

God Series
“God Gives”

For the week beginning 2.20.12

The 2012 Grammy Awards show was a couple of weeks ago. We remember how this year’s broadcast was overshadowed by the death of superstar Whitney Houston. Throughout the evening, music’s biggest stars offered tributes to Houston’s memory and celebrated the victories of today’s big stars like Adele and the Foo Fighters. Yet, there was a “Story” in the crowd that few people knew about.

A songwriter named Laura Story won the 2012 Grammy for *Best Contemporary Christian Music Song*. You might not recognize Laura’s name, but you’ve heard of her work. Laura was the song writer behind the Chris Tomlin song, “Indescribable;” a song you’ve heard at CedarCreek during this “God” series. This year, Laura won the Grammy Award for her song, “Blessings.” If you listen to KLOVE or any other Christian station, you’ve heard this song, or perhaps you’ve heard it sung here at the ‘Creek. In this song, Laura asks God some provocative questions, mainly because of the journey she has taken.

Laura married Martin, her high school sweetheart. In 2006, Martin was diagnosed with a brain tumor while they were still newlyweds. Faced with a terrifying situation, Laura fought fear and loneliness as she sat in a hospital room watching machines keep her husband alive. Years later, Martin is doing better, but has not been completely healed, and Laura admits that it is hard to see how God is all-powerful and all-loving in a situation where hardship is a fact of life. But, Laura also realizes the “blessing in disguise” that has come as a result. With the success of her album, “Blessings,” Laura is traveling around the United States, Europe and South America and says she has a voice that she didn’t have before—but that doesn’t mean that it’s been easy for her. *“It hasn’t been easy,”* shares Laura. *“Everyone wants to be a mature and equipped (Christ) follower, but would I have signed up had I known what it would take? God has grown us up, deepened our faith, our awareness of our great need for Him as a savior, daily. We knew it before, but we didn’t see it. This is a good place to be.”*

During this weekend’s service, you watched the video of a mother of a one-year-old recount the blessings of her child’s life—a life that will likely end in the near future. How could she possibly see the blessings in such a heart-wrenching situation? Yet, she does see the blessings. Many of you have told us about how God has blessed your life even though your heart was broken or you lost something precious. Could it be that what we think of as “bad,” God knows is for our ultimate “good?” So, could your unemployment be a gift? Yes, it *could*. Could choosing to struggle through overcoming an addiction be a gift? Yes, it *could*. Could an illness be a gift? Yes, it *could*. This week is a great opportunity for each of us to reconsider what God gives to each one of us every day.

**“What if Your blessings come through raindrops?
What if your healing comes through tears?
What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know you’re near?
What if the trials of this life are your mercies in disguise?”**

IN THIS WEEK’S STUDY WE WILL EXAMINE THE LAVISH GIFTS THAT GOD GIVES TO EACH ONE OF US THAT TRUSTS IN HIM.

Monday – God Gave Us Christ

Big Point: God didn't have to give us ANYTHING, but God gave us EVERYTHING when He sent Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

Valentine's Day was last week. It's a holiday that encourages us to express our love for those who are special to us. Of course, we all know that expressing our love toward others should not be limited to a twenty-four hour period and an overpriced Hallmark card. Love is a tremendous gift that cannot—should not—be contained. It must overflow! As they say, "Love is the gift that keeps on giving!"

God is the Creator of love and the Bible tells us that God IS love. Of course, the Bible tells us over and over again that God loves us. Unfortunately, most of us don't really grasp what it means for God to love us. It's shameful for us to admit, that too often, God's love for us isn't enough. We say, "Yes, God loves me—but what about my health? What's God going to do about my health?" Others say, "Yes, God loves me, but what about my house payment? Why doesn't God send me the money I need for that?"

Ann Voscamp is the author of the best-selling book, *One Thousand Gifts*, and she writes about how we underestimate the greatest gift God has given to us: "He gave us Jesus! Jesus! Gave him up for us all. If we have only one memory, isn't this one enough? Why is this the memory I most often take for granted? He cut open the flesh of the God-Man and let the blood flow. He washed our grime with the bloody grace. He drove the iron ore through His own vein. Doesn't that memory alone suffice? Need there be anything more? If God didn't withhold from us His very own Son, will God withhold anything we need?"

READ & THINK...Find Answers in the Bible

We've focused on Romans 8:28 for a few weeks, but there are some other verses that also give us great encouragement because they expand upon the lavishness of God's great love for us. Read Romans 8:31-32 and reflect on the question that the Apostle Paul asks us. If God was willing to give up His Son for you, then what does that say about how God will handle the other details of your life?

Romans 8:31-32 (New Living Translation)

³¹ ...If God is for us, who can ever be against us? ³² Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?

Answer:

John 3:16 is another verse we've been focusing on lately. This verse captures the essence of God's greatest gift to humanity. Take a moment and attempt to describe the kind of love that God must have for us to give us salvation through Christ.

John 3:16 (New Living Translation)

¹⁶ "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

Answer:

Gifts are something that are given without the expectation of payment in return. Why did God give us salvation? Even though it cost Christ his life, God didn't pass along the cost to us. Why not?

Ephesians 2:8-9 (New Living Translation)

⁸ God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. ⁹ Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Answer:

LIVE...What will you do now?

How has God's gift of grace—given through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ—enriched and/or blessed your life?

For some of you, that last question might have been difficult to answer. You feel pressured by some tough circumstances in your life and so it is tough to really connect with the magnitude of God's gift of salvation. List some of the circumstances that are getting in the way of being truly grateful for your salvation:

Now, re-read Romans 8:31-32 and fill in the space provided on the following:
"If God loves me enough to send Christ to die for my sins, then I can trust that God will _____ in my current circumstance."

No one likes being taken for granted—even God. Can you relate to Ann Voscamp's words when she talks about God's free gift of salvation: "Why is this the memory I most often take for granted?" If we are so grateful for God's free gift of grace, then why don't our lives reflect more gratitude? How can your life reflect more gratitude for God's most precious gift to you?

PRAY...God, What do you want me to know & do?

We hope that by the end of today's lesson you were filled with a tremendous sense of gratitude for what God sent Jesus to earth to do on your behalf. We have all taken our salvation for granted—every one of us. But, today we get the chance to individually thank God for the free gift of salvation and reflect upon God's greatest gift of all. Take time today to talk with God about how your salvation has changed your life, and most of all, thank Him for giving you such a great gift!

Reminder: You'll Find the Daily Bible Reading commentary for the Daily Bible Reading Plan by going to www.livingitout.tv and clicking on the appropriate commentary links that precede the reading for a particular day. The Daily Bible Reading will alternate from Old Testament to New Testament throughout 2012.