

Study Guide



WHAT IS IT?

I agree with Ben that it would be pretty crazy to be offered a gift and then to never open it. When a gift is given to us it is expected that we will receive it and then open it. Just like Ben, opening a gift was never a question for me. In fact, I still can't wait to rip into the wrappings when a gift is given to me. Over the years I must admit that some gifts stand out more than others. I love any gift my wife, Gayle, gives me because I know it is given from a heart of love and thoughtfulness. This year she surprised me with tickets to see The Smothers Brothers in concert; something I've wanted to experience since I was in high school. (Ask your parents or more likely your grandparents if you have no idea who they are.) There were the precious handmade gifts from my sons and grandsons as well as the magnificent painting of an eagle painted by my dad. After a break-in to our house left my computer completely destroyed a couple of college students combined their resources to buy me a new computer. A member of a church I pastored sacrificed her very small income to buy me a gift one Christmas. And then there was the anonymous gift of a plane ticket for me to fly to Indiana from Minnesota to see my mother who was dying of cancer.

THINK ABOUT IT

Why do you think these gifts are so important to me? What were some of the best gifts you've ever received? What made them so special? What are some of the best gifts you've ever given? What made them special?

HOW BEN SEES IT

My two brothers, Sam and Chris, and I have always loved Christmas gifts from my grandpa. Every year he seemed to know just what three "wild and crazy" boys would love to have. Christmas Eve 1984 I received one of the best gifts ever. After bugging my mom and making Chris tearfully beg her to let us open one gift, she finally relented. Of course, we chose grandpa's gift.

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HOW BEN SEES IT continued...

Even though the box was kind of small we knew there had to be something really cool inside it. And there was; a shiny red Swiss Army Knife. Wow and double wow!!! It was a ten year old boys dream and a mother's nightmare all wrapped up in one package. This was not just a knife, this was a tool. It had 3 knife blades, 2 screwdrivers, tweezers, scissors, a saw, a cork screw, and even an unbreakable tooth pick. As soon as we got the knives out of the boxes we started running around the room. Chris was yelling, "I'm going to cut stuff!" Sam had the cork screw open and was staring at our dog with a weird grin, and I started trimming the artificial Christmas tree with the scissors. Dad quickly confiscated the three knives and said we could not have them back until the summer when grandpa could teach us the safe way to use them. Later that evening my parents had their annual Christmas Eve party and the three of us were confined to our rooms to play. That was fine with us. It just so happened that I knew where Dad had hid the knives and I decided to liven up the evening with an amazing knife show. After seating my brothers in front of me I began. I poked Chris with the tooth pick, sawed off the head of GI Joe, etched my name into the dresser and then pulled out the largest of the knife blades. With a piece of paper in one hand and the knife in the other I told my brothers that with one swift swoop of the blade I would cut the paper cleanly in half. While Sam gave me a drum roll I raised the knife and then swooshed it downwards to make a beautiful slice in the paper and also in my finger. Blood squirted all over Chris which caused him to scream hysterically and Sam gave me a standing ovation saying it was the best knife show he'd ever seen. Meanwhile I was stunned. My brothers tried to stop the bleeding with scotch tape and Elmer's glue but to no avail so while I wrapped my dangling digit in a pair of Chris's dirty underwear Sam went downstairs to be the bearer of bad news to my parents. Dad immediately wrapped the finger in some gauze and hustled me to the emergency room at the hospital. Oh was I going to get it...or so I thought. On the way to the hospital the only thing Dad said to me was, "Don't bleed all over the car." After waiting forty-five minutes we were finally ushered into one of those small rooms with a bed covered in butcher paper; not a welcome sight. I think I was more worried about what Dad might say or do than I was about my finger since I ruined one of his favorite events of the year and outright disobeyed him. With a shaky voice and tears in my eyes I told my dad that I was sorry.

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HOW BEN SEES IT continued...

He looked at me and acknowledged my sorrow and then told me that he forgave me and was sure glad I didn't cut off my whole hand. (I'd be out of a job if I had.) It turned out that the knife wasn't the best gift of Christmas 1984. My dad did not treat me in the way I deserved. He loved me unconditionally and gave me grace. That was the best gift I received in 1984.

THINK ABOUT IT

What made the knife from Ben's grandpa such a special gift? Why was the gift from his dad considered to be greater? Have you ever received a gift like that from a family member or friend?

EXAMINE IT

Ben told us in the DVD that though the cross was one of the most tortuous, excruciatingly painful devices for execution it turned out to be beautiful packaging for God's ultimate gift, Jesus. Let's take a look in the Bible for more insights to the gift that goes beyond being good.

1. Read **John 3:16**
 - Who gave the gift?
 - Why was the gift given?
 - Who was the gift?
 - Who can receive the gift?
 - What did the gift provide?
2. Read **Romans 6:23**
 - What do all sinners deserve?
 - What does God give instead?

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EXAMINE IT continued...

3. Read **Ephesians 2:8**
 - How can someone receive God's gift?

4. Read **James 1:17** and **2 Corinthians 9:15**
 - How does James describe gifts from God?
 - Why would God's gift be considered "indefinable"?

5. Read the following scriptures and then make a list of how God chooses to treat the sin of a believer.
 - **Psalm 31**
 - **Psalm 103:1-12**
 - **Isaiah 43:25**
 - **Romans 6:23**
 - **Titus 3:4-7**

6. Read the following scriptures and discover some of the reasons Jesus died on a cross for us?
 - **John 6:38-40**
 - **John 19:28-30**
 - **Romans 5:9-11**
 - **Ephesians 3:12**
 - **Philippians 2: 5-11**
 - **1 Timothy 2:5,6**
 - **Hebrews 4:14-16**
 - **Hebrews 12:2,3**

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CLAIM IT

Before we move on let's go back to where we started. A good gift will have one or more of the following characteristics: it's freely given, meets a need, satisfies a desire, involves a cost and a sacrifice, and often comes as a surprise. God has always had our best interest at the center of his heart and mind. Listen to Romans 5:6-8 and hear how God's ultimate gift touches each characteristic.

"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Our need for perfect, unconditional love was met, our desire to have our sins dealt with was satisfied, a sacrifice was made, a cost was paid, and it was all freely given, surprisingly, when we did not deserve it.

In order to claim this gift for your very own you must be a part of God's forever family and God made that process quite simple. There's no big test or obstacle course to go through. Jesus did all of the work when He died on the cross so you could get all of the benefits. The Bible says it this way:

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him." ***John 3:16, 17***

"Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God." ***John 1:12***

CLAIM IT continued...

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CLAIM IT continued...

To receive Jesus, God's ultimate gift, you only need to tell Him you believe in Him, that you're sorry for your sins, and that you want Him to forgive your sins. Once you speak those words from your heart God will welcome you with open arms and all the angels in heaven will be celebrating in your honor. You can make up your own prayer, but here is one that Ben and I usually use when we pray with folks that want to make that first-time commitment:

Dear God,

I know that I'm a sinner and I'm sorry for living a life that does not honor you. I believe that Jesus is your perfect Son who died on the cross for me. I thank you for the free gift of Salvation that you offer me and I believe by faith that Jesus is my Savior. Thank you for my new identity in you as a part of your forever family. Give me the courage to seek you more than I seek the world. Help mold my life and help me to become the person you always intended me to be.

In Jesus' Name I pray these things.

Amen

SPECIAL NOTE: If you prayed this prayer, be sure to share it with one or more of the following people: Your parents, youth leader, pastor, a friend and send Ben and me an email (ldmeagle@att.net). We'd love to celebrate with the angels in heaven your being a child of God and also send you some material that will encourage and help you with your first steps into God's forever family.

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APPLY IT

When I began youth ministry back in the 70s, (you probably weren't born yet), a man by the name of Ralph Carmichael started writing some upbeat Christian youth musicals. They weren't quite at the level of Disney's High School Musical movies but they did focus on teen issues using rock music and high energy choreography. At the heart of Carmichael's musicals was a relevant biblical message. I especially remember the musical called Tell It Like It Is! that challenged teens to examine life's journey through God's truth. One memorable song continues to help me understand just how precious God's ultimate gift of Jesus dying on the cross is for me and for anyone who would receive Jesus.

***"When I think of the cross, it moves me now;
The nails in His hands and His bleeding brow.
When I think of the cross, it moves me now.
It should have been me, it should have been me.
Instead I am free, I am free, I am free!"***

Because of the cross I am free...free from sin...free from being separated from God... free to be God's child...free to live a life with God's purpose and power...free to have personal communication with God at any time...free to love and be loved...free to live with God forever.

When you think about what God has done for you through Jesus dying on the cross, how does it move you?

What difference should it make in your life?

Are you living a life of freedom? How do you know? If not, how can you begin?

Take time today and everyday to thank God for His perfect gift to you?

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***“But thanks be to God!
He gives us the victory
through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
1 Corinthians 15:57***

***“May I never boast except in the cross
of our Lord Jesus Christ...”
Galatians 6:14***