?

Read the following quote from Dr. David Livingston, famous Scottish evangelist, in response to people saying he had sacrificed so much during his 33 years of service in Africa.

"People talk about the sacrifice I have made... can that be called a sacrifice which is simply paying back a small part of the debt I owe to our God, which I could never repay? It is emphatically no sacrifice, rather it is a privilege."

6. What do you think about Dr. Livingston's attitude about his service? Does it change the way you view your own service? Is there anyone you know who also exhibits a generous spirit which stems from the Lord?

## **BELIEVE...** God wants you to have a plan for giving.

2 Corinthians 9:6-7

*"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."*

Once you have "decided in your heart" as Paul says in the passage, you need a plan. I remember the first pastor I ever worked with, Rev. Fred Shoemaker, would often say this, "Proper prior planning prevents poor performance." There is a balance between the spontaneity of Spurgeon's comment in the previous section and the call to commit to a plan which Paul moves us towards.

7. What is one lesson about money that you can recall learning from your family?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
8. How is your approach with money similar or different from the patterns you grew up with?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Which side of the planned versus spontaneous spectrum do you typically verge towards? Is this tendency reflected in your giving also?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
10. Have you ever gone through the process of "deciding in your heart" what you give? If so, what did this process look like for you?

**DO...** create a giving plan.

11. Are you spiritually satisfied with your generosity of time, talent, and treasure this year thus far? If not, what would you do to change that?

Pray and meditate over your giving, considering what you may 'decide in your heart' to give moving forward (whether that be the same, or different, from what you've given in the past). This is between you and God and will not be shared in small groups. The following are some categories you can use to help consider different areas you could focus your giving.

Church Offerings

Special Causes in the Local Church

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Special Missional Causes around the Globe

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Other causes I believe in and want to support  
(see the 'going deeper' section)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Legacy Gifts or other special gifts

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# Lesson 6

## Gifted for Love

As a result of this study, you will:

- **Understand** that the character of our giftedness comes from love.
- **Believe** God extravagantly loves us so that we may extravagantly love others.
- **Remember** to keep love alive and growing.
- **Do** share love for God and others.

**UNDERSTAND...** that the character of our giftedness comes from love.

As God's gifted people we are called to use faithfully the resources God has entrusted to us. In previous sessions we discussed how we grow in using those resources according to the will of the Owner. There is another important dimension to what our giftedness is all about. It has to do with our call to reflect the character, personality, and qualities of the Owner!

The trait that leaps from the pages of Holy Scripture which most accurately reflects the Owner is LOVE! 1 John 4:7-16 says "*And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*" In Jesus Christ we see God revealed as the God who *loves* His people. Because God is love, we who are His gifted people are empowered to love.

Read Mark 14:3–9

*<sup>3</sup> While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.*



<sup>4</sup> Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? <sup>5</sup> It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

<sup>6</sup> “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. <sup>7</sup> The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. <sup>8</sup> She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. <sup>9</sup> Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

1. Wow – what an extravagant display of love this woman demonstrated! Nard was very costly, a precious perfume imported from India. One denarius was one day's wage. 300 denarii would be the equivalent of a full year's wages! Some people believe the action was excessive. What would lead a person to expend so many of her resources in such a way? What results were achieved by what this woman did?
2. Jesus defends the woman's generous action. “*She has done a beautiful thing to Me*” (v. 6), He says in the face of the criticism leveled against her. Can you describe the scene and the feelings it may have generated? What does Jesus say about the appropriateness of her actions (vv. 6–9)?

**BELIEVE...** God extravagantly loves us so that we may extravagantly love others.

God's love is not a theory. "*God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*" (Romans 5:8). This love is extravagant. His love is always extravagant.

Philip Yancey, in his award-winning book, *What's So Amazing About Grace*, tells the story of the younger lost son in modern context. Yancey's writing skills are extraordinary, and his re-telling of this story is powerful. Enjoy.

A young girl grows up on a cherry orchard just above Traverse City, Michigan. Her parents, a bit old-fashioned, tend to overreact to her nose ring, the music she listens to, and the length of her skirts. They ground her a few times, and she seethes inside. "*I hate you!*" She screams at her father when he knocks on the door of her room after an argument, and that night she acts on a plan she has mentally rehearsed scores of times. She runs away.

She has visited Detroit only once before, on a bus trip with her church youth group to watch the *Tigers* play. Because newspapers in Traverse City report in lurid details the gangs, the drugs, and the violence in downtown Detroit, she concludes that is probably the last place her parents will look for her. California, maybe, or Florida, but not Detroit.

Her second day there she meets a man who drives the biggest car she's ever seen. He offers her a ride, buys her lunch, and arranges a place for her to stay. He gives her some pills that make her feel better than she's ever felt before. She was right all along, she decides: her parents were keeping her from all the fun.

The good life continues for a month, two months, a year. The man with the big car – she calls him "Boss" – teaches her a few things that men like. Since she's underage, men pay a premium for her. She lives in a penthouse, and orders room service

whenever she wants. Occasionally she thinks about the folks back home, but their lives now seem so boring and provincial that she can hardly believe she grew up there.

She has a brief scare when she sees her picture printed on a flier with the headline, *"Have you seen this child?"* But by now she has blond hair, and with all the makeup and body-piercing jewelry she wears, nobody would mistake her for a child. Besides, most of her friends are runaways, and nobody squeals in Detroit.

After a year the first sallow signs of illness appear, and it amazes her how fast the boss turns mean. And before she knows it she's out on the street without a penny to her name. She still turns a couple of tricks a night, but they don't pay much, and all the money goes to support her habit. When winter blows in she finds herself sleeping on metal grates outside the big department stores. "Sleeping" is the wrong word – a teenage girl at night in downtown Detroit can never relax her guard. Dark bands circle her eyes. Her cough worsens.

One night as she lies awake listening for footsteps, all of a sudden everything about her life looks different. She no longer feels like a woman of the world. She feels like a little girl, lost in a cold and frightening city. She begins to whimper. Her pockets are empty and she's hungry. She needs a fix. She pulls her legs tight underneath her and shivers under the newspapers she's piled atop her coat. Something jolts a synapse of memory and a single image fills her mind: of May in Traverse City, when a million cherry trees bloom at once, with her golden retriever dashing through the rows and rows of blossomy trees in chase of a tennis ball.

*"God, why did I leave,"* she says to herself, and pain stabs at her heart. *"My dog back home eats better than I do now."* She's sobbing, and she knows in a flash that more than anything else in the world she wants to go home.

Three straight phone calls – three straight connections to voicemail. She hangs up without leaving a message the first two

times, but the third time she says, *"Dad, Mom, it's me. I was wondering about maybe coming home. I'm catching a bus up your way, and it'll get there about midnight tomorrow. If you're not there, well, I guess I'll just stay on the bus until it hits Canada."*

It takes about seven hours for a bus to make all the stops between Detroit and Traverse City, and during that time she realizes the flaws in her plan. What if her parents are out of town and miss the message? Shouldn't she have waited another day or so until she could talk to them? And even if they are home, they probably wrote her off as dead long ago. She should have given them some time to overcome the shock.

Her thoughts bounce back and forth between those worries and the speech she is preparing for her father: *"Dad, I'm sorry. I know I was wrong. It's not your fault; it's all mine. Dad, can you forgive me?"* She says the words over and over, her throat tightening even as she rehearses them. She hasn't apologized to anyone in years.

The bus has been driving with lights on since Bay City. Tiny snow flakes hit the pavement rubbed worn by thousands of tires, and the asphalt steams. She's forgotten how dark it gets at night out here. A deer darts across the road and the bus swerves. Every so often, a billboard. A sign posting the mileage to Traverse City. *"Oh God."*

When the bus finally rolls into the station, its air brakes hissing in protest, the driver announces in a crackly voice over the microphone, *"Fifteen minutes, folks. That's all we have here."* Fifteen minutes to decide her life. She checks herself in a compact mirror and smoothes her hair. She looks at the tobacco stains on her fingertips, and wonders if her parents will notice. If they're there.

She walks into the terminal not knowing what to expect. Not one of the thousand scenes that have played out in her mind prepares her for what she sees. There, in the concrete-walls-and-plastic-chairs bus terminal in Traverse City, Michigan, stands a group of forty brothers and sisters and great-aunts and uncles and cousins and even her grandmother. And taped

across the entire wall of the terminal is a banner that reads, *"Welcome Home!"*

Out of the crowd of cheers and well-wishers breaks her Dad. She stares out through the tears quivering in her eyes like hot mercury and begins the memorized speech, *"Dad, I'm sorry. I know...."*

He interrupts her. *"Hush child. We've got no time for that. No time for apologies. You'll be late for the party. A banquet's waiting for you at home."*

After this story, Yancey adds the following comment: We are accustomed to finding a catch in every promise, but Jesus' stories of extravagant grace include no catch, no loophole disqualifying us from God's love. [When we "come home"], to God it feels like the discovery of a lifetime. As Dutch author, Henri Nouwen, points out, *"God rejoices not because the problems of the world have been solved, not because all human pain and suffering have come to an end... No, God rejoices because one of His children who was lost has been found."*

3. While we were yet sinners Christ died for us! How does this impact your ability to extravagantly serve those he has placed around you? Have you seen this fruit in your daily life?

**REMEMBER...** to keep love alive and growing.

Music embeds things deeply into our souls. Paul encourages us to speak *"to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord."* Ephesians 5:19.

4. What are a few of the songs, hymns, songs of the Spirit which remind you of God's extravagant love? **List a few songs, write out some lyrics, sing a verse of two with your group on Sunday AM.**

**DO...** share love for God and others.

Why is it critical for the church to fulfill her mission? Acts 4:12 says, *"<sup>12</sup> Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."*

There is only one sure way for people to be put right with God now and eternally! Jesus Christ, His Son, Savior of the world, is the bridge God gave to bring people to Himself. He entrusts us with the life-giving message of hope for all people. We are privileged to be His gifted witnesses, bringing light, life, and love to all whose lives we can touch.

5. Whose life will you be privileged to touch in the days ahead? Pray, reflect, make a plan. You are gifted and chosen for His purpose!

My management of talents, gifts, and skills is for the health of the church. Read and meditate on 1 Peter 4:7–11 below:

*<sup>7</sup> The end of all things is near. Therefore, be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. <sup>8</sup> Above all, love each other*

*deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.<sup>9</sup> Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling.<sup>10</sup> Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.<sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.*

6. Whose lives am I touching? How? How is it going?

**Be ready to share the hope you have in Christ and ask Him here for opportunities to see when He has prepared those divine appointments for you.**

### **GOING DEEPER...**

For those who wish to go deeper... Read Luke 15 and identify the three things of great value which have been lost.

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

What happens each time after the lost object becomes found? What kind of party in heaven is occurring every time a sinner repents, and a lost person is restored to God? What kind of party should we as a church throw for every repentant soul?

# Lesson 7

## Gifted for His Glory

As a result of this study, you will:

- **Understand** what it means to give glory to God through your daily living.
- **Believe** this present giftedness is simply a foretaste of the glory to come.
- **Remember** those who have brought God's glory into your life.
- **Do** remind other believers of their saintly status!

**UNDERSTAND...** what it means to give glory to God through your daily living.

Read 1 Peter 1:3-9

*<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*





It has been said - the Christian story is a good story in which to learn to fail. As the ethicist Samuel Wells has written, some stories feature heroes while others feature saints, and the difference between them matters:

"Stories . . . told with . . . heroes at the center of them . . . are told to laud the virtues of the heroes—for if the hero failed, all would be lost. By contrast, a saint can fail in a way that the hero can't, because the failure of the saint reveals the forgiveness and the new possibilities made in God, and the saint is just a small character in a story that's always fundamentally about God."

Ultimately, we are small characters in the story that is about God. However, this does not minimize our importance. Failing saints are broken people. Failing saints are broken people who help heal what is broken! This is our vision as a church. We are "Broken people helping heal what is broken". We are not the healer, but we can point people to the one who can gloriously heal with his love.

When we receive the body and blood of Christ at the communion rail we are being healed. When we humbly "bow down" and confess our sins and receive assurance of forgiveness we are being healed. When we "look up" to the cross in praise and worship we are healed. When we hear the Good News of Christ's substitutionary death and defeat of the grave we are healed. When we "lean in" to deep and abiding fellowship we are healed. When we "reach out" to those who don't know Christ we are both being healed and bringing healing.

6. When do you experience God's healing the most?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
7. What role do the word and the sacraments play in your healing process?

**BELIEVE...** this present giftedness is simply a foretaste of the glory to come.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:18

*And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.*

8. Do you believe this? How have you seen God's transformational work in your journey? Where is "ever increasing glory" appearing in your friends, family, spouse, church friend?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. **Ask for honest feedback from a few trusted friends by prompting them – "where do you see a need for God's transforming work in my life?"** A good place for self-assessment is with the list of the fruits of the Spirit (see below). Circle a few which you need help with. Believe God can and will do these things as you seek his lead!

Read Galatians 5:22-25

*<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.*

**REMEMBER...** those who have brought God's gift of glory into your life.

A small child was taken to a cathedral. She sat watching the sunshine through the windows. She asked her mother, "What are these people on the windows?" "They are saints," was the answer. Then the child said, 'Now I know what saints are. They are people who let the light shine through.'

Process the above conversation. God declares you 100% justified by the blood of Christ and therefore 100% a saint in his eyes. We are also 100% sinner, for the old Adam never fully departs until our days of eternal glory come.

10. How have you seen the light shine through in some member of our family of faith at Grace Lutheran in recent days, weeks, and months? Remind them, next time you see them, that they are indeed saintly!
  
11. Now - draw your own stained-glass window which features some aspect of a sainted member of God's family. Just draw something. Don't be afraid. You will be blessed. **Use a separate sheet of paper to add to a display on Sunday.**

**DO...** remind other believers of their saintly status.

This week at the time in our service when we share the peace of the Lord make sure that you hunt out a few fellow saints and tell them that you have noticed their saintly nature on display and share some specific behavior which you have observed.

This will help you fulfill God directive to each of us... from Hebrews 3:13... *“But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.”*

12. Reflect on the last seven weeks going through this study. Write a short summary of what has impacted you the most going through this series, and what you may carry forward into the next seasons of your life.

## GOING DEEPER...

For those who wish to go deeper... Review a partial list of God's "broken people" used in amazing ways.

- Abraham – Was old.
- Joseph – Was prideful
- Moses – Was a murderer.
- Gideon – Was afraid.
- Rahab – Was a prostitute.
- Samaritan Woman – Divorced.
- Jeremiah – Was very young when called by God.
- Jacob – Was a cheater.
- David – Was a murderer.
- Jonah – Ran from God.
- Peter – Denied Christ three times
- The Disciples – Fell asleep while praying when Jesus needed them the most.
- Paul – A Pharisee who persecuted Christians before becoming one.

Which of these characters reminds you most of your journey?

Celebrate the fact that God uses all kinds of broken people to help heal what is broken!

