

## **It Isn't Always Easy: Looking At Bible Stories Through The Lens Of Gifts**

When we look at the Bible through the lens of gifts, we see immediately that the business of using our gifts is not always easy. One bible story, Jesus and the Syrophoenecian Woman, even suggests that Jesus struggled with issues around his purpose and calling. In the end, Jesus showed a willingness to hear the voice of God through this foreign woman, and change his cultural preconceptions in the face of real human need.

We hope this guide can help junior youth understand that identifying and using our gifts is sometimes challenging. Yet, amidst the challenges, God gave us gifts for a reason. We are called to help co-create this world, alongside our Divine partner. We might sometimes deny our gifts or give up on ourselves. But God never gives up on us. Often God speaks to us in surprising ways and calls us back to being our true selves ~ created and gifted in God's own image.

This guide contains 4 Bible studies. They focus on the same stories that were briefly covered during the Make a Difference Workshop – “Gift Busters.” These resources are here to allow for further study of each story within your youth group. These Bible studies may be used in a variety of settings, including brief devotionals at junior youth events, Sunday school classes, and in depth sessions like retreats. Please adapt this guide to best fit the needs of your group.

Each story has two parts: The story itself and a series of questions that can be used individually or in a group.

This is only the beginning of looking at our scriptures through the lens of gifts. A good extension would be to ask kids to think of other Bible stories and what they have to say to us about gifts. Perhaps you will come up with a good story for us to focus on during the spring Junior Youth retreat at Silver Lake Camp.

May you find challenge and support in working through this guide.

## **Moses and the Burning Bush**

### **Exodus Chapters 3 & 4**

Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, way out in the wilderness. (Remember, he had gone to the wilderness to get away, after killing an Egyptian soldier who was harming a Hebrew slave.)

When Moses came to the mountain of God he saw a strange thing ~ a burning bush that was blazing, but was not being consumed by fire. Moses went to take a closer look and then God spoke to him: "Moses, come no closer. Take off your sandals for you are standing on holy ground."

Then God told Moses that he had seen the misery of the His people in Egypt and wanted to deliver them from slavery into a promised land flowing with milk and honey. Then God said something that really scared Moses: "I want you to return to Egypt, talk to your people on my behalf and then go to the Pharaoh and tell him to set my people free."

Moses was scared stiff. Finally he muttered, "What if the people of Israel ask me, "What is the name of the God that sent you?" So God replied, "I am who I am. Tell them that I Am sent you."

"What if the Pharaoh doesn't listen to me?" This was the next objection that popped into the mind of Moses. But the Lord told Moses about how he would stretch out his divine hand and strike Egypt with wonders and plagues.

Then Moses answered, "But suppose people do not believe me or listen to me, but say, "The Lord did not appear to you.'" Then God gave Moses the power to perform three amazing signs ~ to turn a stick into a snake and transform it back into a stick; to cover his whole hand with leprosy and then return it to normal; and to turn water into blood as it is poured onto the sand. "Surely this will convince people."

Still looking for excuses, Moses said to the Lord, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to me; but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." Then the Lord said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak."

Still not satisfied, Moses said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses and he said, "What of your brother Aaron? I know that he can speak fluently. Indeed, he shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him.

Finally convinced, but still full of trepidation, Moses decided to do what God had asked. He returned to his people in Egypt to help set them free.

## **Reflection Guide**

1. How many objections did Moses raise to God's proposal?

2. God must have asked Moses to lead the freedom flight of His people for a reason. What gifts do you think God saw in Moses?

3. What are some of the gift-busters that almost prevented Moses from using his skills and talents?

4. Making connections:

a) Who do you identify with the most?

b) Have you had any similar kinds of experiences (especially when you consider the emotions involved)?

c) How does this story connect with you today?

d) What does this story say to you about gifts in your world?

## **God and Jonah Jonah Chapters 1, 3**

One day long ago, GOD's Word came to Jonah,

“Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer.”

But Jonah had no desire to go and preach God's word to the people of Nineveh. They were an evil people, and his enemies. So rather than follow God's call, Jonah got up and went in the other direction, to Tarshish, running away from God. He went down to the port, found a ship, paid the fare and went on his way. Getting as far away from God as he could get.

God was not ready to just let Jonah run away. A big storm came and Jonah eventually decided that he needed to be thrown overboard in order to save everyone else's life. While Jonah was sinking to the bottom of the sea, a giant fish came and swallowed him, allowing him to stay alive for 3 days and 3 nights. Then the fish vomited Jonah up onto the land. He was back on the way to Nineveh.

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God spoke to Jonah again

“Up on your feet and on your way to the big city of Nineveh! Preach to them. They're in a bad way and I can't ignore it any longer.”

This time Jonah started off straight for Nineveh, obeying GOD's orders to the letter. But he still wasn't happy about it. He knew that if they repented God would forgive them, and he hated the Ninevites.

And that's exactly what happened. The people of Nineveh listened and trusted God. They repented and God forgave them.

But Jonah was furious! He lost his temper. He yelled at God, “I knew it! When I was back at home, I knew this was going to happen! That is why I ran away. I knew you were full of grace and mercy, rich in love, and ready to forgive people. I knew if I preached to Nineveh and they repented that you would forgive them, and not destroy them.

And so, Jonah sat on a hill overlooking Nineveh, brewing in his anger that they were not destroyed.

## Reflection Guide

1. What kept Jonah from exercising his gifts in the first part of this story? Make a list of gift-busters that prevented him from preaching to the people of Nineveh.
  
2. How did God respond to Jonah not using his gifts? Did God give up on him?
  
3. Did Jonah ever change his mind? How could he have used his gifts in a different way?
  
4. Making connections:
  - a) Who do you identify with the most?
  
  - b) Have you had any similar kinds of experiences (especially when you consider the emotions involved)?
  
  - c) How does this story connect with you today?
  
  - d) What does this story say to you about gifts in your world?

## **Jesus and the Syrophenecian Woman**

### **Mark 7: 24-37**

Jesus was tired and a bit overwhelmed with the challenge of teaching and healing 24/7. He decided that he needed to get away, so he went out of his home country to the region of Tyre. He stayed in a house and did not want anyone to know he was there.

Yet he could not escape notice. Word about this visiting healer spread. A woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenecian by birth. She was not a Jew, like Jesus. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.

Jesus said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'

But she answered him, 'Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'

At this moment Jesus was struck by this woman's courage, faith and humanity, even though she was not a Jew. Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.' So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

## Reflection Guide

1. What kept Jesus from exercising his gifts in the first part of this story? Make a list of gift-busters that prevented him from healing this woman's child.
  
2. What were some of the gifts that the woman used to get through to Jesus?
  
3. What gifts made it possible for Jesus to change his mind?
  
4. Making connections:
  - a) Who do you identify with the most?
  
  - b) Have you had any similar kinds of experiences (especially when you consider the emotions involved)?
  
  - c) How does this story connect with you today?
  
  - d) What does this story say to you about gifts in your world?

## **Jesus And The Woman At The Well**

### **John 4:1-42**

There once was a woman who never quite fit in with the rest of her village. They did not approve of her lifestyle and so they never welcomed her into their community. She would have to do her errands when everyone else was busy. For example, she would go and get her water during the hottest part of the day when everyone else was inside avoiding the heat.

One day as she went to get water from the well, she met a man there. This was no ordinary man, but he was a Jew, the enemies of her people. She tried to avoid talking with him, but he called her over and asked her for a drink of water. She was shocked, how could this man who was supposed to be her enemy ask her for help? Does he know she was a Samaritan, does he have any idea that even her own people wouldn't ask her for help? But he went on, and he told her, that if she knew who he was that she would be asking him for a drink of water, because when people drink his water they never get thirsty again.

That sounded wonderful! If she had water like that, she would never have to come back to the well, especially when it was such hard work in the hot sun! So she asked him for some of this water. And he responded by telling her to go and get her husband and come back with him. And she felt her stomach turn. He is about to ignore her like the rest of her village, but she had to tell him. "I have no husband".

The man smiled, and said, "That is true. I know that you have had five husbands, and the man you are living with now is not your husband". She should have been angry that he knew this already, but she couldn't believe it herself. And then she realized that he must be a prophet! And she asked him about the Messiah. Then he told her that he was in fact the messiah!

She couldn't contain herself. The long awaited Messiah was right in front of her. He was talking to her and not ignoring her because of who she was. He welcomed her. She had to tell other people! Even if they didn't like listening to her, she had to go and tell them.

She went back to the village and started yelling that she had found the Messiah. Everyone must come and meet him! He knew everything about her and promised so much more. And so the people actually listened to her. She was never the one they would have expected the Messiah to come to, but she was the one the Messiah chose.

She was once ignored among her people, and now she was the one who brought the good news to the village, and many in the community ran out to meet the Messiah, whose name was Jesus.



## Reflection Guide

1. What kept the woman from exercising her gifts in the first part of this story?  
Make a list of gift-busters that stood in her way.

2. How did Jesus help her overcome those roadblocks?

3. Once freed to use her gifts, what was she able to do?

4. Making connections:

a) Who do you identify with the most?

b) Have you had any similar kinds of experiences (especially when you consider the emotions involved)?

c) How does this story connect with you today?

d) What does this story say to you about gifts in your world?