

GIVING FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

Sunday School Leader's Guide – Lesson One



Gifts that Make God Smile

Lesson Goal:

To see our financial giving from God's perspective.

Our gifts can please God and delight His heart. He notices! The Bible calls these kinds of gifts “acceptable”, and also clearly shows that other gifts can be un-acceptable. This is a very important concept, but often overlooked in teaching about giving. The very point of a gift is to delight the recipient.

There are four biblical truths, consistently revealed in both Old and New Testaments, which give light on how God views our giving. Today we will introduce the idea of an “acceptable gift”, and Truth #1: When we give gifts to God, the amount matters.

Before The Lesson:

Read the book *Plastic Donuts* for background, and note any highlights you may want to share from chapters 1-3. Make special note of how we should understand the word “acceptable” as discussed in Chapter 2, and contrast it with “barely good enough.” Also review the Guide to become familiar with its flow.

This lesson outline may contain more content than you can cover in a single session. If so, highlight which elements you believe will best fit your schedule, and cross out areas as needed. Leave room at the end of class to discuss homework in the Guide. (Please note as you review your lesson plan, there are options for a fourth class, if you'd like to focus on Truth #3 on week three, and focus on review and the Guide on week four.)

⚠ If you are distributing copies of *Plastic Donuts* to each member, your class discussion will be enhanced if you hand out the book, and the companion Guide, the week prior to the first lesson – encouraging people to read the entire book, or at least chapters 1-3.

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Gifts that Make God Smile (continued)

Key Points:

- God notices my gifts in a personal way – Like a Father receives a gift from a child
- Some gifts are acceptable to God, while others are not
- When we give to God, the amount matters (Acceptable Gift Truth #1)

Introduction:

Introduce the lesson, and ask the question below.

? Ask:

- What is a memorable example of a gift you received that touched your heart?

Have various individuals from the group share. Then ask them follow-up questions below:

- How did that gift connect you to the giver?
- Do you think God could view our giving in a similar way?

⚠ Be prepared to offer your answers to questions above, if needed, to help others feel free to share.

Key Point:

God notices our gifts in a personal way. (Much like the gift of a child to their father.)

Illustration:

Read the “donut story” from *Plastic Donuts*, pages 7-8 (Or, if the class has received and read the book, reference the story, and tell a personal story that communicates the same message)

? Ask:

- Can anyone relate to that story?
- Does anyone have a similar story that helps you relate to giving from God's perspective?

Now let's look at a similar story between God and two of His children...

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

Genesis 4:3-5

⚠ Read this passage, or have someone else read it.

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Gifts that Make God Smile (continued)

Depending on the translation, verse 4 says that the Lord “had regard,” “looked with favor,” or “had respect for” Abel’s gift.

The word in Hebrew (sha’ah) literally means “to gaze upon” or “pay attention to.” So God paid attention to or gazed upon Abel’s gift. The New Testament account says Abel gave a more “acceptable sacrifice” (Hebrews 11:4).

So if Abel’s gift was acceptable, then Cain’s gift could not have been acceptable because God had “no regard for” or “did not pay attention to” Cain’s gift.

The word “acceptable,” as used in these references to giving, does not mean “barely good enough” – rather, it describes a gift that gets God’s attention in the most wonderful way. The way we hope all gifts would be received!

? Ask:

- Could we really give gifts to God that are acceptable?
- Could we sometimes bring gifts to God that are not acceptable?
- How is the way our culture defines “acceptable” different from what the Bible reveals about that word? (You may want to reference Psalm 19:14 or Romans 12:1.)

⚠ Do not get caught up in discussion about what made the gifts acceptable or not. The Bible does not tell us for certain, but what is clear is that God accepted Abel’s gift, while He did not accept Cain’s. Remain focused on the fact that some gifts get God’s attention while others do not.)

Key Point:

An acceptable gift is a gift that pleases God, gets His attention and delights His heart.

When we study this thought in the Bible further, we find that there are gifts that are acceptable to God and others that are not.

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

Look at these other gifts that got God’s attention:

Genesis 8:20-21

Philippians 4:18

Ephesians 5:2

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Gifts that Make God Smile (continued)

We certainly know that Jesus Christ was the only acceptable gift that could satisfy the heart of God toward mankind's sin. He offered His life in our place and it was acceptable to God.

Examine the Scriptures:

Here is one instance where gifts that were being presented were not acceptable.
Malachi 1:8-10

Some gifts to God are not acceptable. But do we have clear guidelines to help us give acceptable gifts? That leads us to the first of 4 truths...

Key Point: Acceptable Gift Truth #1:

When we give gifts to God, **the Amount Matters**

Illustration:

Read the illustration of "John" from Plastic Donuts, pages 36-37. (Or, if the class has received and read the book, reference the story, and tell a personal story that communicates the same message)

Examine the Scriptures:

1 Chronicles 21:21-26

Key Point:

David insisted on paying full market price for the land, the wood, and the oxen for his offering to God. David knew that if the amount matters to him, it can matter to God also.

Ask:

- Why would Oman offer the land and supplies to David for nothing? (David was the King of Israel.)
- Why did David not accept the offer? (verse 24)
- Does it surprise you that David did not bargain or try to get a good deal? (David knew the amount mattered. If he gave an offering of an amount that mattered to him, he knew the offering would matter to God.)
- What are amounts that matter to us? (our mortgage, car payment, grocery bill, vacation)

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Gifts that Make God Smile (continued)

- Would you say the amount matters when we give gifts to those close to us?
- Would you say the amount matters when we give to God?

Key Point:

Amounts that matter come in all sizes

Examine the Scriptures:

Mark 12:41-44

First of all, notice Jesus was observing the gifts that people were giving. It is a clear picture that God indeed watches and pays attention to our giving. He is not waiting to condemn, but rather looking for gifts that are acceptable and pleasing to Him.

Secondly, note the widow gave a gift that captured the attention of Jesus. **The amount of the gift certainly mattered to her** – it was all she had. It was an acceptable gift even though it was exceedingly small in size.

Ask:

- What made the widow's small gift acceptable?
 - Of the two parties mentioned, who gave the larger amount? Which gift got God's attention? (Made him smile)
 - How do you suppose the widow felt when she put her gift in the treasury? Fear? Joy? Satisfaction?
 - If the "rich people" could have seen their giving from God's perspective at that moment, how do you think they would have reacted?
 - Do you believe that only large gifts matter to God?
 - How do you feel when you give a gift that you know matters to you? (Like when you chose the right gift for a child or spouse)
 - How do you feel when you receive a gift that matters to the giver?
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Gifts that Make God Smile (continued)

Key Point:

Giving an acceptable gift will have an effect on my attitude toward God - and it can bring us closer together.

Examine the Scriptures:

Genesis 4:5

Ask:

- Why did Cain's countenance fall?
- How do you feel when you give a gift that "bombs"? One that does not meet the expectation of the recipient? (Like another necktie on Father's day.)
- Funny stories? ("re-gifting exposed," etc.)

Key Point:

Cain's gift did not get God's attention; it did not delight the heart of God. Cain's attitude was tied to the acceptability of his giving. When we give a gift that delights the heart of the receiver, we are connected to them in a relationship that brings joy to our heart as well.

Bringing It Home:

- God notices my gifts in a personal way – Like a Father receives a gift from a child
- Some gifts are acceptable to God, while others are not
- **Acceptable Gift Truth #1:** When we give gifts to God, **the Amount Matters**

Companion Guide: Review the Guide with the class, and encourage them to:

- Read the appropriate chapters in the *Plastic Donuts* book before working in the Guide (Explain that Guide homework will always follow class discussion. For example, work on Truth #1 after covered in class)
- Take their time working through the Guide, talking over impressions and ideas with the family
- Refer to sample answers and helps at www.AcceptableGift.org/MyDonuts

Next week: Complete the first page and Truth #1 in the Guide. Then read or review chapters 4-6 in *Plastic Donuts*.