

More Gifted THAN YOU REALIZE

A Bible Study for the Incarcerated



LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES
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Introduction

Gifts. What a wonderful thing they are! Chances are we've all received them at one time or another. It may have been Christmas or your birthday. But what about those gifts we receive that are totally unexpected—like a package, a letter with some pictures, maybe even a phone call. Isn't it wonderful when that happens? Isn't it amazing when someone thinks of you in that way? How great it is when someone gives you something of real value, right from the heart, made just for you!

Well, whether you know it or not, that has been done for you, and for me. God has given each of us a gift, and it may be more than one. Now whether you believe in God or haven't given Him a thought in years, you'll be glad to know you still have gifts. And these gifts can benefit you here—making your time inside better and more productive—and can definitely be put to good use on the outside, too.

You see, we believe **everyone is a gift with gifts to share**. Let's take these truths one at a time: (1) everyone is a gift; (2) with gifts; (3) to share.

Everyone is a gift.

Everyone is a gift because we are all made in God's image. God's handiwork in creation, especially in creating you and me—makes you and me, and every human—gifts in themselves.

Let's look at Genesis 1:26-27.

"Then God said, 'Let Us make human beings in Our image, to be like Us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.' So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them."

Reading this, we see that every person has worth and dignity. Those around us should be treated as we want to be treated. In fact, humans are created in the very image of God. Being made by God you have gifts—gifts to be discovered, shared, grown, and used in powerful ways. As God sends people to do their work, He blesses them, too.

Now on to the second truth that we believe: Everyone is a gift ... **with gifts**.

Here's what the Bible says about God and the gifts He gives:

*"There are different kinds of spiritual **gifts**, but the same Spirit is the Source of them all. There are different kinds of **service**, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different **ways**, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).*

Now you may be thinking that you don't have any special gifts—that when the gift train came by you weren't at the station. But that's not what the Bible says about you. In fact, God has a different sense of the value and purpose of your life. Still scratching your head? Check these passages out:

*"You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body
and knit me together in my mother's womb.
Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex!
Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it.
You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion,*

*as I was woven together in the dark of the womb.
You saw me before I was born.
Every day of my life was recorded in Your book.
Every moment was laid out
before a single day had passed” (Psalm 139:13-16).*

“Just as our bodies have many parts and each part has a special function, so it is with Christ’s body. We are many parts of one body, and we all belong to each other. In His grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out with as much faith as God has given you. If your gift is serving others, serve them well. If you are a teacher, teach well. If your gift is to encourage others, be encouraging. If it is giving, give generously. If God has given you leadership ability, take the responsibility seriously. And if you have a gift for showing kindness to others, do it gladly” (Romans 12:4-8).

“God has given each of you a gift from His great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another. Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God Himself were speaking through you. Do you have the gift of helping others? Do it with all the strength and energy that God supplies. Then everything you do will bring glory to God through Jesus Christ. All glory and power to Him forever and ever! Amen” (1 Peter 4:10-11).

Here’s what is really clear in these passages (and many others!): the gifts God has given you are there to **benefit you** and to **bless others**. Your special aptitudes, innate abilities, and acquired skills are all gifts from God.

You may never have looked at yourself with special qualities or abilities. Probably most people don’t see themselves that way. But more people should. And if they did, there would be a whole lot more happy and satisfied people in the world. It’s learning how to recognize qualities you possess—and in that fresh understanding you begin to see your potential in ways that can change your life. Now getting to know what gifts we have may take a little time and work, but the benefits are beyond awesome, especially when we see how they can fulfill our lives and enrich the lives of others. So, to begin with, think for a minute about yourself. What kind of gifts do you think God has given you?

Do you have a special “business” sense, an understanding of how to get a job done? Perhaps you have an entrepreneurial or management gift? How are you with sharing ideas, either verbally or in a written way? Maybe the gift of communication is yours. You may have an artistic gift like painting or sculpting or building that can be explored. For others, your gift may be technical like computers, engineering, or the law. This Bible study will consider all these possibilities as they relate to you. It will show how you can use this time—this valuable time that you’ve been given—to look at yourself and see a whole new world of possibility.

On to our third truth that we believe: everyone is a gift with gifts ... **to share**.

Now it will take some effort, but we hope you’re up for it. Because the rewards are immense. You are a specially created (and gifted) son or daughter of God the Father. And He has proven that to you through His Son Jesus who died and rose for you so you can live in His kingdom forever. May we all use our gifts in ways that are pleasing to God and a blessing to others.

Our best example for using our gifts is the one Jesus gave during His earthly ministry. He led with boldness and grace. He communicated with care and empathy. He bridged cultural differences and opened doors of understanding. He managed a group of disciples with different backgrounds. And He created a team united in a common pursuit and launched them forward on a worldwide mission. In all these things, He worked with different people possessing different gifts who could use them in different ways to serve God and His kingdom here on earth.

The 16th-century church reformer Martin Luther stressed how we are all called by God to love and serve our neighbor in our lives through our gifts. God works through our human efforts, Luther said, blessing others and mirroring His love to the world in the work we do. Not surprisingly, there was no distinction made to using our gifts in or out of prison.

But wait, there's more!

God has not only generously given us gifts to use and bless others, but He has also given us of Himself, and it cost Him dearly to do so. This Gift exceeds all others. It is Jesus Christ, the One given to each of us for this life and for our eternal salvation. As the apostle Paul says,

"What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since He did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't He also give us everything else?" (Romans 8:31-32)

This is God's full generosity, that He gives to ALL so graciously in His Son Jesus—and then equips us INDIVIDUALLY in special ways to serve Him and bless others. So, you are truly a gift with gifts to share. As we have freely been given, so then we should develop our gifts and share them with others. As Paul reminds us: *"In His grace, God has given us different gifts for doing certain things well"* for the good of others (Romans 12:6a).

Join us!

We will look at gifts in 12 different areas. Here's a list of them from 1 to 12 with no priority given to one over another.

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|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1. Technical (Page 5) | 7. Artistic (Page 23) |
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So, before we begin with Gift #1, let's review the Bible passage given above:

*"There are different kinds of spiritual **gifts**, but the same Spirit is the Source of them all. There are different kinds of **service**, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different **ways**, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).*

Our earnest hope for you is that you discover the **gift(s)** God has given you. As you do this, ask yourself how you can use it to be of **service** to others. What **ways** can you do that to benefit others and to bless God who is the Giver of gifts that are *"good and perfect"* (James 1:17b).

Here are three questions to think about:

1. What gift(s) do you think you have?
2. What have you done to explore and expand this gift?
3. How do you think your gift could benefit others—either in prison or in civilian life?

Be encouraged!

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

1

Technical Gift



When hasn't it been great to prepare a nice meal or figure out a computer glitch or complete a house repair? Never! *It's always been great!* That's what having a technical gift brings to the table. The ability to do and succeed. Technical gifts vary greatly. They can be developed over time and can turn into a career choice if so desired.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a technical gift is: "Technical gifts help you perform specific tasks that require a special and refined set of skills. Gifts include craftsmanship, profession-specific knowledge, and acquired skills."

In 1 Kings, chapters 6-7 the reader is given a list of extensive instructions for the building of the temple and Solomon's royal palace in Jerusalem. Both chapters provide detailed descriptions of all that went into building these structures and how they were furnished. To create these magnificent buildings, dozens of skilled craftsmen, artists, massive stone cutters, metallurgists in bronze and gold, wood carvers, furniture builders, surveyors, material transport operators, quarry engineers, and more were called upon for their expertise and their contributions.

"King Solomon then asked for a man named Hiram to come from Tyre. He was half Israelite, since his mother was a widow from the tribe of Naphtali, and his father had been a craftsman in bronze from Tyre. Hiram was extremely skillful and talented in any work in bronze, and he came to do all the metal work for King Solomon" (1 Kings 7:13-14).

If your gift is a technical one, there will always be an outlet for you to use it to your advantage. Whether you're part of building a temple, putting upholstery in a '67 Chevy, or fixing a leaky roof, technical skills are always in demand. Training in areas like computer skills, carpentry, and other trades can provide inmates with valuable skills for post-release employment.

Lisa's Story

I knew for a long time I wanted to be a cosmetologist. My Aunt was one when I was growing up and I'd watch her. When I got towards the end of my 25-year sentence they said every inmate is allowed to take one vocational class and I wasn't gonna pass up that opportunity. Out of all the classes offered cosmetology felt like a career. I needed some kind of skill when I got out and this gave me that chance.

You have to go through a whole process with the board and tell them your story on top of the application and interview process. You sit on pins and needles waiting to see if they will accept you into the program as they only met quarterly. I went to prison for a violent crime, and they could easily see a pair of scissors as a weapon so that made it even more nerve wrecking for me in waiting. Then Covid hit and it took even longer but finally I received my approval letter! We had school just like in the free world with hair color, bleach and flat irons, we learned how to do eye lashes and facials, manicure and pedicures. It was like a whole salon in there!

There were 10 of us who went through the classes. I remember when we took the boards they handcuffed and shackled us and put us in a van and took us to a location with others that were free and we took the practical exam the first day and the written exam the next. I didn't even care what they did

because I knew in the end it was gonna be worth it. It was a little embarrassing in a setting like that, but you learn to not let some things faze you. A month before I got out, we found out that all 10 of us passed and we had a graduation with cap and gowns, and we celebrated with family.

I'm so thankful this was another opportunity they made available to me. So many opportunities are available to the entire prison population but only 2% take advantage of an offer that could give them that same foundation that could catapult them towards success. Including the Cosmetologist license, I also obtained a license as a personal trainer and group fitness instructor, service dog trainer, and a business degree in business management and business administration. All of this available through Federal Government and State funding ... offered to EVERYONE! Who could pass that up?! It's a lot of hard work, but is a lifesaver in keeping someone out of the mix of the prison drama, which is where most inmates choose to make their foundation. I've been out almost 3 years now and I still have my career! It's definitely paid off.

Lisa Z

Reflection Questions:

Acts 18 mentions how the apostle Paul met a married couple in Corinth. It also says they shared a very specific skill:

"Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome. Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was" (Acts 18:1-3).

- Knowing a trade or a craft is always a huge plus. What are some ways that Paul's tent-weaving ability may have helped him in his ministry and/or his personal life?
- What technical gift would you like to get better at? How could you use it to serve others?

Summary Questions:

- If you have a technical gift, how can you use it to benefit yourself? To bless others?
- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to understand my technical abilities, so I can develop them into real, practical skills. Amen.

2

Interpersonal Gift



Effectively relating to others is nothing short of an art form. It involves listening, being patient, more listening, and carefully choosing words that promote—not hinder—healthy conversation. Can you remember a time when your ability to relate to people made a difference in a touchy social situation? Maybe your gift is interpersonal, one that strengthens interaction and encourages relationships.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what an interpersonal gift is: "Interpersonal gifts help you interact with, care for, and build relationships with others. Gifts include active listening, self-awareness, and empathy."

While there are several instances in the Bible of people displaying interpersonal skills, there's never a better example than Jesus Himself. His heartfelt talks with His disciples, His patience with the crowds that pressed Him from all sides, and His care for those who were hurting are all prime illustrations of Jesus' profound ability to relate to others. In this regard, the New Testament offers several episodes involving Jesus and Peter.

Jesus and Peter had a close relationship. Peter and his brother Andrew were disciples Jesus called. It was Peter who walked on the water with Jesus. It was Peter who said of Jesus that *"You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"* (Matthew 16:16b). It was Peter who denied Jesus three times on the night of His arrest. And it was to Peter that Jesus asked point blank how much he loved Him.

In John 21, three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves Him, and each question is capped with a command for Peter to care for those who follow Jesus.

"After breakfast Jesus asked Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love Me more than these?'

'Yes, Lord,' Peter replied, 'You know I love You.'

'Then feed My lambs,' Jesus told him.

Jesus repeated the question: 'Simon son of John, do you love Me?'

'Yes, Lord,' Peter said, 'You know I love You.'

'Then take care of My sheep,' Jesus said.

A third time He asked him, 'Simon son of John, do you love Me?'

Peter was hurt that Jesus asked the question a third time. He said, 'Lord, You know everything. You know that I love You.'

Jesus said, 'Then feed My sheep.

'I tell you the truth, when you were young, you were able to do as you liked; you dressed yourself and went wherever you wanted to go. But when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and others will dress you and take you where you don't want to go.' Jesus said this to let him know by what kind of death he would glorify God. Then Jesus told him, 'Follow Me'" (John 21:15-19).

In this passage, we see Jesus encouraging Peter for his future mission. Peter's faith in God may have wavered a few days earlier, but going forward he would be a champion for the Gospel. Jesus knows Peter's heart, but His three questions indicate He wanted Peter to say it. Jesus wants to know that Peter is committed. In the end, Peter would follow Jesus, leading the early church as it grew among the

Jewish communities in Judea and Galilee. Eventually, Peter would give his all when, according to church tradition, he became a martyr in Rome.

Interpersonal skills like those Jesus used throughout His earthly ministry can be developed through counseling sessions, group therapy, and social skills training. These resources help you build stronger relationships with others. Interpersonal skills are a vital gift that can be nurtured and developed to enhance personal and mutual relationships, reflecting the love and unity that's taught in the Bible.

Oliver's Story

85 people stuffed double bunked in one open dormitory. Two 32" T. V's. 5 toilets spaced 3 ft apart with 4 urinals less than 5 ft directly in front. 4 shower heads in a 15 foot open shower bay. 4 wall telephones and 2 microwaves. 1 water fountain. All to be shared by these same 85 people. Imagine living in such an environment. How will you interact?

That's my reality and it has been for the last 20-some-odd years! When I first got incarcerated in this environment, there were different men from various walks of life and mentalities. Some are respectful and mature while others are arrogant and childish. I'm thinking "Lord please don't make me have to kill someone in here." I was an introvert who kept to myself and didn't want to be bothered. I was already pissed and bitter from being locked up. I was a ticking time bomb around 84 other ticking time bombs. How am I going to navigate through this?

Sometime after avoiding some serious confrontations behind the TV or a shower or a phone, I HAD to change something since this is my reality. I needed to learn to become interpersonal. One day I was reading Scriptures and ran across these verses in Ephesians 4:1-3 concerning Paul being a "prisoner of the Lord" and how to keep the peace with those I am among. I reluctantly attempted to follow those instructions and to my surprise things became better and more tolerable. Over continued practicing these instructions now everyone pretty much lives in harmony and learned each other's ways. Each man respects the next and bearing each other "flaws" with gentleness instead of conflict.

As for me, those instructions in Ephesians 4:1-3 saved my life and possibly someone else's. I thank God for teaching me how to be interpersonal through His Scriptures and able to cope with living in such an environment.

Oliver

Reflection Questions:

Luke 19:1-10 relates how the tax collector Zaccheus met with Jesus and the impact his encounter had on Zaccheus' life.

"Jesus entered Jericho and made His way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

"When Jesus came by, He looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. 'Zacchaeus!' He said. 'Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.' Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. 'He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,' they grumbled.

“Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, ‘I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!’ Jesus responded, ‘Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.’”

- Why do you think Zaccheus was so intent on seeing who Jesus was? Did he want anything from Jesus?
- Did Jesus surprise Zaccheus in any way? How might Jesus’ response to Zaccheus have changed his life?

Summary Questions:

- If you have a hospitality gift, how can you use it to help others?
- If you’ve seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, teach me how to get along with people and be a friend to them. Amen.

3

Entrepreneurial Gift



Life is full of opportunities, even behind bars. Making the most of circumstances involves assessing the situation, making a plan, and staying the course. That's what an entrepreneurial gift is all about: seeing the possibilities, setting realistic goals, and working hard to make them succeed. It's big-picture thinking combined with the good sense of how to proceed toward one's objective.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what an entrepreneurial gift is: "Entrepreneurial gifts help you identify new opportunities, set goals, and design strategies to achieve them. Gifts include analytical thinking, market research, marketing skills, problem solving, and sales."

As one might expect in a book as large as the Bible, there are examples of people who have been successful in business ventures. In Acts 16, we meet Lydia who lived in Asia Minor (the western region or peninsula of present-day Turkey), in a wealthy commercial district. She dealt in luxury fabrics and took advantage of the buying and selling in the Roman province where she and her family lived. She was also a believer when the apostles Paul and Silas first encountered her.

"One of them was Lydia from Thyatira, a merchant of expensive purple cloth, who worshiped God. As she listened to us, the Lord opened her heart, and she accepted what Paul was saying. She and her household were baptized, and she asked us to be her guests. 'If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,' she said, 'come and stay at my home.' And she urged us until we agreed" (Acts 16:14-15).

Lydia had good business sense: she sold high-end goods (purple was a sign of royalty in the ancient world), and took advantage of the bustling trade in the city where she lived. She owned a home and showed hospitality to Paul and Silas. And after they were released from prison, she again opened her home so they and others could gather.

Now your business goal might not be trading in colorful fabrics. But whatever it is—fashioning and selling jewelry, trading in stocks and bonds, or raising horses—there are things you should know. As an entrepreneur you can take part in vocational training, engage in prison industries, and even develop small business ideas, using your creativity and problem-solving skills to move you to self-sufficiency in the future.

Damien's Story

I used to provide for my kids the only way I knew how, that was selling drugs. It provided a comfortable lifestyle for us; however, it was a gamble with my freedom and prison was the end result. I still had a young son and daughter who I needed to figure out how to provide for from prison. I knew selling drugs was NOT the answer. It was the cause of the separation between my kids and I in the first place!

One day an old timer asked me, "Hey Youngsta, how would you like to make some money?" I responded, "No, that's what got me locked up now!" He said, "Selling hobby crafts got you in prison?" I laughed and explained the misunderstanding then I told him I don't know anything about hobby crafting. He told me how he makes a good income each year with his own legal business—selling hobby crafts. He shared

how he was able to help with his children going to college and still helps with his wife's car payment and mortgage even though he's in prison. I was awed because this is what I desperately needed. After questioning him about this hobby crafting, he offered to teach me everything he knew if I became his helper in the hobby craft shop. He said to me, "You are already a businessman with entrepreneurial skills from your former profession, so we'll take that knowledge and change the product with your own hobby craft business. Then you can help your family out in times of need or buy your own lawyer!"

I clung to that old-timer like a leech and in less than a year I was happily providing for my kids and family with a clean and cheerful heart. I took those same skills I learned on the streets and refined them for my own successful hobby craft business with leather goods. My kids are now adults. They still remind me of when I purchased their first bike or paid for their school clothes and school pictures or simply paid for a past due bill when they were in a bind. All while I was still in prison.

I thank God for the old-timer who showed me a better way to use the gifts God blessed me with for good and not for evil. I thank God for showing me that I can be a provider with my gifts that are pleasing to Him. Cleanse my ways O Lord.

Damien

Reflection Questions:

Matthew 25 contains Jesus' "parable of the three servants." Here Jesus speaks to how God is pleased when we take what we've been given and make the most of it through good stewardship.

"Again, the Kingdom of heaven can be illustrated by the story of a man going on a long trip. He called together his servants and entrusted his money to them while he was gone. He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.

'The servant who received the five bags of silver began to invest the money and earned five more. The servant with two bags of silver also went to work and earned two more. But the servant who received the one bag of silver dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.

'After a long time, their master returned from his trip and called them to give an account of how they had used his money. The servant to whom he had entrusted the five bags of silver came forward with five more and said, "Master, you gave me five bags of silver to invest, and I have earned five more." The master was full of praise. "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!"

'The servant who had received the two bags of silver came forward and said, "Master, you gave me two bags of silver to invest, and I have earned two more." The master said, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!"

'Then the servant with the one bag of silver came and said, "Master, I knew you were a harsh man, harvesting crops you didn't plant and gathering crops you didn't cultivate. I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back." But the master replied, "You wicked and lazy servant! If you knew I harvested crops I didn't plant and gathered crops I didn't cultivate, why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it!" (Matthew 25:14-27).

- What talents or resources has God entrusted to you, and how can you use them to positively impact those around you?
- How can developing and using your gifts be a way to witness to Jesus' lordship over your life?

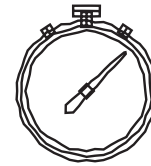
Summary Questions:

- If you have an entrepreneurial gift, how can you use it to help yourself? To bless others?
- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, teach me to be honest and upright in my business dealings with others. Amen.

4

Management Gift



Managing things in a way that takes people into account and still gets the job done can be a tall order. Let's face it, people can be tough to work with. Personalities, backgrounds, and attitudes all come into play. That's where the person with a management gift is essential to charting a course, spreading out the workload, and keeping individuals on task.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a management gift is: "Management gifts help you manage both tasks and people. Gifts include decision-making, project planning, task delegation, and communication."

If you're familiar with the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, you can appreciate the importance of management skills. Nehemiah lived in Persia, a long way from Judea, when he heard the city's walls were in disrepair. As court official to King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah had already positioned himself favorably, so he put his case forward to repair the walls of Jerusalem.

"The king asked, 'Well, how can I help you?' With a prayer to the God of heaven, I replied, 'If it please the king, and if you are pleased with me, your servant, send me to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried'" (Nehemiah 2:4-5).

This wasn't an easy undertaking. In addition to the complexities of arranging for the labor to rebuild the wall, Nehemiah had to contend with the vocal opposition of foreign rulers near Jerusalem. There were many families struggling under the oppression of those who ruled Jerusalem before Nehemiah became governor, and he had to address their concerns as well. Furthermore, he was falsely accused of planning a rebellion against Persia by trying to make himself king of Judah. Still, and even with all these obstacles, the wall was completed.

Now not all management projects may face such outright opposition, but managers will have to make decisions to accomplish their—or their company's—objectives. So, why not take advantage of your current situation to begin sharpening your management abilities. You can take on leadership roles in various programs at your facility, oversee teams in work assignments, and coordinate events. This helps you in developing organizational and supervisory skills that can be used in various situations.

Lisa's Story

There are so many ways in which I was taught skills during my incarceration that I probably wouldn't have learned had I never gone to prison. Anything that felt like it was for the worst in my life, God turned it around and made it for the good, and a blessing to have learned. I learned to be a positive and compassionate leader. Back in high school, I would freeze up in all my oral communication classes that consisted of giving speeches. God knew that I was weak in this area and put me in positions while in prison that I was leading and managing 100 women at a time in fitness classes, keeping their attention for an hour.

I taught them to want better for themselves and how fitness could change the way they feel about themselves, which in turn would create better decision making. I was the head of different organizational committees, responsible for not only planning but managing events and fundraisers to help those in need in the community.

I learned insight into how important it was to help others and to be compassionate to their needs. Instead of only thinking of ourselves, these positions taught me how to think of others, and to love them just as God loves us.

There is no greater feeling than love, and love is the main feeling most women incarcerated are missing from their lives. We are searching for it in all the wrong places, causing us to make bad decisions leading to destruction.

As I matured in prison, I realized all the blessings of the leadership and management roles I had and how it helped myself and others to be the way God wants us to be.

Working on so many different committees you end up working with a lot of different personalities, and managing so many is something I became very good at and by far a much better leader than I ever dreamed.

Walking out of prison after almost 26 years into the free world now I still lean into this gift as it prepared me to ready myself for leadership and management roles on the outside. I give God all the glory for bringing me where I am today.

Lisa

Reflection Questions:

In Genesis 37, we have the Joseph story and how he ended up in Egypt, in the house of a high official. Chapter 39 has him supervising the household affairs of Potiphar, the captain of the palace guard. In this demanding assignment Joseph handled his work with great skill and professionalism:

“When Joseph was taken to Egypt by the Ishmaelite traders, he was purchased by Potiphar, an Egyptian officer. Potiphar was captain of the guard for Pharaoh, the king of Egypt.

*“The Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything he did as he served in the home of his Egyptian master. Potiphar noticed this and realized that the Lord was with Joseph, giving him success in everything he did. This pleased Potiphar, so he soon made Joseph his personal attendant. He put him in charge of his entire household and everything he owned. From the day Joseph was put in charge of his master’s household and property, the Lord began to bless Potiphar’s household for Joseph’s sake. All his household affairs ran smoothly, and his crops and livestock flourished. So Potiphar gave Joseph complete administrative responsibility over everything he owned. With Joseph there, he didn’t worry about a thing—except what kind of food to eat!”
(Genesis 39:1-6)*

- How did Joseph’s attitude and actions turn a horrible beginning into a great outcome?

- What management skills has God given you, and how can you use them while incarcerated?

Summary Questions:

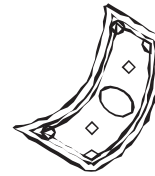
- If you have a management gift, how can you use it to help yourself? To bless others?

- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, teach me how to manage people and circumstances with integrity and sensibility. Amen.

5

Financial Gift



Money. One reason there's never enough of it is because people don't know how to handle it. Understanding how to save it, spend it, and make it grow indicates having a financial gift. As money is critical to so many things in this world, special care is needed to responsibly possess it, control its use, and maximize its growth for the benefit of self, family, church, and community.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a financial gift is: "Financial gifts help you plan, organize, direct, and control financial activities. Gifts include accounting, planning, and attention to detail."

The detailed story of Joseph is found in the last 14 chapters of Genesis. One of Jacob's 12 sons, he was a favorite of his father, the owner of a famous technicolored coat, and much despised by his brothers. So much so that Joseph was sold into slavery to Ishmaelite traders headed to Egypt who then sold him to Potiphar, a high official. After some shrewd moves and favorable dream interpretations, which pleased Pharaoh, Joseph rose to unprecedented heights in the kingdom.

"Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has revealed the meaning of the dreams to you, clearly no one else is as intelligent or wise as you are. You will be in charge of my court, and all my people will take orders from you. Only I, sitting on my throne, will have a rank higher than yours'"
(Genesis 41:39-40).

Giving Joseph this massive responsibility proved to be an economic windfall to Egypt. During times of abundance, Joseph's foresight in stockpiling grain in Egypt's storehouses brought the country great wealth when famine struck and both the Egyptians and their neighbors were desperate for food. It even led to Joseph reuniting with his father and brothers as they too turned to Egypt to satisfy their hunger.

Of course, handling money is loaded with pitfalls, and it could have something to do with the reason many of you are here today. But that doesn't mean it can't be managed properly—both for your benefit and the benefit of those you love. Here's where financial literacy programs can teach you budgeting, saving, and investing. Managing prison commissary accounts also provides practical experience for civilian life later on.

Gwen's Story

I developed so many gifts while I was in prison. Gifts I would have never had the opportunity to have, had I not been there. I was the president of organizations where I ran outreach programs where we would have fundraisers. One particular fundraiser we would do was raise money for Christmas gifts for families who weren't able to provide a nice Christmas for their children, so we helped them out through fundraising in the prison. We would order items with the help of a staff member and set a price with a profit built in and sell them to the other inmates. We were able to help so many families. I also had to keep track of everything on Excel spreadsheets, like total sales and profits. I taught myself how to do all of that. I had never even seen a computer before, but they had some tutorials so I sat down and taught myself so I could get better and better at what I was doing. I got really good working with numbers doing so many fundraisers and quickly became the favorite to lead the financial part of the process.

Gwen D

Cordell's Story

I am incarcerated for multiple armed robberies. I was known as a serial robber. That was my means of gaining financial stability to satisfy my desires and livelihood. One day I was sitting in the law library studying a law book. I became so frustrated and trying to figure out those difficult legal terms. I knew right at that moment I needed some big money to get a professional lawyer.

How can I get \$20,000 for the lawyer I needed? On the streets I would easily rob something to get the finances I needed. Robbing is out the door in this situation - incarceration. I was determined to gain my freedom therefore I got to gain these finances. I started designing cards out of manilla folders for holidays and birthdays to other inmates for \$5 - \$10 each. My cards became so popular to where correctional officers started purchasing them, too. Special ordered cards sell for \$15 - \$18. In 3 1/2 years I have saved over \$16,000. Almost there.

Through this process, God convicted me and showed me my wrongful actions of taking someone else's money and/or property through the story of David with the parable of the 99 ewes and yet took the 1 ewe from someone else. Just as I have worked hard to raise these \$16,000, those I took from worked hard for their money and property. I was instantly filled with remorse for my many victims and repentance of my actions against God. I thank God willing my financial blessings and correcting my wicked ways and making me realize the harm I caused so many others.

Cordell C

Reflection Questions:

2 Corinthians 9:1-8 has Paul commending the Corinthian church for a financial gift it will be sending to believers in faraway Jerusalem. This indicates the church could handle its finances, with money to spare.

"I really don't need to write to you about this ministry of giving for the believers in Jerusalem. For I know how eager you are to help, and I have been boasting to the churches in Macedonia that you in Greece were ready to send an offering a year ago. In fact, it was your enthusiasm that stirred up many of the Macedonian believers to begin giving.

"But I am sending these brothers to be sure you really are ready, as I have been telling them, and that your money is all collected. I don't want to be wrong in my boasting about you. We would be embarrassed—not to mention your own embarrassment—if some Macedonian believers came with me and found that you weren't ready after all I had told them! So I thought I should send these brothers ahead of me to make sure the gift you promised is ready. But I want it to be a willing gift, not one given grudgingly.

"Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. 'For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.' And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others."

- How appreciative—and inspired—do you think the believers in Jerusalem were by the generous gift they received from the Corinthian church?
- How could the money you earn in prison benefit the people you care about back home?

Summary Questions:

- If you think your gift is financial, how can you use it responsibly to help yourself? Help others?
- When have you received a financial gift, and how did you use it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, teach me how to handle money wisely so I can help myself and bless others. Amen.

6

Critical Thinking Gift



When hasn't one of us wished we used our heads a bit more? Thinking *through* a situation before it happens definitely beats just winging it and hoping for the best. A critical thinking gift works that way. It assesses the problem, processes information, and considers possible outcomes (both good and bad) in an attempt to solve the problem for everyone involved.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a critical thinking gift is: "Critical thinking gifts help you process data to problem solve or make informed decisions. Gifts include analytical thinking, creativity, data analytics, and decision making."

The apostle Paul spent a lot of time using this gift. He handled questions about the Person of Christ from both Greeks and Jews, and he skillfully articulated the main points of the Christian faith to believers in general. He assessed who he was talking to—Roman authorities, fellow prisoners, the man or woman on the street, Christian brothers and sisters, Jewish leaders—so he could relate to them more effectively, in a more Christlike way.

In Acts 17, Paul, Silas, and Timothy are taking the Gospel through northern Greece, bound for Athens. Along the way, Paul spoke with many Jewish people who received and understood the Gospel, despite some of them strongly disagreeing. In Athens, however, Paul encountered a very different sort of audience, which forced him to creatively think about how he was going to share the Good News.

"While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply troubled by all the idols he saw everywhere in the city. He went to the synagogue to reason with the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, and he spoke daily in the public square to all who happened to be there.

"He also had a debate with some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers. When he told them about Jesus and His resurrection, they said, 'What's this babbler trying to say with these strange ideas he's picked up?' Others said, 'He seems to be preaching about some foreign gods.'

"Then they took him to the high council of the city. 'Come and tell us about this new teaching,' they said. 'You are saying some rather strange things, and we want to know what it's all about.' (It should be explained that all the Athenians as well as the foreigners in Athens seemed to spend all their time discussing the latest ideas.)

"So Paul, standing before the council, addressed them as follows: 'Men of Athens, I notice that you are very religious in every way, for as I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: "To an Unknown God." This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I'm telling you about.

'He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since He is Lord of heaven and earth, He doesn't live in man-made temples, and human hands can't serve His needs—for He has no needs. He Himself gives life and breath to everything, and He satisfies every need. From one man He created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and He determined their boundaries.

'His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him—though He is not far from any one of us. For in Him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, "We are His offspring." And since this is true, we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

'God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now He commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to Him. For He has set a day for judging the world with justice by the Man He has appointed, and He proved to everyone who this is by raising Him from the dead.'

"When they heard Paul speak about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed in contempt, but others said, 'We want to hear more about this later.' That ended Paul's discussion with them, but some joined him and became believers. Among them were Dionysius, a member of the council, a woman named Damaris, and others with them" (Acts 17:16-34).

It was in Athens, in Paul's conversations with religious thinkers and philosophers, that the apostle's critical thinking was at work. He reasoned with them, tactfully handling their questions, expressing the Gospel in clear and certain terms. He endears himself to them by noting their religious interests and thirst for knowledge. And he zeroes in on the real issue: their search for truth and wisdom—and gives them the Good News of Jesus.

Assessing situations. Considering outcomes. Approaching a problem thoughtfully, with a clear head. Thinking critically can be learned, and the benefits of practicing this daily can be the source of great satisfaction as you navigate the world around you. Consider taking part in educational programs that encourage debate, problem-solving activities, and decision-making exercises. This will give you an intelligent edge in many situations.

Ellzey's Story

I have never in my wildest dreams thought that I would be incarcerated. However, here I am and here I have been for the last 30 years. My life prior to prison could be classified as good. I would not say that I was good compared to who I am presently. My life scripture for the Bible is Genesis 50:20. Let me give you the short version. Joseph told his brothers, "What you meant for bad, GOD will use for the good." That is exactly how I describe my life as a prisoner.

My focus has been education from day one. I dropped out of high school in the 9th grade. Later because I was seeking a job promotion, I went to night school and got my G.E.D. When I entered the prison system, I only had an 8th grade reading level. As all men who enter the prison (Angola) usually their first job would be working on the farm line (that's swinging a sickle and picking vegetables). I did that for nine months and I started getting better jobs. I had to learn the prison ways and how to stay out of trouble. I am a fast learner, and I was rewarded by getting accepted into the Bible College (seminary). Going to the Bible College was a great blessing because of the people I met and grew to love as my brothers. I learned many things that helped me as a "Fresh Fish" (someone who has never been to prison) maneuver through these dangerous waters. I learned a better way to deal with others, argue less and fairly and make much better decisions.

My main job today is being a sign language interpreter for deaf inmates. I must always be on my toes! I travel with them to their classes, school, and church services to interpret what is being said for them. It takes critical thinking to do this job as you need to get the correct information relayed. It's important to note that most of the deaf population don't use slang terms that the speaking inmates use so I need to be a quick thinker to sign the right words!

I was determined not to waste my life ever as an incarcerated man, and just do time. As I sit here the things I have accomplished are no less than a phenomenon. The things I have learned in prison and the person I have become would not have happened if I had not come here. I have a Master of Arts degree

in Christian Ministry, I am a certified Sign Language Interpreter for the prison system and a published author. Again, what the devil meant for my bad God is using for the good.

Ellzey C

Reflection Questions:

Proverbs 2 is a treasure trove of divine wisdom. In it you will find many pearls to last a lifetime.

*"My child, listen to what I say,
and treasure My commands.
Tune your ears to wisdom,
and concentrate on understanding.
Cry out for insight,
and ask for understanding.
Search for them as you would for silver;
seek them like hidden treasures.
Then you will understand what it means to fear the Lord,
and you will gain knowledge of God.
For the Lord grants wisdom!
From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.
He grants a treasure of common sense to the honest.
He is a shield to those who walk with integrity.
He guards the paths of the just
and protects those who are faithful to Him.
Then you will understand what is right, just, and fair,
and you will find the right way to go.
For wisdom will enter your heart,
and knowledge will fill you with joy.
Wise choices will watch over you.
Understanding will keep you safe.
Wisdom will save you from evil people,
from those whose words are twisted.
These men turn from the right way
to walk down dark paths.
They take pleasure in doing wrong,
and they enjoy the twisted ways of evil.
Their actions are crooked,
and their ways are wrong.
Wisdom will save you from the immoral woman,
from the seductive words of the promiscuous woman.
She has abandoned her husband
and ignores the covenant she made before God.
Entering her house leads to death;
it is the road to the grave.*

*The man who visits her is doomed.
He will never reach the paths of life.
So follow the steps of the good,
and stay on the paths of the righteous.
For only the godly will live in the land,
and those with integrity will remain in it.
But the wicked will be removed from the land,
and the treacherous will be uprooted."*

- How is God's wisdom different (and better) than the "street smarts" you may know now?
- What wisdom have you gained in life and shared with others?

Summary Questions:

- If you have a critical thinking gift, how can you use it to benefit yourself? To bless others?
- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, let my thinking be reasonable, open to understanding, and mindful of those I live and work with. Amen.

7

Artistic Gift



Painting, building, sculpting, writing, acting, drawing, dancing, singing, playing an instrument—all these and more are creative pursuits. They're modes of personal expression that arise from deep within us. With practice, an artistic gift can transform into an onstage performance, a musical solo, or a work of poetry. But the value isn't only its public display; the private gains are substantial as well.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what an artistic gift is: "Artistic gifts help you express yourself in creative and artistic ways. Gifts include all forms of artistic expression, media use, design, composition, and performance."

Ever heard of Bezalel and Oholiab? No, they're not characters from a Disney® flick. They were highly skilled artisans appointed by God and directed by Moses to work on the tabernacle, which was built with very specific instructions. This was God's portable sanctuary on earth, elaborately designed and furnished with numerous items, such as a table for bread, golden lampstand, incense altar, and the ark of the covenant. Fantastic art details crafted on expensive fabrics embellished this holy shrine, which bore the tablets of the Law and Aaron's staff.

In Exodus 36:1, Moses said,

"The Lord has gifted Bezalel, Oholiab, and the other skilled craftsmen with wisdom and ability to perform any task involved in building the sanctuary. Let them construct and furnish the Tabernacle, just as the Lord has commanded."

And if you read through the last six chapters of Exodus, you'll see just how much attention is given to detail, how nothing is left to chance. The tabernacle was the home on earth for God's glory to reside; it was to be the center of Israelite worship. It was a big deal.

This speaks loud and clear to the value God places on what artists can do, doesn't it? The gift to create wonderful pieces of art—to fashion textiles, shape metals, work wood, and cut gemstones—is a gift of powerful and enduring significance. This is what Bezalel, Oholiab, and dozens of other skilled workers brought to the table. They were ready when called upon, and they rose to the task God appointed them to do.

Your artistic inclinations may lean in other directions. Perhaps working with pottery, graphic design, or cooking is your sweet spot. There are ways to explore such avenues on your own or as part of a group. Art therapy, music programs, and creative writing workshops give you the chance to express your emotions and even provide you with therapeutic benefits as you explore your artistic talents.

Oliver's Story

Before I came to prison, I never knew how to use a sewing machine, read a ruler, or paint. Heck, I didn't even know how to cut with scissors or thread a sewing needle.

I would see other prisoners going to visit with beautiful purses, hats, and other leather goods for their families as gifts. I was amazed at the creativity and craftsmanship of those handmade items by prisoners.

One day I told Jeffery, a very talented and popular craftsman, that I wanted to make a gift for my kids.

He asked "Can you sew? Can you read a ruler? Can you cut with scissors?" My answer was "No" to each of those questions. He replied, "Dang, well I hope you can at least paint letters." Staring at the puzzled look on my face, he said "You can't do a damn thing." Finally, he agreed to teach me provided that I be diligent.

Jeffery made cutting and sewing look so easy! I would make crooked uneven cuts with the scissors, sew crooked with the sewing machine, give wrong measurements and paint outside the lines. I was messing up Jeffery's good material. But I was determined and diligent.

After many days of Jeffery's grilling, fussing, and threats of paying for the material I messed up, I got it! Now I am a master leather craftsman designing my own style of purses, belts, hats, and slippers. I am sought after for my unique creativity and quality handmade products. Thanks to Jeffrey.

These are artistic skills I never would have discovered before my incarceration because I would simply go to the mall and purchase these kinds of items. Thank God for patience, persistence, and perseverance.

Oliver

Reflection Questions:

Genesis 4 mentions Jabal and his brother Jubal, whose specialty was music: "His brother's name was Jubal, the first of all who play the harp and flute" (Genesis 4:21).

- What artistic gifts might Jubal have possessed since he was known as the "father" of *all* those who play the lyre and pipe?
- What's something creative you would like to do, music or otherwise, to bring honor to God?

Summary Questions:

- If your gift is an artistic one, how can you use it to benefit yourself? To bless others?
- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, let my artistic abilities point to You as the Creator of all good things. Amen.

8

Civic Gift



Good citizenship means many things: being neighborly, showing respect, helping others. It can also mean political participation and working to improve people's lives. That's where the civic gift comes in: seeking the benefit and blessing of others, assisting neighborhoods and communities, advocating for the powerless, and treating others as you would like to be treated yourself.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a civic gift is: "Civic gifts help you make an impact by participating as a citizen within an organized community. Gifts include advocacy, knowledge of political systems, and the ability to critically think about civic and political life."

The people of Israel endured the Babylonian exile under King Nebuchadnezzar. His armies overtook Judah, bringing destruction and despair on the people. And as had been the policy of several kings before him, he deported large numbers of Jews from their cities and homes and moved them to Babylon. Imagine the horror these people suffered being uprooted and carted off to a foreign land so far away!

But all was not lost. Even in their devastation, God had something in mind for His people: that was to trust Him and flourish where they were planted. Speaking through the prophet Jeremiah, God said,

"And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, for its welfare will determine your welfare" (Jeremiah 29:7).

Talk about making the most of a bad situation!—and so they did. They prayed, they married, they had children, they planted gardens, they sank roots, and they *prospered*.

Now we live in turbulent times. Following our best impulse is hard when bad tapes are playing in our head. So, how do we do the right thing? Prayer is the place to begin. God's interested in our welfare, and He wants us to be, too: *"And work for the peace and prosperity of the city where I sent you into exile,"* He tells us. He will give us the strength we need to do this. He always has a better picture for us than we can see for ourselves:

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope" (Jeremiah 29:11).

We can all be more civically minded toward others. In addition to God helping us to be constructive in our social interactions, in-house civic education programs teach you about your rights and duties as a citizen, encourage your participation in community service projects, and strengthen your resolve to seek the welfare of others.

Johnny B's Story

"Johnny B., you got D.B. (disciplinary board) Court today at 9 a.m., for 3 rule violations: a rule 3 aggravated disobedience, a rule 5 defiance, and rule 28 work offense."

"Alright Sarge, same ol' crap."

That used to be me at least once a week for my first 4 years of incarceration. I was angry and very rebellious. Nobody told me what to do. If it was a rule or law, then it was there for me to break it. That was my mindset.

Each time I went to D.B. Court I received sanctions from losing store privileges, visiting privileges, and up to being confined in a tiny one-man cell. That cell had no TV, fan, or anything except a hard iron bed and a toilet.

One day my parents came to visit me and told me that they were tired of visiting me behind a big plexiglass wall and talking thru a phone. And they wanted to sit, visit, and eat together like the rest of the visitors. That they wanted to hug me. And why can't I act right, that's what got me in jail. If I wanted to see my kids then get it together and get regular visiting privileges back.

That was a shock-treating turning point for me. I knew I had to get myself together for my parents and for my kids. I needed a radical change in behavior. A week later I shared my story with a visiting minister. He asked me to read the Scriptures Romans 12:1-2. The "Do not be conformed to this world. but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" part hit me like a ton of bricks. I knew it was God speaking to me thru that minister. I got a prison rule book and learned all the prison rules with determination not to break them.

It took me another 8 months or so to prove to the administration that I was changing and to give me a chance in general population. It has been 16 years since I've been given that chance. I haven't had any rule violations, and I speak to the "fresh fish" (new arrivals) about obeying the rules and getting involved in the community services available. Furthermore, I have been visiting my children and giving my mom all the hugs she desires as well as eating together as a family.

I thank God for His Word in helping me be "transformed by renewing my mind" from being known as that trouble making convict to being known as a respected model prisoner.

Johnny B.

Reflection Questions:

Matthew 5:13-16 has Jesus calling His disciples the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world."

"You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

'You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your Heavenly Father'" (Matthew 5:13-16).

In other words, Jesus wants His disciples present and ready to serve. He wants them following His example, doing the kinds of things He did in His interactions with others.

- What are some things Jesus' followers could do to show they got His message of being "salt" and "light" in the world?

- In what ways have you or others tried to be “salt” and “light” within the prison community?

Summary Questions:

- If you have a civic gift, how can you use it to benefit yourself? To bless your community?

- If you’ve seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, show me how to be light and salt to the world around me. Amen.

9

Intercultural Gift



Do you enjoy the world's diversity? If so, the intercultural gift may be yours. We all know people are complex; disputes and conflicts will occur. While ignorance and disrespect are often the bad agents, it could be misreading a person's culture, too. Showing consideration for other people's points of view is the key to overcoming prejudices and to building bridges of mutual respect.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what an intercultural gift is: "Intercultural gifts help you relate to people from other cultures and social groups. Gifts include language skills, respect for others, and the ability to understand cultural differences."

The Old Testament character Daniel practiced intercultural skills. His family knew wealth and privilege in Jerusalem, but that life ended with his exile to Babylon. Daniel's situation, however, was better than most: he was handpicked for a three-year education in Babylonian language and culture by King Nebuchadnezzar.

In Babylon, Daniel adjusted to life far away from home, but there were problems because of his faith. If church is a part of your background, you may remember from Sunday school days how Daniel was tossed into a lion's den; another episode had three of his friends sent into a fiery furnace for refusing to worship Nebuchadnezzar. In both cases, God saved them from a certain death.

In due time, Daniel's political savvy, his dream and vision interpretations, and his people skills paid off. He was promoted—and what a promotion it was!

"Daniel soon proved himself more capable than all the other administrators and high officers. Because of Daniel's great ability, the king made plans to place him over the entire empire"
(Daniel 6:3).

Daniel learned how to operate within the system. He didn't *want* to be in Babylon, but he made it work. He practiced his faith, learned the culture, and shared his ideas with intelligence and respect. The benefits to him were tremendous.

Having an intercultural gift opens doors. It nurtures relationships. It doesn't label people and dismiss them. It genuinely wants to learn about who they are *as people*—people who are not much different than we are. Programs that focus on cultural awareness and diversity can help you value and respect people's backgrounds. This knowledge helps reduce conflicts and encourages a more inclusive environment.

Jason's Story

I was born and raised in a small town called Klondike, LA. It's a close knit town of less than 1000 people. A majority of the folks are related. When I was first incarcerated and sent to Louisiana State Penitentiary, Angola, I was in a gigantic cultural shock. I have never traveled outside of Klondike.

There were all shades of people, talking what sounded like many foreign languages (though it was English) and they all looked different. I hadn't been around Blacks, Latinos, or Asians. Klondike is all white and everyone talks with the same deep Southern drawled accent.

For the first 4 months I kept to myself and was afraid to mingle with other prisoners. I saw some fellas with funny lil' caps on their heads standing and prostrating on some small rugs. Someone told me they were Muslims. I yelled out, "Terrorists are in here with us?" I was terrified to go to sleep and I watched their every move. I wasn't ready to die.

One day a new black guy was assigned to the bunk over me. We introduced ourselves and talked for a few minutes. While he was unpacking he pulled out one of those small rugs and started prostrating on it like the other Muslims. I was numb with fear! I ran to the first correctional officer I saw and told him that terrorist can't stay there or one of us have to move. The officer said the dorm was full and nowhere to move.

I was determined to not talk nor trust this 'Black Muslim. Every morning for a week straight he spoke to me and offered me something (food, drink, etc.) I never spoke back and gave him distasteful stares at every offer he made. Finally, he asked "What have I done to you? I can tell you don't like me. Why?"

Those questions were turning points for me. The next morning I told him I don't have an answer to your questions. I continued to tell him how I was raised and taught. He laughed so hard and then cleared up a lot of my misconceptions I had about Muslims, religion, black folks, and other absurd ideas I was taught.

Today, Kareem and I are best friends and I have a great understanding of Islam properly and other races of people. I am close friends with many of those same fellas (Muslims) that I feared before. I have come to respect and embrace the different religions and races of people around me.

I was known as the backwoods, prejudice racist dude. Now I am known as the funny talking country fella who gets along with everyone. I truly thank God for opening my eyes to the beauty of his diverse creation of human beings so that we may know one another and not hate each other.

Jason R

Reflection Questions:

1 Corinthians 9:19-23 sheds light on how Paul was sensitive to the cultural differences among his audience, so that he could share the Gospel with all kinds of people.

"Even though I am a free man with no master, I have become a slave to all people to bring many to Christ. When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. Even though I am not subject to the law, I did this so I could bring to Christ those who are under the law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. But I do not ignore the law of God; I obey the law of Christ.

"When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some. I do everything to spread the Good News and share in its blessings."

- How might Paul's response to people who believed and lived differently than him help open doors to conversation?

- When have you listened to someone else's beliefs and ideas and found you didn't judge them but instead simply wanted to understand them better?

Summary Questions:

- If you have an intercultural gift, how often can you use it where you are right now?

- If you've seen this gift in others, what can you do to encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, help me to look past differences and get along better with people. Amen.

10

Communication Gift



Communication: a big word for getting one's ideas across. And how is this done? Effective speech. Gesturing. Inflection. Reading an audience. Humor. Body language. Storytelling. Comic mannerisms. These are all used by those with the gift of communication. Their aim isn't simply to relay info; it's to "make it stick," to leave an impression on a person that achieves the communicator's objective.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a communication gift is: "Communication gifts help you communicate with individuals or groups in a clear and engaging way. Gifts include organization of thought, presentation, and storytelling."

Moses is a biblical character who possessed exceptional gifts in a number of areas: interpersonal, leadership, intercultural, and communication. Throughout his lifetime he had to communicate effectively—with Pharaoh, with the people of Israel, and with God Himself. As God's mouthpiece, Moses spoke a message of urgency to the people of Israel, who could be both attentive and hard-headed, and who were prone to backsliding and constant complaining.

By his own admission, Moses wasn't a naturally gifted public speaker (or was he just trying to dodge God's call on his life?).

"But Moses pleaded with the Lord, 'O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though You have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled.' Then the Lord asked Moses, 'Who makes a person's mouth? Who decides whether people speak or do not speak, hear or do not hear, see or do not see? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go! I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say'" (Exodus 4:10-12).

Moses, along with his brother Aaron, addressed Pharaoh several times about the people of Israel's captivity in Egypt. This had to be immensely difficult. Later, when Israel made its exodus out of Egypt, Moses used his communication gift often. He imparted the Ten Commandments, rebuked Israel for its idolatry, oversaw construction of the ark of the covenant, instituted a massive census, prayed for mercy on Israel's behalf, quelled family disputes, transmitted hundreds of laws and instructions, blessed the tribes and, finally, at the ripe old age of 120 passed the leadership baton to Joshua.

All these things that Moses did required skill in communication. Moses' ability was honed by practice, stepping up and taking the reins, and trusting God's promise that said, *"I will be with you as you speak, and I will instruct you in what to say"* (Exodus 4:12b). Being able to effectively communicate has many benefits, but it takes time and persistence to get comfortable with it. Your communication skills can be sharpened through public-speaking courses, conflict-resolution workshops, and participation in group discussions.

Darby's Story

I really didn't understand how important communicating properly was until I was trying to get my G.E.D. I dropped out of school in the 9th grade because I wanted to work for my daddy's shop. We placed windows in homes and automobiles and provided locksmith services. I was an accomplished window technician and locksmith around town.

I have been incarcerated for 10 years now and I decided to get my G.E.D. about 3 years ago. I took my test and passed everything except the essay part. I failed miserably. In order to get your G.E.D., one must pass writing an essay. On my first two practice tests for writing the teacher had red ink all over my paper. I was awed because I thought I was doing a good job. I asked the teacher why it was wrong. What's wrong with it? She told me that I wrote the way I talked—bad! I was very offended, frustrated and ready to quit G.E.D. school. I thought, I had been getting by with my daddy's shop with the way I talked. I had been talking like this my whole life 43 years. Who she think she is?

She talked me into staying in school because I will need it for the pardon/parole boards.

The teacher assigned a tutor to me named Joe. He took time with me and a lot of patience. He gave me the basics of English language and grammar. We practiced writing essays every day. The more knowledgeable I became the more I began to enjoy the subject. I gained a passion for it. I even began to speak differently. It also helped me become a better listener because I would listen to my friends talk and it made me cringe. After I passed my G.E.D., I was given a job as a tutor. I now work with the same guy Joe who taught me. I'm known as the English and essay "Master." I not only tutor the students, but I also help many of the legal counselors write writs properly for the courts.

Learning how to communicate properly through that process helped me choose the words I speak carefully as I ponder on the Scriptures James 3:5-11 as the tongue can be very unruly. Our spoken/written words can be a blessing or a curse.

Darby F

Reflection Questions:

James 1 imparts three core truths when it comes to communication:

"Understand this, my dear brothers and sisters: You must all be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires" (James 1:19-20).

In other words: listen to people, measure your words, check your hostility. It's a good formula for getting off on the right foot.

- How can being quick to listen and slow to speak improve understanding and communication between people?
- Can you remember when you or someone you know didn't follow this advice? How did that work out?

Summary Questions:

- If you have the gift of communication, what's one good thing you can do with it immediately?
- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, teach me to use my words wisely in my conversations with others. Amen.

11

Leadership Gift



You've likely met many who want to be leaders, but this role is not easy. The best leaders possess many qualities. In addition to good character, wisdom, and vision—courage and humility are needed, too. Leaders excel at teaching and team building. They're more eager to participate than to dictate. Those with the leadership gift have people skills that bring out the best in others to get the job done.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a leadership gift is: "Leadership gifts help you organize people to reach a shared goal and effectively lead them toward that goal. Gifts include the ability to teach and mentor, flexibility, risk taking, team building, and time management."

Throughout the Scriptures, we encounter leaders (Abraham, Esther, Samuel, Deborah, Josiah, and others). Perhaps no leader is remembered as fondly as David. The youngest of eight brothers, he was a shepherd from Bethlehem. It was David who killed the Philistine Goliath in a one-on-one contest. And later, after King Saul had fallen in battle, it was David who took the kingship of Israel, having been anointed earlier for this role by the prophet Samuel.

"And the Lord said, 'This is the one; anoint him.' So as David stood there among his brothers, Samuel took the flask of olive oil he had brought and anointed David with the oil. And the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David from that day on" (1 Samuel 16:12b-13a).

David faced obstacles on his way to the throne: family squabbles about his selection, Saul's jealousy and murderous intentions due to his popularity, and animosity from other rivals.

Now David's kingship was not always a smooth-sailing vessel. As Israel's leader, there were battles waged, a city (Jerusalem) to be conquered, and an ark to be recaptured from the Philistines. There was also the loss of at least four sons, adultery with Bathsheba, the murder of her husband Uzziah, and the prophet Nathan's stinging rebuke. But through all this, David sought God in a spirit of faith and humility as the many psalms attributed to him point out.

Leaders are not flawless. They have as many imperfections as the rest of us. But the best of them understand this and act accordingly. If they're *truly* wise, they know their work should be done as a humble and faithful servant of God, acknowledging Him and His Lordship. David knew this and despite his mistakes, he led God's people honorably. Leadership training programs can prepare you for roles, such as peer mentors, program coordinators, and team leaders in various prison activities.

Joe's Story

Growing up, I was a very shy, quiet, humble little boy who would always stay in the shadows of a group not wanting to be seen or out front. I enjoyed being out of sight with NO interest in leading anything or anyone. I enjoyed being a participant/follower in a group and doing my part.

Nevertheless, growing up as that little boy, every group, team, or establishment that I was affiliated with attempted to make me their leader or push me out front. This happened without fail with every group. I would constantly shun their offers with a bitter resentment. My thoughts screamed, "Leave me alone! I'm straight (okay) simply being a part of"

Years later in prison, I have been faced with the exact same thing throughout my incarceration. So one day, the leader of a large group (120 +) that I am a member of was being transferred to another facility. And the chatters and whispers began of who was going to “take over” the organization. It was agreed that a non-security administrative staff personnel will temporarily appoint the best qualified member as the new President until elections.

It was totally unexpected when I was chosen as that President. My usual pattern of avoiding a leadership position didn’t work this time. It was vehemently rejected by 95% of the membership. I yelled “Why me!! I don’t want to be no leader!” I was told that I possessed the right qualities of a good leader and I had no choice that I was the new President. Reluctantly, I assumed responsibility as the new President.

Over 20 years later, I am still the leader of that same organization and CEO of the financial merger. Under my leadership, we have doubled in membership, established 8 different committees with chairmen for each, and expanded our out-reach to helping nonmembers the less fortunate and elderly throughout the prison. Also, I facilitate weekly leadership classes teaching OTHER leaders and aspiring leaders with the leadership skills and characteristics that God has blessed me with.

I never saw myself in a million years being anyone’s leader, let alone over 200 plus members on a daily basis. Oh as I reflect back, we never had that election because with each election year the membership unanimously says, “There is no need, we want you to remain.”

Joe W

P.S. I can’t help but laugh at God’s humor when he remind me that Moses was the same way in running from leadership until he had no choice just like you. Truly I thank God for grooming me as a good follower which resulted in being a good leader.

Reflection Questions:

1 Timothy 3 tells us that overseers or leaders must be worthy of the position:

“This is a trustworthy saying: ‘If someone aspires to be a church leader, he desires an honorable position.’ So a church leader must be a man whose life is above reproach” (1 Timothy 3:1-2a).

- Why was Paul so intent on leaders possessing good character qualities?
- What is at stake if someone of bad character “blows it” in their leadership position?

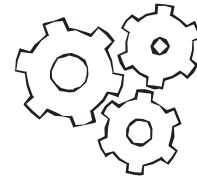
Summary Questions:

- What qualities do you see in yourself that you think would make for a good leader?
- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, as I lead let me do so by words and actions that do the right thing. Amen.

12

Teamwork Gift



Think of your favorite sports team. If they're playing well, then teamwork is in operation. The potential of a highly functioning team (military unit, assembly line, musical band even) is truly awesome. A person with a teamwork gift solves group problems by listening and responding to its members. This involves addressing issues positively, being mindful of others, and staying open to ideas.

Here's a note from Lutheran Hour Ministries' *Discover Your Gifts* workbook that shares what a teamwork gift is: "Teamwork gifts help you effectively collaborate with and work alongside others. Gifts include collaboration, communication, empathy, humility, positivity, and problem solving."

Jesus' command was for us to take the Gospel—the Good News of His life, death, and resurrection—to the ends of the earth. If this was to happen, then it was teamwork that would do it. Here we think of the apostle Paul's four missionary journeys. As he trekked the shores of the Mediterranean and sailed its open waters as far as Rome, Paul was often accompanied by disciples like Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Gaius, Aristarchus, Timothy, and several others.

Here's the Scripture that speaks about the first of Paul's four missionary journeys to the Gentiles.

"Among the prophets and teachers of the church at Antioch of Syria were Barnabas, Simeon (called 'the black man'), Lucius (from Cyrene), Manaen (the childhood companion of King Herod Antipas), and Saul. One day as these men were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Appoint Barnabas and Saul for the special work to which I have called them.' So after more fasting and prayer, the men laid their hands on them and sent them on their way" (Acts 13:1-3).

Paul's journeys took him to several cities in Asia Minor and mainland Greece as well as islands, such as Cyprus, Crete, and Sicily. Along the way, he was assisted by brothers and sisters in Christ. They gave him room and board, introduced him to other Christians at house churches and synagogues, and cared for him when he was harassed, beaten, and/or imprisoned by his opponents. It was the early Christian community that proved essential to the success of Paul's road trips and sea ventures to share the Gospel.

That's what teamwork is all about. It's joining forces, gathering resources, uniting in a common cause and dedicated activity. Both Paul's and Peter's advances in spreading the Gospel speak to the value of working with others. As the Holy Spirit blessed the fruitfulness of their message, their lives were made easier by the many support personnel who served with them along the way. When you participate in team-based activities, such as sports, group projects, and joint work assignments, you learn to cooperate and collaborate on bigger-picture objectives.

Heather's Story

My first job in the county jail was being a pod worker which is a group of women who wipe down tables, sweep and mop floors, clean showers and whatever else would be on the list of things to do. I did it to pass the time plus there were benefits that came along with the job. I'd get more phone time, extra TV time and double trays of food. There were four of us that had to work together to complete the jobs and enjoy the rewards. If one failed, we all failed.

Soon, I graduated to laundry where there were even more women (10) who had to get along and work together as a team. This time the benefits would be even greater! We would be given an extra mat to

sleep on, the newest blankets and were paid weekly, which was a big deal for me since I had no one to put money on my books for commissary so, teamwork was really an important part of my days. There were definitely all different kinds of personalities, which could prove to be a challenge but when we all worked together towards the common goal, we could make it happen. I learned that I had a gift for teamwork.

After my release I found myself working jobs that didn't require much teamwork, and I didn't thrive as much but now I am employed in a very good paying job that I moved quickly up the ladder, and our department is sectioned off in teams! We must work together to make bonuses and be the best department in the company each month. I've been chosen by my boss to train others in my department and am always more than happy to share what I've learned so we can be the best and strongest team possible.

Heather W

Reflection Questions:

1 Corinthians 12 gives us a good look at how teamwork works best. Here, Paul reminds us that though we are many, we are to be one in unity and in our joint mission to serve Christ and others.

"The human body has many parts, but the many parts make up one whole body. So it is with the body of Christ. Some of us are Jews, some are Gentiles, some are slaves, and some are free. But we have all been baptized into one body by one Spirit, and we all share the same Spirit.

"Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, 'I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand,' that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, 'I am not part of the body because I am not an eye,' would that make it any less a part of the body? If the whole body were an eye, how would you hear? Or if your whole body were an ear, how would you smell anything?

"But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where He wants it. How strange a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body. The eye can never say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.'

"In fact, some parts of the body that seem weakest and least important are actually the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care. So we carefully protect those parts that should not be seen, while the more honorable parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together such that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity. This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other. If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

"All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it" (1 Corinthians 12:12-27).

- Why does Paul believe unity among the different parts is so important when the body of Christ is working as a team?
- What are some reasons why teamwork might break down for some teams?

Summary Questions:

- How do you know you have the gift of teamwork? When have you seen this gift in successful operation?
- If you've seen this gift in others, how can you encourage them to develop it?

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, teach me to work with others, combining our strengths to do the best job possible. Amen.

Conclusion

As you've read through this Bible study, we hope (and pray) that you've seen how the gifts God gives us are real. You may have been surprised along the way. Maybe you uncovered an interest or hidden talent you didn't know you had. Maybe something you loved long ago has resurfaced once again. If so, these are good things to learn about yourself. They remind you that you are worthwhile, loved, and richly blessed by a generous Creator.

As we've said, it is God who freely gives us these gifts, and their use is for the "common good." Let's look again at Paul's words from the Introduction:

*"There are different kinds of spiritual **gifts**, but the same Spirit is the Source of them all. There are different kinds of **service**, but we serve the same Lord. God works in different **ways**, but it is the same God who does the work in all of us. A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other" (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).*

So God gives. We receive and use. And everyone is blessed in the process. One of life's true win-wins!

As we close out this study, here are some ideas to think about concerning your gift(s):

Reflect on Your Gifts:

- **Before Incarceration:** Consider the gifts you had before incarceration. What talents or skills did you possess? How did you use them?

- **Since Incarceration:** Reflect on any new skills you've acquired during this time. Perhaps you've discovered hidden talents!

- **List Your Gifts:**
 - Make a list of your gifts (before incarceration, during incarceration, and after).

 - Acknowledge that these gifts are not accidental; they are part of God's intentional design for you.

 - Recognize that even in the challenging circumstance of incarceration, your gifts are valuable.

- **Using Your Gifts:**

- **Where You Are:** Consider how you will use your gifts right where you are: (list ways to share your gifts).
 - Encourage fellow inmates through acts of service or kind words.
 - Share your artistic talents.
 - Use your teaching abilities to help others learn and grow.
 - Be present to listen for those who need comfort.
- **Beyond Bars:** Think about how you can continue using your gifts once you're released. How can you contribute to your community and society?

Three Questions to Consider About Your Gift(s):

1. What gift(s) have you discovered/explored since beginning this Bible study?
2. How do you want to use this gift in prison and in the future?
3. Can you share how this gift has already benefited you, helped someone else?

If you've looked this Bible study over but haven't begun exploring your gifts, why not begin now? With a fresh slate before you, see your life as you've never seen it before. The temptations will be great to neglect your gift, to lose heart, to blow it off and say, "Oh, what's the use!" That's the enemy talking. He's a liar, a deceiver, a thief whose *"purpose is to steal and kill and destroy"* (John 10:10a). But he doesn't get the last word on your life.

That's because the Heavenly Father has given us a Gift that can transform us from the inside out. In fact, He spared nothing in giving us Jesus for your life and mine. Again, Paul writes,

"What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since He did not spare even His own Son but gave Him up for us all, won't He also give us everything else?" (Romans 8:31-32).

Final Words of Encouragement

You may remember in the critical thinking session, we briefly looked at Paul's struggle when taking the Gospel through Greece. We focused there on his conversations with some Athenian citizens on the Areopagus, a hill near the acropolis where the Parthenon stands. His message to those leading thinkers of the day some 2,000 years ago is as evergreen now as it was then.

Paul said,

"God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now He commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to Him. For He has set a day for judging the world with justice by the Man He has appointed, and He proved to everyone who this is by raising Him from the dead" (Acts 17:30-31).

Knowing the truth of Jesus giving His life for us—then our gifts, that is, God's gifts to us—become even more important. Using them is a way of saying thanks to God for all that He has done in saving our lives now, and in giving us a future and *eternal* life with Him later: a life that will be free of the pain and sorrow we so often experience living in a fallen world.

We pray this Bible study blesses you during your incarceration. Our fullest prayer is that you receive the grace, mercy, and peace that God has promised *and given* to each of us in this life and the next. Jesus said,

"And this is the way to have eternal life—to know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the One You sent to earth. I brought glory to You here on earth by completing the work You gave Me to do. Now, Father, bring Me into the glory We shared before the world began" (John 17:3-5).

May we all take Jesus' words to heart and receive the Savior who in love and compassion gave His life—God's ultimate Gift—for each of us.

God bless you as you discover your gifts and use them to His glory!

Resources

For a FREE **certificate of completion** and a variety of ministry resources and booklets—many of which are also free—please contact Lutheran Hour Ministries.

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