

Simple Sundays

**What Are
God's Gifts?**



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Main Idea

In our busy, busy world, time is of the essence. We, as Christians, must understand that we are on God's time and that our decisions about time can reflect what we believe.

Faith Statement

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

You Will Need

Bibles, newsprint and markers, paper and pens, photocopies of clock chart and highlighters

Background

Kairos and *chronos* are Greek words for time and are used in the New Testament. For most of our lives, we experience time in order, or in "chronology." This is linear, historical time that is measured in the passing of seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years. Biblical writers talk about a time that is measured in moments of awareness of God's time. This *kairos* is measured in grace, awareness, epiphanies, kingdom experiences, and "God moments." *Chronos*, or linear time, is suspended during these moments of grace and epiphanies.

Youth recall experiences of *kairos* on retreats, at youth group events, in worship, at conferences, or on mission trips. The source of all time is our Creator. Since many people talk about the importance of time and the value of time, we study it with the hope that youth will become more aware of time and how to prioritize time in a way that reflects their values and beliefs.

The book of Ecclesiastes has texts that reflect wisdom, philosophy, and theology about the world, as well as ideas about human relationships and God's relationship with the world. The words of wisdom in Ecclesiastes seek to instruct the next generation, to solve problems, and to give form to the traditions. Ecclesiastes 3:1-18, selected for use in this session, is used in many secular songs and readings for weddings and funerals. Outside of the Jewish and Christian world, it is one of the best-known biblical passages.

This Scripture passage talks about the passages of time, the seasons of life, and the cycles of our world. It is amazing that what is written in these verses still holds true for us today. Because we as Christians understand time as a gift from God, this passage gives us a framework for living in time.

Our lives come and go through events and seasons and change as the lives of those who came before us, and as the lives of those who will come after us. We are called to experience God's gift of time and to give this gift of time to others among God's family.

You and Your Youth

This session challenges the youth to reflect on God's gift of time in their lives as a community and as individuals. In their over-scheduled family and personal lives, time issues may be a source of stress. In this session, the youth will have an opportunity to talk about time—priorities about its use and their hopes for its use, what Scripture says about time, and learning how to experience time in moments. Become more aware of how you spend your time each day and of "God time" in your life.

 **Enter**

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

Test of Time

Find a partner in the group and take turns answering the following questions. (Make sure you record your partner's answers.)

- How would you spend a weekend alone with one parent?
- How would you spend two hours after school?
- How would you spend a one-hour break in the middle of a school day?
- How would you spend a rainy weekend?
- How would you spend a day of summer vacation?
- How would you spend an evening with no homework?
- How would you spend a week in which you had no chores?
- Are you more likely to spend time meditating, praying, or keeping busy?
- Are you more likely to spend time in silence, playing music, or watching television?
- Are you more likely to spend time being productive or playing?

After listening to each other's answers, choose the questions that you and your partner answered the same. Are you surprised your partner answered the way he or she did? What comments can you make about how you and your partner spend your time? Then gather as a group and take turns repeating some of these comments. What comments can you make about how the people in the group spend their time?

Opening Prayer

God, we thank you for the gift of time that you have given us. Help us remember to take time to recognize your presence in our lives and to make sure that our decisions about time reflect our love for you. In your name, we pray. Amen.

 **Explore****Study the Bible***Bibles*

Choose a different partner and together find a place to read Ecclesiastes. 3:1–14. Take turns explaining how the passage is relevant to you and your life,

and listening to your partner do the same. Then work together to use your own language and life situations to rewrite the passage as a prayer that is meaningful to you and your life.

Help the youth distinguish *chronos* and *kairos*, two Greek words for time. The two words are used in the New Testament. *Chronos*, from which the word chronology is derived, refers to linear, historical time measured in seconds, minutes, hours, and so on. It is understood as clock time. *Kairos*, on the other hand, refers to time that is measured in grace or God moments.

As a group, brainstorm on newsprint how and when we experience *chronos* time and *kairos* time.

Use the brainstorm list you developed to figure out how your youth ministry program (church school, youth group, church, etc.) can become a community where individual persons can experience *kairos* moments. Discuss the group's ideas.

**Express**

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.

Youth Issue*Art supplies*

Using the art supplies, ask the youth to draw two clock faces (analog) and number each hour with 12 at the top and 6 at the bottom. On the first clock face, with different colored markers, color in how many hours you spend daily doing the following:

- ___ hours for sleep
- ___ hours for school
- ___ hours for study
- ___ hours for work
- ___ hours for church and church activities
- ___ hours for extracurricular activities
- ___ hours for family activities
- ___ hours for friends and social time

Discuss: Does the way your clock look surprise you? Is there an area of your life in which you would like to devote more time? Less time?

On the second clock face, and using markers, color in how you would like to use your time:

- ___ hours for sleep
- ___ hours for school
- ___ hours for study

- ___ hours for work
- ___ hours for church and church activities
- ___ hours for extracurricular activities
- ___ hours for family activities
- ___ hours for friends or social time

Action Steps

Commit together to say the closing prayer during each day in the coming week. Your group may want to agree that you will write in a journal once during the week or once each day about the experiences you have had making the distinction between “chronos times” and “kairos times” in your lives. Include in the journal ways that you can give someone the gift of time. You may wish to share your experiences or journal entries at the beginning of the next session.



Closing Prayer

Gather in a circle and take turns saying aloud the times in your life that you would like to become “kairos times”. You may also want to take turns saying aloud how you would like to change the way in which you spend your available time. Then pray in unison the following prayer:

God, we thank you again for the gift of time. We thank you for the time measured in days and years and for the time measured according to our private moments with you. Help us hear your call to make all time “kairos time” to reflect our love for you. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Let Our Talents Employ

*Rom. 11:29; 12:4-21;
1 Cor. 12:4-31;
Gal. 5:16-24; Eph. 4:1-16*

Main Idea

How many of your gifts and talents do you use for the glory of God? We will commit ourselves to use these gifts for God's good and in service to others.

You Will Need

Bibles, index cards (enough for each person to write a note to each person in the group), basket, chair, envelopes

Faith Statement

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God's image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

Background

Romans 11:29; 12:4-21; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31; Galatians 5:16-24; and Ephesians 4:1-16 all lift up the gifts that are given to the body of Christ and are used for service to our Lord and Savior. The Reformed tradition informs us that each person has gifts and talents from God. Not only are we given these gifts and talents, but God calls us to use them in the world for the goodness of God and in service to others. This, in turn, allows us to express God's love for us.

These passages are taken from Paul's letters to the people in Rome, Corinth, Galatia, and Ephesus. In these letters, Paul challenges people to use their gifts to help build God's world and the body of Christ. The varieties of gifts and talents we have make up the one body of Christ. Our understanding of the Corinthians passage tells us that we work together to use our gifts and talents so that the one body of Christ can function while receiving and spreading God's goodness and love. We must respond to God's call for us to recognize our individual gifts while working in the unity of the one Spirit. It is, therefore, important that the church continues to be a place where we are all called, have something to give, are all accepted, and are all wanted. As God's people, we are called to hear Paul's words urging us as a united body to live out the ultimate gift of grace, acceptance, love, and care in Christ.

You and Your Youth

As you prepare for this session, create a gift envelope for each youth in your group. Put their names on the envelopes and decorate the envelopes with words, pictures, or symbols of gifts or talents you know they have. Become aware of the abundance of God through the gifts you receive and the gifts you use.



Engage

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

Talent Search

Find someone in the group who can complete the tasks below. Try to find at least one person for each task. The first person to find one individual for each task below wins the contest. (Be sure to allow fifteen minutes to complete the activity. Please write on a sheet of paper the names of the people who complete each task.)

- _____ Someone who can juggle three balls.
- _____ Someone who can complete the following sequence of numbers:
8 24 16 48 40 120 112 336.
- _____ Someone who can unscramble the following words: netlat, ydettini, ilebogngn, plseidarhe.
- _____ Someone who can hum the tune to a familiar movie.
- _____ Someone who can recite words from a poem or song.
- _____ Someone who can draw how a generator works.
- _____ Someone who can stand in a circle and hop on one leg.
- _____ Someone who can draw a map that illustrates how to travel from their home to the church.
- _____ Someone who plays at least three of the following sports: football, baseball/softball, volleyball, golf, tennis, and basketball.
- _____ Someone who can play at least one musical instrument.

Gift Basket Turnover

Sit in a circle with each participant in a chair. Count off in fours. All those who are assigned the number 1 should be the gift of love. All those who are assigned the number 2 should be the gift of faith. All those who are assigned the number 3 should be the gift of hope. All those who are assigned the number 4 should be the gift of joy. The person in the center of the circle should call out any number of gifts, and those whose number (gift) is chosen must change seats. You cannot sit in a chair on either side of your current seat. If the person in the center calls "Gift Basket Turnover," then everyone must find a new seat. The person without a chair becomes the next person in the center of the circle.

Opening Prayer

O God, be with us today as we learn about the gifts of your Spirit and what it means to live as your people. Amen.



Explore

Study the Bible

Bibles

Stay in your groups of gifts from "Gift Basket Turnover." Read the following Scripture passages, giving each group a passage to study:

- (1) Romans 11:29; 12:4–21
- (2) 1 Corinthians 12:4–31
- (3) Galatians 5:16–24 and
- (4) Ephesians 4:1–16.

Each group should do the following:

- Summarize the passage in ten words or less.
- Come up with a slogan that captures the essence of the passage.
- Create a commercial about the passage.
- Present your commercials to the whole group.



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.

Youth Issue

Index cards, envelopes

Take a few index cards, one per youth in the group, and at the top of each card write the name of an individual in the group. Then on each card complete the sentence, "One gift you bring to me and our church is . . ." for everyone in the group. Put these cards in envelopes that have each person's name on them.

Action Steps

Engaging in a prayer partnership is one of many spiritual practices that we can use to experience God's presence in our lives. Find a partner and share with your partner how you want to use your gifts and talents to serve God for the next week. Covenant with your partner to pray for one another in the coming week as you commit to using your gifts and talents.



Exit

Closing Prayer

Index cards, pencils

Write on index cards one gift you are thankful for. Bring your cards and gather in a circle. Place a basket in the center of the circle. Gather together in a circle around the basket of gifts. Say aloud the following prayer of thanksgiving:

God, we thank you for the good and abundant gifts you have given us. We ask that you help us celebrate the gifts and talents of others. Inspire us to use our gifts and talents for your goodness and in service to others. Thank you, God, for the gift of Jesus Christ. Amen.



Main Idea

Some of us have never been taught to save our treasures while others of us have learned to give away our treasures to help those in need.

Faith Statement

In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit, we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks and to live holy and joyful lives.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

You Will Need

Bibles, newsprint, markers, slips of paper, copies of your church's budget

Background

Money is often a difficult topic to discuss in public. Our society treats money and the decisions persons make regarding it as one of life's most private matters. We don't want to know or talk about how someone spends his or her money. The gospel tells us differently. Our financial resources or treasures are of concern to God and to the faith community. It is a topic addressed in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. In Luke 12:13-34, Jesus challenges his followers to focus on what is truly important instead of worrying about their treasures.

Exodus 23:15-16 and 2 Chronicles 31:2-10 offer accounts of people offering tithes (first fruits or first one-tenth), and being blessed by God. Those who engage in this spiritual discipline find themselves blessed not only in resources, but also in attitude and spirit. Tithing is a difficult concept for our society, which is focused on accumulating and acquiring possessions. Many Christians, however, who engage in the discipline of tithing find their lives much more fulfilling.

Malachi 3:8-10 and Matthew 6:1-4 emphasize God's call for us to give our gifts and our treasures to the poor without regard for the recognition we will receive from others. Giving to God and giving to the poor are not things we should do for show or credit. We are called to give out of humility and gratitude. Giving our treasures to others is a discipline that expresses our gratitude to God and gives us a sense of joy in reaching out to all those in God's faith community.

You and Your Youth

We all are called to use our gifts and treasures to help others. Make yourself aware of how you use your treasures by taking part in the following activities (Money Game and Action Steps) and offering your insights.

 **Engage**

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

Money Game

Slips of paper and markers

Take turns calculating how much money you receive in a week (allowance, work, lunch money, etc.). Create your weekly treasure in one-dollar bills that you make using slips of paper and markers. Then put your dollars in piles according to how much you spend on entertainment, food, clothing, charitable giving, savings, and so on.

Where Does Your Treasure Go?

Move into small groups and discuss the following questions:

1. Where do you spend most of your money?
2. Are you satisfied with what you receive from spending your money?
3. How do you feel about your giving pile?
4. What changes would you make in using this gift of treasure?
5. How difficult do you feel it will be to change how you spend your money and how you use your treasures?

Opening Prayer

God, we thank you for the many treasures you have given us. Help us hear your call for us to use these gifts to spread your goodness and love to others. In your name, we pray. Amen.

 **Explore****Study the Bible**

Bibles

Stay in small groups, with each one reading and studying one of the following passages: (The basic subject for each passage has been identified.)

Treasure

- Luke 12:13–34
- Exodus 23:15–16
- 2 Chronicles 31:2–10

Giving to God and alms

- Malachi 3:8–10
- Matthew 6:1–4.

On newsprint, write the small group's understanding of the meaning of each passage:

1. What motivates giving to God?
2. What is the message regarding our treasure?
3. How much should we give?
4. How should we behave when we give to God and when we give away our treasures to help others?

Then gather as a group to discuss how each group answered these questions.

The Church Budget

Copies of your congregation's budget

Obtain copies of your church budget and examine it as a group. Look at how much the church takes in. Where does all this treasure come from (members, rent, special gifts)?

Look for the places in the budget where money is spent on the church itself and places where money is spent on others.

1. What percentage of the church's income is given away (total given away divided by total income)?
2. How much of the budget goes to programs for the youth?
3. How much do the youth in the church give away?
4. What would you change about the budget and how money and resources are distributed?
5. Why is giving away our treasures such a challenge?
6. Why would giving away treasures be a challenge for our youth group?
7. What does it mean to you to give away your treasures?

After answering the questions, spend a few moments in silence. You may want to use this time to reflect on what you learned in the Money Game and in examining your church's budget. During this time, challenge each other to make a commitment to God to give your treasures.



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If you do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant to your own life.

Youth Issue

One friend believes that people who live in poverty are in poverty because of choices they made. Another friend vows to accumulate as much wealth as possible and believes equal opportunity to accumulate wealth exists for everyone. How would you respond to these two people? What do their thoughts tell you about how they value people and treasures? How can your faith help you inform your friends about what the gospel teaches us about our treasures? Do you believe you have a personal responsibility to people who live in poverty? How do your spending habits and the choices you make about your personal treasures affect others?

Action Steps

This week keep a record of how you spend your money. Think about the things you learned in the session. You may want to use a journal to write about how your faith affects the ways you spend money and how you decide to use your treasures to serve others.



Exit

Closing Prayer

Gather in a circle and take turns saying aloud one hope you have for the coming week. Close by saying the following prayer:

God, we thank you for reminding us of the many treasures you have given us and for teaching us how to use these treasures to serve others. Give us the courage to give our treasures to others in gratitude and love without regard to the attention and recognition we may receive. Continue to make us mindful of the needs of others and your will for us to reach out to them. In your name, we pray. Amen.



The Priesthood of All Believers: Do We Hear God's Call?

*1 Sam. 3:1-21;
Matt. 4:17-25; Eccl. 3:9-14
John 4:4-42; 1 Pet. 2:4-10;*

Main Idea

God calls us to assess our gifts and to respond to God's call to be part of the priesthood of all believers.

Faith Statement

The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, . . . and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.

—A Brief Statement of Faith

You Will Need

Bibles, continuum and list of statements on newsprint, river stones

Background

This unit explores three accounts of God calling ordinary people to extraordinary tasks. The first of these—the call of Samuel in 1 Samuel—is a story of confusion. The wiser, elder Eli does not understand when Samuel, thinking Eli has called his name, asks him what he wants. Twice Eli tells Samuel he hasn't called his name. The third time that Samuel asks Eli if he has called, Eli suggests that Samuel respond to the voice by saying, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." At this point, Eli suspects that God is calling Samuel. There are times when God's call can be hard to understand completely, so it may take us a while before we realize what we are being called to do.

The call of the first disciples in Matthew 4:17-25 is particularly interesting. The disciples leave their fishing responsibilities without questioning Jesus. There are times when we, like the disciples, simply follow God's call on faith and without knowledge of the future.

The call of the Samaritan woman in John 4:4-42 is significant because she was scandalous and less than an ordinary person. God calls individual persons who are often outcast as being worthy of being called to receive and spread God's love. The woman is called and then—in an act of evangelism—she tells the people in her village about Jesus.

First Peter 2:4-10 and Ecclesiastes 3:9-14 encourage us to follow God's call. In 1 Peter 2:4-10, God's people are metaphorically described as living stones in the living temple built on the cornerstone of Christ. We are part of the priesthood of all believers. Our faith informs us that we are all priests. In other words, we are all called to make an offering to God. No longer are the duties of worship, sacrifice, confession, and care relegated to the priests who

are religious professionals. We are all called to assume this identity and to respond to God's call. In Ecclesiastes 3:9-14, we are called to live with joy and gratitude for the goodness God has given and to take pleasure in all that we do for as long as we live.

You and Your Youth

This session calls the youth to reflect on being called by God to be a living stone in the temple and a member of the priesthood of all believers. Review the Background section and use it, along with your understanding of the passages, to help guide your discussions. Pray that the youth in your group hear and respond to God's call to them.



Engage

Learn names, encourage interaction, and laugh together as the session begins.

Call Continuums

Prepared newsprint, markers

Post the following statements on separate sheets of newsprint with a continuum line drawn beneath each statement. Beneath the continuum line, write the following responses: Totally Disagree—Don't Know—Totally Agree.

- I have a call from God to serve God in the world.
- I know what my gifts are.
- I know what I am called to do with my life.
- It doesn't really matter what I do with my life.
- I want to serve God, but I don't know what God wants me to do.
- I am part of the priesthood of all believers.

Respond to the statements above. Mark where you agree or disagree with the statements along the continuum line.

Opening Prayer

God, we ask for your courage to respond to your call. Help us listen to you and to understand that you call us all to use our gifts in unique ways. Be with us as we learn how you have called ordinary people to do extraordinary things and, as we discern your call for us, to act as part of the priesthood of all believers. In your name, we pray. Amen.



Explore

Study the Bible

Bibles

Divide into three small groups, with each group taking one of the passages below. Pretend you are journalists. As you read and study the passage, answer the basic questions of journalism: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? Then gather so that the groups can take turns presenting their findings in the form of live television news broadcasts.

1 Samuel 3:1–21—Call of Samuel

Matthew 4:17–25—Call of the Disciples

John 4:4–42—Call of the Samaritan Woman

Discuss the calling of each person in the stories:

1. How does God call them?
2. Why does God call them?
3. How does God call us as a group?
4. How does God call us as individual persons?

Think about how God calls you and on paper write how you believed we are called as people of faith.

Dialoguing with God

Dialoguing with God is one way we can experience God's presence in our lives. This spiritual practice may offer opportunities for individual persons to discern God's call to them, in addition to being a relaxing meditative exercise. Follow these instructions:

- Find a comfortable, quiet spot in your meeting space.
- Choose one of the five passages selected for study in this session.
- Take several deep breaths and exhale slowly. Read the passage silently.
- Then read the passage silently a second time.
- If a word or image catches your attention, stop and hold on to the word or image.
- Reflect on why the word or image is significant. Try to make the passage real for you. Remember that God is speaking to you.

Then answer silently the following questions:

1. Do you have a clear understanding of the passage?
2. What is the passage saying to you?
3. What is God saying to you about your life now?
4. About what do you want to dialogue with God?
5. How is the passage relevant for you and your life today?



Express

These discussions are an opportunity to apply the Scripture to our lives. If the youth do not seem to relate to these situations, then change them to make them relevant.

Youth Issue

How have you experienced God calling you in your life? Did you respond to the call at once? If so, how did you respond? Is this a call for you to pursue a job or a vocation or to move to some action? How

is God's call to individual persons depicted in television shows and movies?

How would you describe God's call to you to someone who doesn't believe that God has called them? What are some ways you might suggest someone use to listen to God?

Action Steps

Bibles, river stones

As a group, read 1 Peter 2:4–10. Discuss the meaning of the priesthood of all believers and what it means to be a living stone.

Take a river stone. Remember to carry your stone with you throughout the next week. Hold the rock when you feel discouraged, overwhelmed, or alone and say:

God, we are living stones in your household. You have given us gifts, talents, and treasures and you call us to a life with you.



Exit

Closing Prayer

Read Ecclesiastes 3:9–14 as a charge. Turn to the person on your right and say to them, "You, (*name*), are a living stone in the household of God," and give him/her a hug. Continue around the circle. Close by thanking God for God's good gifts.