

GIVING FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

Sunday School Leader's Guide – Lesson Three



The Heart of the Matter

Lesson Goal:

To see our financial giving from God's perspective. (Please note as you review this lesson, 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.)

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.

Before The Lesson:

Read the book *Plastic Donuts* for background, and note any highlights you may want to share from chapters 7-8. Also review the companion Guide, and fill out Truth #4 and “My Plastic Donuts” section.

Review this lesson outline and feel free to cut sections as necessary for time management. If you are following a three-lesson format, you will need time at the end to allow for meaningful Guide discussion. If you are following a four-lesson format, you can rely on the final class to cover Guide content more fully.

Key Points From Prior Week's - Review:

- 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)
- **We Determine the Amount** (Acceptable Gift Truth #2)
- **We Give According To Our Ability** (Acceptable Gift Truth #3)

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The Heart of the Matter (continued)

? Ask:

Have various individuals from the group share.

- What do you think it means when someone says, “It’s the heart that matters?”
- Why do you think the condition of our heart matters in relation to giving?
- Do you think the **amount** or the **heart** matters more to God?
(Scripture reveals that **both** matter – as we’ll see)

Key Point:

Often times, when it comes to giving to God, people say, “As long as the heart is right, the amount of the gift doesn’t matter.” Well, that’s not even true with gifts we give to each other!

God is most definitely concerned about the condition of our heart when it comes time to express our worship through giving; but as we have seen, the amount matters as well.

So what does the Bible really say about the condition of our heart and how it relates to our giving?

- From God’s perspective, the condition of the heart matters
- If the heart is not right, the gift is not acceptable to God
- God knows the condition of our heart
- So, in all areas of our lives, **including financial giving**, let’s align the condition of our hearts to give acceptable gifts

⚠ Read the story from pages 91-94 of *Plastic Donuts*, and/or tell a personal story with a similar message.

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

Matthew 5:23-24

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

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The Heart of the Matter (continued)

? Ask:

- Would you say Jesus is most concerned about the money? or something else?
- Why do you suppose there was such an urgency to leave the gift and go immediately?
- Why not just give the gift, then go make things right?

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

Acts 5:1-10

? Ask:

- What was the heart condition of Ananias and Sapphira?
- Was it the **amount**, or the **condition of the heart** that troubled Peter?
- Do the consequences for a bad heart condition seem extreme? (Consider another time God puts such a great emphasis on a right heart. 1 Corinthians 11:27-30)

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

Proverbs 21:3, 1 Samuel 15:22

? Ask:

- What is it God desires more than our sacrificial gifts? What does that look like in life?
- So do you think that as long as the heart is right, the amount doesn't really matter?

Key Point:

No doubt God puts a priority on the heart; however that does not devalue the other truths we have learned so far. It is not “either or”, it’s “both and”!

Our hearts must be right for our gifts to be acceptable, however, simply having a right heart does not justify giving a gift that falls short of our ability! All four truths reveal facets of God's perspective on our giving.

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The Heart of the Matter (continued)

There are various heart conditions that can affect our gifts. Take time to cover a few of them (time may not allow you to cover each one)

What does Scripture say about having a heart that is right before God? Let's examine several verses below and consider what it takes to have a right heart condition for giving acceptable gifts to God.

Examine the Scriptures:

(Look back at) Matthew 5:23-24

Ask:

- What condition of the heart was Jesus dealing with in this passage? (Forgiveness/Broken Relationships)
 - Do you suppose the opposite is true? If you know you have hurt or have something against someone, should you go make that right? Grant forgiveness?
 - What do these conversations look like? How do we do it to insure our heart is right?
 - Why are we talking about things like forgiveness, in a study about financial giving?
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Examine the Scriptures:

1 Samuel 15:22

Ask:

- What is it that God desires more than just a financial contribution? (Obedience)
 - What does this look like in life today? (Romans 12:1)
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Examine the Scriptures:

Matthew 23:23, 1 Corinthians 13:3, 1 John 3:17

Ask:

- What does Jesus call these men to pay attention to? (How they act - Their character)
- Does Jesus reduce the importance of giving? (No, He looks for both!)
- What is it that Paul says makes a gift acceptable? (Love)
- (Note: These are all character issues: Justice, mercy, faithful, loving, righteousness.)

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📖 Examine the Scriptures:

2 Corinthians 8:12, 2 Corinthians 9:7

❓ Ask:

- What do you think Paul means by “if the willingness is there”?
 - Have you ever given because you felt compelled to give? How did that feel?
 - Have you given from a sacrificial gift from a willing heart? How did that feel?
 - What makes the difference?
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Key Point:

God knows the condition of our hearts

One thing is very clear throughout Scripture and that is God looks at, examines, and knows our hearts. While we may outwardly fool others and inwardly even fool ourselves, God knows the condition of our hearts.

Many take this in a way that paints a picture of God waiting to condemn us, but we're seeing that the condition of our heart can delight Him. That's what he's looking for!

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

1 Samuel 16:7, Luke 16:14-15

❓ Ask:

- Does the fact that God knows us completely make us uncomfortable? Or draw us closer to Him? Why?
 - How could the fact that man looks on the outside while God looks at the heart, affect our giving?
 - What do you think what the Pharisees were doing seemed so favored in the sight of men, but was so detestable in the sight of God?
 - What are some ways we could be like the Pharisees today?
 - What do you think Jesus desired of the Pharisees? To stop giving? Or to clean their hearts, then give?
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Key Point:

God is a loving Father, who wants to connect with our hearts

The most important truth we need to keep in mind is that He loves us unconditionally.

He is the Perfect Father, desiring what is best for us, His children. What He wants from us is to acknowledge the areas of our lives that fall short, to come to Him and seek forgiveness, then enjoy our relationship with Him. Let's look at David as our example.

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

Psalms 51:1-2

❓ Ask:

- What did David ask God to do?
- Why did David make this request? (See verses 13, 15, 16-19. David knew his witness was affected, His worship was affected, and His giving was affected. David could not give an acceptable gift until his heart was right. verses 16-19)

📖 Examine the Scriptures:

1 Chronicles 29:2-5, 17

Many years later, David gave an extravagant gift to the Lord. He gave of his complete financial ability (v2-5). More importantly, he wanted God to know the condition of his heart (v17). David knew from previous experience (Psalm 51) that God looks at the heart and desires nothing more than for His children to give from a clean and pure heart in worship.

❓ Ask:

- What do you think David meant by “all my ability”?
- How did David's heart expression to God **impact those around him** when he offered this gift?
- What changes in perspective have you experienced through this study of an acceptable gift?

Bringing It Home:

In this study we have learned that in giving gifts that please the heart of God...

- **The amount matters**
- **We determine the amount**
- **We give according to our ability**
- **The heart makes the gift acceptable**

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Guide Discussion

If this is NOT your final session (if you are going to have a fourth session):

- Ask if there are any questions about the Truth #3 exercise – the Donut Chart. Allow for discussion as natural and appropriate.
- Assign “Truth 4” and “My Donuts” sections as homework for next week.
- Explain how the “My Donuts” decisions flow from the processing through the Donut Chart in Truth #3
- (Save “Prompts and Goals” for final homework)

If this is your final session in the study, encourage participants to finish out the Guide in the days to come. Direct them to complete:

- Truth #4 – The Heart
- “My Plastic Donuts”
- “Prompts and Goals”

Take time to allow participants to talk through their Guide experiences so far and share how God may be speaking to them through their giving journey.

? Questions to consider:

- What is God teaching you?
- Which of the four truths have been most impacting to you?
- How do you plan to apply this truth(s) in your life?

Bringing It Home:

- It's about a relationship with Him. You should sense great freedom in this relationship-based giving truth. You should also sense a great amount of responsibility as you seek to give an amount that truly matters to you.
- Make sure you complete your Companion Guide this week