

GIFT OF SHARING (WEEK 2 OF LENT)

STUDY GUIDE FOR SECTION TWO

- Pray a centering prayer for guidance for the discussion of the “Gift of Sharing” section.
 - The word **SACRIFICE** literally means “to do or make sacred.” In Old Testament times, the Hebrew people believed that their offerings were made holy as they were presented to God. The gift of sacrificial sharing – of generosity – is part of who we are as faithful people. It is ingrained in the DNA of those who follow Christ. How could it be otherwise for followers of Jesus – who made the supreme sacrifice – giving his life to redeem the world? As we consider God’s gift in Jesus, we are answering the call to share sacrificially, and we do so knowing that our gifts are going to a sacred purpose.
1. Teenager Lauren Gordon shares her amazement at how the impoverished mother of a very large African family offered food to her group. It caused Lauren to recognize her own tendencies to be selfish and called her to a more generous and self-giving lifestyle. Think of times the generosity of others has “held a mirror” up to your own actions. If you are comfortable sharing some of these, explain how you were changed by the experience. What changes do we need to make as faithful Christians to model generosity and help our children learn not to grasp, but to give?
 2. In Tony Dotson’s moving description of the gift of sugar cane, we see the DNA of sacrificial giving manifesting itself in an act of kindness to strangers. Recall Bible stories about similar expressions of generosity. Which ones stand out most vividly in your mind?
 3. Albano Tayengo, an AU graduate working temporarily in the NTC, remembers a good friend who died of hepatitis B while at school. Citing the text from Matthew 11:2-5, Tayengo lifts up the importance of an AU clinic where diseases like hepatitis can be diagnosed and treated. What would it be like to be ill and not able to receive proper care? What are some ways that we can be agents of healing and health through our gifts and through our deeds?
 4. Marvin Guier shares how the AU experience reminded him of the mission of the UMC – making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. How do you understand your own role in fulfilling this mission? What are ways that our joint sharing can lead to the fulfillment of our overarching mission?
- Close the session with prayer, remembering the students and faculty at AU and all of those sharing in this Lenten challenge. **ASK FOR GOD’S GUIDANCE ALONG THE WAY.**

But she said, "As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am not gathering a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

Elijah said to her, "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterwards make something for yourself and your son. For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth." She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days.

— 1 KINGS 17:12-15

I wouldn't say that I was a greedy person, but I will admit that sometimes I had even the hardest time sharing a bag of chips. It was so easy for me to think about what I was losing that I didn't realize what I could gain if I just opened my fist, even a little. Going to Africa this summer really brought it home. When I met Jane, a third grader who wants to be a doctor, at an orphanage, she took us by the hand to show us her garden and her house that she shared with her mother, grandmother and nine other children. When we went inside, her mother was cooking. This is what hit me the hardest: even though she has to feed so many and doesn't have that material wealth, she offered food to us. Yes, everything about Africa was amazing, and yes, I learned important things like the fact that they don't want our "charity." They want to know that we support them in this time of political turmoil. Watching this woman be selfless and so willing to be kind to us caused me to turn the mirror on myself and evaluate my own actions. Like the woman above, you never know what will come about when you use what you have to help and bless others. I also realized I can't just give in order to expect something. I know that God has been too good for me to hold all of my blessings to myself, so I share just because I can. That, I believe, is the least that I can do.

PRAYER: Lord, please help me to be more generous with the gifts and blessings you have given to me. Help me to realize that being able to give is a blessing in itself. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

CHALLENGE: Count the number of chips in a bag and make a donation for each.

Lauren Gordon, St. Luke "Community" UMC Dallas

DAY 6, FEBRUARY 12, 2008

*All of these people gave their gifts out of their wealth;
but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.*

— LUKE 21:4

In July 2007, our Missionary team was anxious to get to a local UMC church in Zimbabwe, Africa. We arrived early and three church members heartily greeted us. There were two males in our group and a senior member graciously invited both of us to walk with him as he led our group on a tour of the church, garden and grade school. As he proudly discussed the church history, he was overjoyed when his Pastor arrived.

The members of the church formed a receiving line and every member greeted us with a special handshake and words of kindness. While waiting for our bus to arrive, one of the American sisters observed a man riding a bike with sugar cane on the handlebars. We quickly got his attention and were ready to purchase three sticks of sugar cane. As we gathered our money a sister from the church intervened and said, "I will pay for your sugar cane." We were all perplexed as this woman living under a dictatorship, in a country with extremely high unemployment, proudly expressed her Agape love with this act of giving. Everyone in our American group was working and came to Africa University for missionary purposes. Yet, we were the beneficiaries of receiving kindness from a stranger. The woman who paid for our sugar cane blessed us by her unmerited act of kindness. This vivid reminder is similar to *Luke 21:4*.
WE RECEIVED SUGAR CANE, WHILE OUR GRACIOUS HOST RECEIVED A BLESSING FROM THE LORD.

PRAYER: Father, thank you for your kindness. Amen.

CHALLENGE: I spend \$2.00 daily on snacks. I will donate my snack money to the NTC AU Mission Initiative.

Tony Dotson, St. Luke "Community" UMC Dallas



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DAY 8, FEBRUARY 14, 2008

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations. . .

— MATTHEW 28:19

At the 2006 Annual Conference session Mary Brooke Casad and I agreed that we and our spouses should accept NTC Lay Leader Billy Ratcliff's invitation to join the group from St. Luke "Community" United Methodist Church that was planning to make their second trip to Africa University the following summer. We thought it was important for the Annual Conference Director of Mission and the Conference Treasurer to do so. Thus Kathy and I had the great privilege last July to be a part of that group.

In spite of the challenges of the trip, it was an incredibly inspiring experience. We experienced a most gracious and welcoming hospitality, not only from the pastor and team members from St. Luke "Community" UMC, but from everyone associated with Africa University and the people of Zimbabwe. We experienced the natural beauties of the land from the acacia tree to the mountains surrounding the valley in which Africa University is located to the awe and wonder of Victoria Falls to the most amazing sights of wild animals in Chobe National Park in Botswana. But more important than all of that, we experienced a vital and alive church at work! Africa University is explicitly and unapologetically a United Methodist institution.

In one morning's devotional, I confessed to the group that I had needed that trip far more than the trip or the group needed me, for it reminded me once more of the mission of the church. Even though I've long said that all of the church's financial and administrative decisions should be made in the context of the church's mission, I needed to be reminded. Africa University is a very significant way we are living out our mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

ALL OF US ARE CHALLENGED TO MAKE THIS ONE OF THE CAUSES THAT WE SUPPORT. WE WILL, AND WE HOPE YOU WILL JOIN US.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, help us to be faithful as we share the abundance we have been given in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHALLENGE: Our pantry shelves reflect our abundance. Count the number of cans and boxes of food in your pantry and make a donation for each.

Marvin Guier, Christ UMC Farmers Branch

DAY 9, FEBRUARY 15, 2008

*During the night Paul had a vision:
there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying,
“Come over to Macedonia and help us.”*

— ACTS 16:9 (NRSV)

There is a member of St. Luke “Community” UMC who closes her emails with a reminder that “We are blessed to be a blessing!” What a tremendous message for those of us with tremendous material blessings. During these 40 days of Lent, we are reminded of Jesus’ sacrifice and self-giving for the salvation, liberation and healing of humanity. His is the model of selfless giving and sacrifice which we are called to emulate.

The present and future students of AU need our help as they fulfill their divine destiny by giving back talents and resources for Africa. I shall never forget my first trip to Zimbabwe and the continent of Africa. As an African American, it was a dream that had finally come true! Seeing my look of wonderment, the baggage attendant said to me, “First time in Africa?” to which I responded, “Yes it is!” He smiled hospitably, “Welcome home my brother!” My eyes filled with tears as I immediately felt the connection to Africa and then AU. Students asked me why they did not see more African Americans come to help. This prompted me to dream of a day I could lead a team of persons to AU to be in ministry and mission with our brothers and sisters there.

The hope of Africa lies on AU’s hallowed grounds, as young people from all over Africa are educated to return home to bring change and transformation. As Paul had his Macedonian call to come and help, we here in North Texas have our call and opportunity to be in ministry with AU. Africans are not asking for a hand-out, just a helping hand! Our destinies are linked; we need each other to survive. Let us listen to the cries of the world with our hearts. We will hear what God hears.

PRAYER: O Christ, I hear your call to help those in need. Open my heart to hear what you hear. Remind me that you have blessed me to be a blessing to others! In Jesus’ Name. Amen!

CHALLENGE: Think of all those that you count as your “brothers and sisters.” Make a donation to AU on behalf of each.

Tyrone Gordon, St Luke “Community” UMC Dallas

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DAY 10, FEBRUARY 16, 2008

Take fast hold of instruction; guard her, for she is thy life.

— PROVERBS 4:13 (KJV)

There has been a resurging interest, of late, in spiritual gifts. A group of Christian friends were discussing their experiences in identifying their own spiritual gifts from the viewpoints of teachings in 1 Corinthians and Romans. As the discussion went on, the list of spiritual gifts expanded to numbers beyond those in 1 Corinthians or Romans. At the end of the discussion, however, they agreed that the one spiritual gift that was highly revered was that of **TEACHER**.

The gift of a teacher is unending. It is a life-time service to the one who receives it. Good instruction leads to gaining knowledge. Gaining knowledge, and ultimately an education, serves the recipient in immeasurable ways. There is a ripple effect from the life work of a teacher. This treasure is passed on to many for years and generations that follow.

No matter what setting a teacher is placed in, the end product – an education, is attained. To acquire an education, to provide an education, to support education is to give hope and freedom, especially to the young. Education is not only valuable, it is an essential tool for everyone. But everyone in today's world does not have access to it. Our children in America are blessed to have access to this valuable tool. Through the work and sacrifice of many in our great denomination, educational opportunities are being provided to children and youth across the globe. We see the benefit of these efforts in the work being done with Africa University. It is awesome to participate in planting the first generation of teachers and leaders from this community of higher education. The ripple effects from this educational community have yet to be felt by our world.

PRAYER: Most merciful Father, cultivate in us the will to share the gifts of our lives for your use in promoting good throughout your world. Amen.

CHALLENGE: Offer a special prayer and personal offering for a child or youth each day who does not have ready access to educational opportunities.

Ruth E. Robinson, Hamilton Park UMC Dallas



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