

The Giver and Gifts

We all know about gifts, especially at Christmas time. Gifts can be physical objects, such as a good book, a new sweater, or even an iPad. But other things are gifts as well. We consider a unique talent or ability to be a gift. For example, a person might be able to play a musical instrument, or maybe they can quickly learn and apply new math concepts, or perhaps someone is extra patient with children, or has a special ability to openly speak their mind. We often call these people “gifted.” However, one feature all gifts share is the fact that the giver freely offers the gift and does not expect to be repaid in any way.

Material Gifts

All of our material goods are blessings from God’s hand. Explaining the First Article of the Creed, Martin Luther teaches that God “daily provides me with food and clothing, home and house, family, land, cattle and all that I need for this body and life.” The Bible also contains much instruction for us who receive these blessings.

From a very early age we too easily become attached to material things. We are unwilling to share our toys and become angry when favorite treasures are misplaced. As we age, the urge to collect “stuff” grows in us, along with a desire for money to buy more. This is common to nearly all people. God knows our human nature, and His Word frequently discusses how we should relate to these material gifts. Jesus himself assures us that God knows our needs, particularly our need for food and clothing, as well as all other things we need in life (Matt. 6). But Jesus also specifically instructs us to seek the kingdom of God first, and all other material things will follow.

Jesus relates a parable of a rich man who “layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12). We tend to prize our own material goods too highly. Even when we have plenty it is also easy for us to look longingly and perhaps enviously into our neighbor’s yard. In the Ten Commandments, God’s will clearly shows that it is a sin to covet, or envy, our neighbor’s property. Yet we are so readily tempted to do just that.

Content and Thankful

It is never safe for us to assume that “God has forgotten me and given everything to the guy next door.” Neither should we suppose that we haven’t received a particular gift because we aren’t a good enough Christian. Apostle Paul warns us that some people in this world will teach that material wealth is a sign of God’s favor, “supposing that gain is godliness.” But then Paul goes on to exhort each one of us to be thankful and content with whatever gifts God chooses to give, saying, “Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim. 6:6–10).

The book of Proverbs contains a precious prayer concerning God-given gifts: “Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov. 30:8,9). This instruction is so simple and clear. We are to know that God is the giver of all gifts and be thankful for the gifts and blessings He gives and be satisfied with them. We shouldn’t compare our gifts with our neighbor’s, or be jealous of our neighbor’s gifts. Be thankful for not receiving too little. But also be thankful for not receiving too much. It is a great blessing when we are able to simply say, “Thank you, God. I have

enough.”

Special Talents Are Gifts, Too

A person’s special talents or notable abilities are also God-given gifts. A gift like this might be a beautiful singing voice, artistic ability, an ear for music, an ear that understands a baby’s cry, a feel for massaging sore muscles, the ability to easily learn mathematics, or the knack for building and repairing machines. All are God-given gifts.

We know our human nature all too well. This is why God’s Word has so much to say regarding material blessings. It’s easy for us to see the size of someone else’s house, their nice new cars, or their other toys such as boats or ATVs. It’s fairly easy for us to comprehend the Bible’s admonitions regarding coveting, overvaluing, underappreciating, hoarding, and so forth. These admonitions apply to our special talents as well.

God knows that we need certain talents to make our way on this earthly journey, and so He has given gifts to each one of us. God also gives gifts to support the work of His kingdom. Every person has special abilities, and the unique collection of these talents is what makes us an individual. The sum of these gifts represents the miracle of God’s creation work—a unique human being, a living soul. Every person has inherent talents. Every person is different. And every person is God’s creation.

Serve with God’s Gifts

Our faulty human nature so easily and wrongfully takes credit for God-given abilities. On the other hand, our faulty human nature also causes us to deprecate our own gifts. This shows the narrow path that a believer walks. Dear child of God, do not envy another person’s abilities, but readily serve with the talents you have been given. Be thankful for your gifts. Use them freely. And pray for a heart that says “Amen. Thank you, God. I have enough.”

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Discussion Questions:

- Discuss God’s instruction about material gifts and how we might apply this to special talents.
- Visit about how love, harmony, contentedness, the gift of prayer, God’s peace in the heart, and so on are also God-given gifts. What other such examples can you think of? What difference do these gifts make in our lives?
- Read 1 Samuel 15. This chapter relates of King Saul and his fate when he came to think of himself “more highly than he ought.” How does this example relate to our lives today?
- Read Romans 12. How does Apostle Paul address God-given talents?
- Read 1 Corinthians 12. What gifts should we use in the work of God’s kingdom? What are some ways we can use our gifts?