

# Study Guide

## *Sharing Gifts in the Global Family of Faith*

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Some gifts are material and concrete. Others are more abstract or less concrete (such as time, hospitality, strategic thinking, singing). These discussions will include both.

Session One (pages 3–14)

### **Thinking About Gifts**

1. Make a list of all the persons to whom you give gifts. How do the gifts you give affect your relationship with the recipient? Who do you receive gifts from? How do the gifts you receive affect your relationship with the donor?
2. Number the following motives for giving in the order in which they primarily motivate our giving—  
  
Being nice.  
It's expected.  
I'd like to get something back.  
I get more satisfaction from giving than keeping.  
I can't help it.  
I want to do everything I can for our common good.
3. When you give, do you feel that your resources have been enlarged or reduced?
4. Tell about a gift you've received—or given—that has built or extended a relationship.
5. Tell about a gift you've received—or given—that did little to nourish a relationship.
6. How might our gift-giving change if we firmly believed that its primary purpose was to connect us with each other and to nourish relationships?
7. Are some gifts superior to others? How do you decide?
8. Read the story at the bottom of page 13 – top of page 14. Notice the remarkable way in which the young woman needed someone else to unlock her gift. How can we cultivate seeing those needs and opportunities in our world? Have you ever had such an experience (on either side) – or observed such an experience?

9. Do you believe that Exodus 16 has anything to say on the matter of gift-giving? Do gifts spoil if they're not given?
10. Who should be the beneficiaries of your congregation's gifts?
11. Who are the beneficiaries?

Session Two (pages 14–22)

## **In the Beginning**

1. Describe to an outsider your congregation's God-given gifts. Read the partial list of gifts on page 17 in the large block of text under the shaded box to prompt your thinking.
2. Has your congregation received gifts from other churches, nearby or far away?
3. How do you think your congregation might be changed if it truly believed and understood that most of its denominational membership is now in Africa, Asia and Latin America? Does this make any difference to your congregation? In what ways do you imagine that it could over time?
4. Meditate on the sentence from I Corinthians 12:7—"To each is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good." Are your congregation's gifts its own? How can you make them available "for the common good"? And for which "common good"?
5. What do you think the Apostle Paul meant when he wrote in I Corinthians 12:22 that "...the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable..."? What does this mean for your church or congregation?
6. Read and reflect on pages 20-21, from the paragraph which begins "In this light..." through the end of the first paragraph on page 21 (...than we do?). Answer the questions in that paragraph.
7. Can you think of instances in which your congregation has received new life and enthusiasm through contact and exposure with people from different cultures and different church traditions? Are there dangers in being exposed to difference?

Session Three (pages 23–30)

## Many Gifts, But the Same Spirit

1. What are the different kinds of gifts that are given and received in your culture? What gifts are valued in your culture? What are your family gift traditions?
2. Choose at random a specific person in your congregation and think about what gifts s/he has—considering all varieties of gifts.
3. Is it appropriate to be modest about a gift you have personally?  
Is it appropriate for your congregation to be modest about its gifts?
4. Is it a gift if the giver suggests to the recipient how the gift be used? Do you agree or disagree with the statement that "gifts are meant to 'go astray'" (page 27, lines 9 & 10)?
5. Do you think it is possible to give or receive a gift without creating or incurring debt?
6. Do you believe that "those who struggle for survival are no less gifted than those who have abundance" (page 28, lines 6 & 7)?
7. What happens to a gift that isn't given?
8. Explore your thinking about the statements from page 30, beginning with line 12 ("Needs are not the opposite of gifts...") through line 29 ("...the whole body suffers."). Do you agree that a "need" is "a cry of invitation from a gift that is trapped and cannot be released or given"?

Session Four (pages 30, bottom–40)

## The Real Reasons for Giving Gifts

1. Is a gift really a gift if it doesn't satisfy a need? (see page 31 lower half – page 32, end of 1st paragraph.)  
Do gifts need needs in order to be fully and appropriately released?  
Think of examples which either show the above to be true—or not true.
2. Gift-sharing implies that giver and receiver know of each other's needs and gifts. Many of us profess that we want to give anonymously. Is that supposed "humility" or "generosity" or "wish not to be a determinant in a situation" actually wrong or, at least, misplaced energy (see page 35, "Degrees of Charity")?

3. Did Jesus hide from the recipients of his healing gifts? Give examples.
4. Explore this idea from the closing paragraph on page 37—"Sharing gifts is...not primarily about making everyone more equal. Rather, sharing is about building up the interrelatedness of the body, the church."  
 Do you give personally within your own congregation in order to enhance interrelatedness, rather than equality?  
 Does your congregation give beyond itself in an effort to enhance interrelatedness with others, or to try to create balance and equality?
5. Is it possible to have a significant relationship that doesn't include sharing gifts with each other? How does sharing gifts enhance a relationship more than giving gifts? (see page 39, first paragraph.)

Session Five (pages 41–50)

## How God Shares Gifts

Notice how in the Creation story, God doesn't just flip a switch and activate light, and then the atmosphere, land, vegetation, animals and humans. Instead, God gives of himself; he is the image around which human beings are created. He remains involved with creation.

1. Where in Genesis 1, does God first directly address his created work? What 2 points does he make in that first direct communication?
2. Is the idea of ownership present in Genesis 1:26-30? Is the idea of sharing present in those verses?
3. How should the fact that God is the author of all creation affect the way we as human beings relate to other parts of creation?
4. By the way in which creation happened, do you see indication that God expected:
  - a. Humans to have an ongoing relationship with the earth and its creatures?
  - b. Humans to have an ongoing relationship with each other?
  - c. Humans to have an ongoing relationship with God?
 Which verse(s) give(s) you that clue?  
 If a relationship is implied in a., b., and c. above, what should the nature of each relationship be?
5. What is the real lesson we are to learn from the woman who gave such an extravagant and impractical gift to Jesus? What would be a comparable gift in our world?
6. Do you agree that the Creation Story and the Jesus Story are the most important stories about gifts in the Bible? Why or why not?

Session Six (page 50, beginning with "God Intends that Gifts Be Shared" – page 61)

## **Abundance**

1. Are we obligated as Christians to share the gifts we have? In other words, if we have a gift are we responsible to share it?
2. True or false: All people are equitably gifted by God.
3. True or false: God has given everyone equal gifts.
4. True or false: A gift becomes a gift only if it is needed somewhere.
5. Why are we human beings so inclined to elevate the value or importance of some gifts and to treat others as inferior?
6. Why do we find it difficult – or why do we need to be reminded – to cultivate this interconnectedness that different gifts make possible?
7. Was the lavish bottle of ointment primarily a spiritual gift or a physical gift?
8. Should all our gifts – whether spiritual, whether "talents," whether particular know-how (technical, business, academic, artistic) – be offered to the community of faith?
9. True or False: The test of a gift is whether or not it contributes to the common good.
10. Is it pride or modesty which often makes persons reluctant to offer their gifts to the church? Or something else?

Session Seven (pages 62 – 71)

## **Sharing Gifts in the Global Family**

1. Does "being fruitful and multiplying" relate to using gifts (Genesis 8:16-17)? How might "filling the earth" relate to using gifts? (page 66, last paragraph)
2. Do you agree – "A family is to nurture its members and then release them, and to enrich them through contact and relationships with the outside" (page 66, middle)?
3. Do you agree – "Our individual gifts contain God's spirit, and they have been given to us so that they can be developed and used for the common good" (page 66, middle)?

4. Make a list of examples in nature (and beyond, if you wish) that show the abundance and extravagant fullness that is God's way.
5. What is wrong with the request "Please give what you can afford"? Or "Please give according to your means"?
6. Why, if "Sharing creates abundance because there is no alienation involved," do we not share more freely (page 71, first paragraph)?
7. How is it possible for "extreme poverty" to "overflow in sharing" (II Corinthians 8:2-4, pages 62 and 71)? How does that work?

Session Eight (pages 72–78)

### **Obstacles to Sharing Gifts**

1. Begin a list of needs your congregation and/or conference has, as a whole, or as individual members.
2. Begin a list of gifts your congregation and/or conference has, as a whole or individual members.
3. What do you think of the final statement on the bottom of page 72 -- "If we look at the needs and gifts we have collectively which go unmet on the one hand or unused on the other, doesn't the phrase 'brother and sister in Christ' amount to profanity, to taking the name of the Lord in vain?"
4. Should we concentrate on sharing gifts with those who are most like us, since economic differences are too real and too major to allow for honest sharing with persons (or congregations) who have either far more or far less than we do?
5. Many comparatively wealthy congregations don't have enough resource (usually the money needed to pay for adequate staff – or sufficient volunteer time from their members) to work consistently and persistently at developing sharing relationships with other churches. How essential is this kind of exchange? How would you advise your congregation if such a decision rested with you?

## Being Our Own Worst Enemies

1. How can your congregation find an appropriate balance between taking care of its own internal needs and agenda and programs and participating in the "feast" of gift-sharing with sister congregations in other parts of the world?
2. On a scale of 1-10 rank how global your congregation is in its vision and thinking ("1" indicates a focus primarily on the local; "10" indicates a global view so pervasive that it affects congregational decision-making.)
3. Think of specific ways in which your congregation can begin to "follow Jesus to the abundant life" envisioned, beginning at the top of page 82.
4. In view of the fact that most congregations are made up of persons who are very similar culturally and racially, how likely is it that the vision of gift sharing globally can become an integral part of church life?
5. Share any examples you have witnessed or been part of where "servant" gifts are given as much respect as "important" gifts.  
What ideas do you have for dismantling the "hierarchy" of gifts which we tend to accept, even though we decry it.
6. Who needs who in II Corinthians 8:13-14?
7. On page 87 (middle of the page), how can "the desperate social needs of Angolans" possibly be potential gifts? Can you accept this logic?

## What Do We Have to Give?

1. What would happen in your congregation if Sunday morning offering time regularly included a time for giving/collecting non-monetary gifts?

How might your congregation prepare to practice this authentically?

2. What do you think of the idea that "a declaration of the gifts we are committed to sharing be part of the service of baptism for new members, and of communion for continuing members?" How could such an idea be put into authentic and useful practice in your congregation?

3. Do you believe that someone somewhere has gifts to match your congregation's needs? If you believe this, what could your congregation do about it? If you don't believe this is true, why do you feel as you do?
4. Might it be true that if your congregation doesn't acknowledge its needs, it is preventing someone or some other congregation from expressing its gifts? Explore this idea.
5. Think of examples from your personal experience where you have seen money be made "relational," where money has created or enhanced relationships. Make a list of these.

Now examine the list to see if any of these examples can work – or be adapted to work – within the larger church or your specific congregation.

Think of ways in which money can be a spiritual gift.

6. Do you agree or disagree with the authors' statements on page 95, in the second full paragraph: "We truly become a part [of the family of faith] through sharing our gifts. There is no other way."
7. Tell any stories you know from your world in which neighboring churches shared their gifts with each other, similar to the African and Latin American churches described on pages 96-97.

Session Eleven (pages 97, bottom – 106)

### **What Do We Need to Receive?**

1. Can your congregation or district conference afford the kinds of sharing that the authors imagine in the first paragraph on page 98, the last paragraph on page 100, and the first full paragraph on page 102?

Can your congregation or conference afford not to undertake this kind of sharing?

2. What are the needs of your congregation for which you need the gifts of other churches?
3. Because our world has become smaller, we are all faced with many more possibilities for sharing our gifts with others. Are there reasons to consider both local and global sharing opportunities? What are the advantages of each? What is the ideal balance between the two?
4. Examine the variety of ways your church currently shares its gifts with others, at all different levels. Look also at ways in which you welcome gifts of others. What are your congregation's strengths; weaknesses, in this regard?

## Being Rich Toward God

1. If gift-sharing is so fundamental to our spiritual health and well-being, name specific practices that your congregation would need to set up to have it be an ongoing and essential "fixture" in your life together.
2. Name your congregation's particular gifts.
3. Name with whom your congregation shares each of those gifts.
4. Does your congregation have gifts it is not sharing? What is the condition of those gifts? Imagine where and how they could be shared.

Session Thirteen - optional (see page 113, questions 1-4; review biblical stories and references about Gift-Sharing on pages 118-120)

## **A Second Look at the Big Questions**

1. Review questions 1-4 on page 113 (and their explications on pages 113-117).
2. Review the biblical stories and references about gift-sharing on pages 118-120.
3. Allow the testimony on pages 121-123 to inspire your thinking and actions.