

Day One: "The Gift of Giving"

Read: Matthew 6:1-4, 5:14-16 (Freedom in Christ Bible, pp. 1083, 1082)

Read: The Treasure Principle, p. 77 to bottom of p. 84

Reflect: Have you ever gone to a birthday party and met someone who was bragging about a gift they were giving away? What did you think of them? How did it make you feel? Have you ever found out about someone's "secret talent," like playing an instrument, singing, or acting, and wondered why they weren't using their talent for God?

Dig: Read Matthew 6:1. When Jesus mentions people's "acts of righteousness," I think in some ways, he really means that they truly are acting. Often, it seems, people were prone to announcing what amazing things they were doing for God while acting like they were so humble about it all. Yet, Jesus was looking at the heart and seeing that people really were not doing it for God, but they were doing it so that they could look good in front of others.

Have you ever given a secret pal gift? You couldn't let the person know it was you who gave it, yet it was still a blast to sneak around and give your gift. Matthew 6:3-4 talks about giving in secret. Why would Jesus encourage this? What would be the blessing in secret giving? See verse 4. Now read Matthew 5:14-16. How can sharing our gifts or telling others how God used us to bless someone lead others to God? What makes the difference between the sharing times and the secret times?

Hebrews 10:24 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." (FiCB, p. 1431) With these words also in mind, think about this: If we can encourage someone to serve the Lord more fully by how we are serving him, we should not keep it a secret. Yet, if telling what we have done will simply make us look good or feel better about ourselves, we should talk to only the Lord about it!

Apply: What could you do for someone in secret to bless them? (For example: Drop a food basket off on their doorstep, ring the doorbell, and hide.) What have you done for the Lord lately that would encourage others to do good works as well? Ask God to show you the difference between the times to give in secret and the times you need to give and share about it with joy. In the meantime, keep your eyes peeled for secret ways you can give and share God's love and abundance with those around you.

For younger children, ages 5–9, and their families . . .

Read: Matthew 6:1-4 (Freedom in Christ Bible, p. 1083)

Activity: Have your parents ever stood up in church and made an announcement of how much money they were giving to God? What would happen if you blew a horn in someone's ear, then told them something? Would they be able to hear what you said?

Dig: Jesus mentions people who are show-offs to God about what they are doing for him. But God looks in our hearts. Why do you think God wants us to be careful to sometimes keep it a secret when we give or do something to him? If we are doing something to get everyone to see how great we are, then we are not really doing it for God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to think of ways to bless people in secret. Help me to do things simply because I love you, not because I want people to think I am cool. Amen.

Week Six: "For Such a Time as This"

Day Two: "A Sense of Destiny"

Read: Esther 4:1-17 (Freedom in Christ Bible, p. 545-546)

Read: The Treasure Principle, bottom of p. 84 to bottom of p. 86

Reflect: Do you consider yourself wealthy, middle class, poor, or poverty stricken? In The Treasure Principle, Randy Alcorn asks us: "Are you educated and literate? Do you have food, clothing, shelter, a car, perhaps some electronic equipment? Then you are among the privileged, the world's wealthy." (p. 85)

How does this line of questioning change how you may have responded to the first question?

Now, think about this: Why has God given you what you have? What purpose does he possibly have in where you live, who you meet at the grocery store, or the fact that you attend Madison Square Church and not a church in a different part of town?

Dig: Would Esther have been considered wealthy, middle class, poor, or poverty stricken? Despite her great wealth, did she feel she had the power to change the circumstances of her people? See verses 10-11. Even with her uncertainty, Mordecai was confident that God would bring deliverance for the Jewish people. See verse 14. The only question in Mordecai's mind was whether or not Esther would be willing to risk being a part of what God may have in mind.

Joseph also realized that God had a plan and purpose for his life. In Genesis 50:20 he said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."

How does Joseph and Mordecai's perspectives of life affect those around them? Joseph's words gave his brothers reassurance of God's provision and faithfulness (Genesis 50:21, FiCB, p. 60), while Mordecai's words to Esther gave her courage to see the king and speak on behalf of her people (Esther 4:16).

Apply: What areas do you need reassurance of God's faithfulness and provision? What areas in your life do you need to ask for more courage to give, do, say, and live how God has asked you to? Do some dreaming. In what ways could God want to use you, your gifts and your resources to do something that others would say is impossible. Jot down your dreams and ask God to show you how to do the impossible for his glory and to further his kingdom. Then to encourage someone, share how God has surprised you.

For younger children, ages 5–9, and their families . . .
Read: Esther 4:6-16 (Freedom in Christ Bible, p. 545-546)

Activity: Who else in the Bible do you remember had a hard time doing what God asked, but they did it anyway and God blessed them? (Moses, Joseph, Daniel, David, etc.)

Dig: Esther became queen and had the chance to save her people. She didn't know why God made her queen, but we do... so she could be used to save many lives! Joseph also was used by God. He became a great leader in Egypt and saved many people, including his family from starvation. Both Esther and Joseph were ordinary people who God used to do amazing things. How does God want to use you and what you have to do amazing things?

Prayer: Dear God, wow! It is amazing to think you could use me! Please help me to see ways I can trust you and bless others. Even though I am a child, I can still bless my family and friends by listening to you and obeying you and loving others. Help me, Lord. Amen.

Week Six: "For Such a Time as This" **Day Three: "Thoughts to Consider"**

Read: Matthew 6:19-21 (Freedom in Christ Bible, p. 1083)
Read: The Treasure Principle, bottom of p. 86 to middle of p. 90

Reflect: What is the true purpose of giving from what we have learned so far? Do we give because God needs our help? Or is the act of sincere giving really a way to say thanks to God, to show our trust in his provision, to reach out to others, and to be filled with pure joy?

Where do you spend your money? Where do you spend your time? Where do you spend your energy? How do you use your money, time, and energy for the Lord?

Dig: How is where you spend your money, time, and energy a reflection of what you treasure?

In Leviticus 27:30 (FiCB, p. 141) we are commanded that, "A tithe (tenth) 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." How often do we rationalize our giving by saying, "I'll give away ten percent of my money, but I'll give some of it here, some of it there, and some to my church."? Yet God's tithe is "holy to the Lord," so why do we stray from giving it first to God's house?

We are told to place our trust in the Lord and that "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:21) We forget that if we trust him to provide our tenth, he will also provide what we need plus everything else for what he has in store for us to do.

"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone." (Luke 11:42, FiCB, p. 1174) This passage shows us how much our giving should first be to God, through his church, and also flow with justice and loving kindness to all those in need around us. Remember that it all comes from God. We are his managers to use what he has given us to reach out to others in the name of the Lord.

Apply: How do you spend your money? Do you get an allowance or a paycheck? Do you really know where all your money goes as you spend it?

Over the next few days, write down all the ways that you spend your money. Are there deep holes or pits your money seems to disappear into? How can your spending be rearranged so that you can better use what God has given you?

Look to see if you are first giving a tenth to God and see what else you may have left to bless others with. Ask God to show you how to best manage the blessings he has given to you.

For younger children, ages 5–9, and their families . . .
Read: Matthew 6:19-21 (Freedom in Christ Bible, p. 1083)

Activity: What things do moths destroy? Where can you find rust?

Dig: God tells us to store up our treasures in heaven. Giving to God is part of that. He gave us everything we have and only asks us for ten percent back-- that's \$1 out of \$10. How does where we spend our money, even our tenth for God, show God where our heart is?

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to give what you ask me to give without feeling worried or selfish. Help me to see money as a tool

to bless others, not as my #1 god. Amen.

Week Six: "For Such a Time as This"
Day Four: "The Greatest Pleasure"

Read: Acts 20:35 and Matthew 22:37-40 (Freedom in Christ Bible pp. 1264, 1110)
Read: The Treasure Principle, middle of p. 90 to end of book

Reflect: Once when I felt a bad cold coming on, I doused myself with Vitamin C, Echinacea, took any other vitamins I thought would help, drank lots of fluids, and took a nap. When I awoke, the cold had fled. Although this doesn't work every time I feel sick, it does give me an example for giving.

Much like rest and vitamins were my antidote for getting sick, giving becomes an antidote for materialism and selfishness. Hoarding our gifts is like giving in to sickness, curling up under the blankets, and waiting for the cold to pass us by. But in real life, if we know a tried and true antidote for a cold, wouldn't we want to use it and share it with others? The same is true of giving. Since giving is such a joy, when have you prevented yourself or others from this joy?

Do you receive from others when they give to you or do you dampen their joy? What keeps you from true giving?

Dig: What blessings have you received when you have given even though it cost you something?

If we are called to "love your neighbor as yourself," how can you combine giving with showing the love of God? (Matthew 22:39) How does our lack of trust in God dampen our giving? How does it dampen our love for others? How does it dampen our joy?

Acts 1:8 (FiCB, p. 1234) says, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." God has given us wisdom, through his word, power, through his Holy Spirit, and joy through our obedience in giving.

If you feel you are lacking in wisdom, power, or joy, the answer is plain and simple. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened." (Matthew 7:7-8, FiCB, p. 1085)

Apply: Ask God to give you wisdom in your finances, power, and courage to use your gifts for his glory, and for opportunities to serve and receive true joy! Ask, seek, and knock!

For younger children, ages 5–9, and their families . . .
Read: Acts 20:35 (Freedom in Christ Bible, p. 1264)

Activity: Have you ever been given a gift and felt sad you had nothing to give in return?

Dig: Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Why do you think it is more fun and rewarding to give something away than to get something? Which way do you think about the other person more, when you give or when you get? Jesus knew that when we give something away, we are being more like him as we show God's love without expecting anything in return. Being selfish isn't fun. It is a lonely place to be. God doesn't want us to feel lonely, so he tells us to give so we can experience true hope and joy and God's smile on us!

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to not be selfish with my giving, but to give out of my love for you! Please show me your blessings as I give so that I can know your true joy! I love you, Lord, and want to give and do the best I can for you! Amen.

Week Six: "For Such a Time as This"
Day Five: "Joy in Giving"

Using the lectio divina process (described below), meditate on this Bible verse:
"It is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20:35 (FiCB, p. 1264)

To help yourself meditate on this verse:

- Find a quiet, comfortable spot to sit where you won't be disturbed
- Take a moment to pray the prayer of protection (in bold) below
- Close your eyes and be still in God's presence for a moment
- Slowly read the scripture aloud
- Read it again, emphasizing the first word as you read out loud
- Next time, emphasize the second word
- Keep going, emphasizing each word in turn . . . take time for God's words to sink in
- Take time to answer some of these questions: Which reading gave you new thoughts? What did it make you think? What does this verse mean for you in your life now? Does it tell me that I need to change anything in my life -- my attitudes, my actions, my thoughts?
- Take time to pray and confess any sins that may have been shown to you. Ask Jesus to help you have victory in this area. Thank Jesus for anything he revealed to you. Ask him to make it real in your life today.

Dear Heavenly Father, I know you are in this room with me and in my life. I want to know your Word better and have a closer relationship to you. I ask for your complete protection and for your guidance as I meditate and pray now. In the name and authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, I command Satan and all evil spirits to flee. I bind their power in Jesus' name. I ask, Father, that you close my ears and heart to any deceptions that Satan would try to plant in my mind. I want to hear only your voice, Heavenly Father. Fill me with your Holy Spirit and lead me into all truth. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

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A Word about Meditation in General

Lectio divina is a form of contemplative prayer and meditation on Scripture. It's different from other forms of meditation that people today practice. We need to understand that many kinds of meditation (such as Transcendental Meditation) can allow the enemy, Satan, to get a foothold in our lives. Just because we are learning here a specific type of meditation doesn't mean that any kind of meditation is OK to practice. We need to be careful.

Lectio Divina -- Background

Lectio divina [LEK sio di VEE na] is an old form of prayer that early Christians used. Through lectio divina, which means "sacred reading," we take time to read God's holy Word over and over again until we memorize it and allow it to sink deep into our heart and mind. The early Christians believed that as they read the Word in this manner, they would hear from God -- hear him speak to their heart through his inspired Word.

In our busy society today, we like to do everything fast. It takes discipline for us to slow down and devote time to meditate on God's word and to pray. If you want to develop a deeper prayer life and have a more intimate relationship with your blessed Savior, Jesus, then you will do well to use lectio divina as part of your weekly devotional time.