

Living a Chocolate Life

SESSION 7 *GIFTS*

A CHOCOLATE SAMPLER

Check all that apply to you, and then discuss as a group:

- You live a rich, chocolaty life as you become sweet, even in bitter circumstances, by the grace of God. (Share an important insight from the last session and enjoy a Memory Morsel moment.)*
- You love to give chocolate-themed gifts.*
- You've saved your chocolate for so long that it has changed color.*
- You have a special memory of receiving a chocolate gift for your birthday, Valentine's Day, Christmas, or another special occasion.*
- You own a chocolate sign, T-shirt, or bumper sticker.*

MEMORY MORSEL

"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone." 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Saved Gifts

My children, when they were young, loved to receive chocolate candy gifts just as much as the next child. However, they developed a tendency to hoard

them. Some kids devour every bit of chocolate in their assortment boxes, baskets, treat bags, or stockings, leaving a large pile of wrappers and an even larger tummy ache as the only evidence. Not my children. They would savor a piece or two, then carefully count and label their stockpile and put it on the shelf. Then they'd forget all about their stash, and I would have to stare at its tempting chocolate goodness. (It was clearly off-limits because it was not labeled with my name!)

Eventually my children would rediscover their months-old chocolate stash, only to find stale, hard, strange-colored chocolate inside. Chocolate has a short shelf life, and their saved gifts often appeared to be spoiled.

How often do we carefully set aside many of God's rich and splendid gifts, saving them for the right opportunity, only to neglect to use them entirely? We set His Word on the shelf. We fail to serve or reach out to others. We neglect to share what we have so generously been given. We don't use His gifts as we ought.

God's greatest gift of faith is freely given and instilled in us by His Holy Spirit in our Baptism and through the Word. It fills us, enabling us to believe in our Savior, Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection paid for our sins, our neglect of His Word, and our many failures. The Spirit also gives us other gifts and the ability and desire to use them, that we may share His grace with others and begin glorifying Him *now*. Let's begin by growing in His Word . . . *now*!

Growing Up

#1 dig in!

- a. Read **Ephesians 4:11–16**. What is the role of pastors and shepherds, and what's the purpose of equipping and building? How are all members of the Body involved in the "work of ministry" (v. 12)?

- b. The last two verses of this passage, **verses 15–16**, talk about growth. How do we "grow up"? Who is the Head of the Body? What happens when each part is working properly?

As members of the Body of Christ, we are united, built up, and strengthened by the Gospel, that we may use the good gifts with which God has richly blessed us. As we do, we participate in the work of ministry, sharing the love of Christ in our vocations.

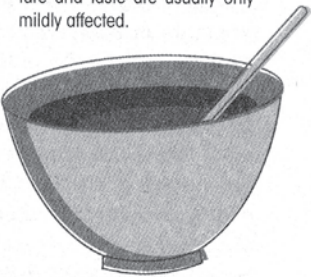
By the Spirit's leading, may you continue to grow up in Christ. Respond to His loving invitation to grow in the Word, that you may be prepared for Christian service, using His good gifts!

Gifts from God

Everything we possess is a gift from God, given by His grace to be used to benefit others and to glorify Him. Our gifts are the instruments through which we get to share God's sweet grace with other believers and with those who need to hear of His saving love.

#2 dig in!

Read **1 Peter 4:10–11**. How do the two gifts stated here encompass many of the specific gifts we may possess? What do we learn about the use of each gift?



CHOCOLATE FUN FACT

Chocolate usually appears shiny, but don't assume it has spoiled if the surface has developed a mild gray or white appearance. This outer change is called "bloom" and it reveals that the chocolate has undergone changes in temperature. The texture and taste are usually only mildly affected.

#3 dig in!

God gives us a brief picture of the vast varieties of His gifts in this session's *Memory Morsel*, **1 Corinthians 12:4–6**. Take a closer look and make note of the powerful threefold repetition of two important truths. What's different and what's the same? Personalize these to your role(s) as a member of the Body of Christ.

Vital Ingredients

Our very favorite chocolate recipes contain a wide variety of ingredients. Take, for example, my much-loved *Triple Chocolate Rocky Road Brownie Pizza* (the recipe follows at the end of this session). It cannot fully satisfy my cravings if even one item is left out because each ingredient plays a special role in the making of the whole. At a glance, I know that I will delight in a dessert containing chocolate chips, nuts, and marshmallows and topped with chocolate drizzle. But while these ingredients are the most noticeable, that doesn't make their contribution to the pizza more or less significant than other ingredients. Under the tasty toppings lies the brownie base, which contains several vital ingredients. Without sugar, where would I find sweetness? A spoonful of vanilla and a scoop of cocoa add bursts of flavor. Flour and butter give the pizza a chewy, moist consistency. I don't see the eggs, but if omitted, the batter would not hold together or rise quite the same. Without each and every ingredient, it wouldn't be the brownie pizza it was intended to be.

Have you ever thought of yourself as a vital ingredient? You are! You are an indispensable member of the Body of Christ!

#4 dig in!


With the dessert pizza in mind, read **1 Corinthians 12:12–25**. Now study the passage slowly, inserting the reference for the verse(s) to which I'll allude in the following fun examples; and as you do, envision the Body of Christ and each member as a vital part of the one Body.

- If the flour should say that since it's not a chocolate chip, it doesn't belong to the pizza, that wouldn't make it any less a part of the pizza.
- If all were a single ingredient, where would the dessert pizza be?
- As it is, there are many ingredients, yet one pizza!
- All ingredients in the pizza have the same care for one another.

Whatever your role, it is indispensable to the Body as a whole. God gives gifts as He knows best (**v. 18**). They may seem disproportionate to us (sometimes it seems the chocolate chips get all the attention), but only because we cannot see the bigger picture or the finished result in the way that God can. Maybe your gifts are noticed by others, or maybe they blend in with those serving behind the scenes. Maybe your role in the Body of Christ, like the blended ingredients in the pizza's brownie base, is to add sweetness, flavor, or consistency. Every member of the Body, regardless of his or her role, works to *hold together* the whole! God uses every one of His chosen ingredients for His purpose and His glory.

Using God's Good Gifts

"Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above" (James 1:17). When we talk about being faithful stewards (look again at **1 Peter 4:10**) with the good gifts God has given us by His grace, we can refer to His gifts as *treasures*, *time*, and *talents*. To be a steward is to use God's good and perfect gifts that we've been given, according to His will, sharing them with others.

 **TAKE A BITE**
Consider some of the personality traits, skills, and talents that you possess. What comes to mind right away? And how are you uniquely packaged within your surroundings, family, and circumstances?

Treasure

Perhaps you have been blessed with material treasures you can share, as an expression of God's love, to assist those in need and to assist with the growth of God's kingdom. Maybe your funds will help a local church or ministry agency, or support a needy child or mission on the other side of the world. Could your treasures contribute to filling a food pantry? Have you been blessed with clothing or furniture that you could give to a neighbor in need or to an organization that reaches out to those who need to start over? God works through our humble offerings to bring the message of salvation next door *and* all over the globe!

#5 dig in!

- a. Turn to **2 Corinthians 9:7–8**. What does **verse 7** say about the attitude of our hearts as we give of our treasures? How can we become cheerful givers?

- b. What's so significant about the repetition of "all" in **verse 8**? How is God at work, and what happens in and through us as a result?

Time

We are all given the gift of time, although many of us wonder what happens to it! It's easy to envision storing up our treasures, but what about time? When we fail to use our time wisely or choose to use it only for selfish purposes, we neglect to use God's gift as He intended. We praise Him for His great gift of grace that continues to pour down over us, even when we've misused any of His good gifts (treasures, time, or talents). And we look to His strength to lead us and enable us to give again.

#6 dig in!

In **Ephesians 5:16** and **Colossians 4:5**, we are encouraged to do something that concerns our time. What is it? How can you do this as you consider your relationships, interactions, and opportunities, and as they intertwine with God's desire for you to impact the world for Christ? Discuss.

Use God's precious gift of time in your church and community, in your home and school. Learn where service is needed in local ministries or in stateside or overseas mission work. By His grace, you can *make the best use of your time* for the good of others and the advancement of the Gospel. As you give the gift of time, God will use you to have an immediate and eternal impact on others' lives.

Talents

God has given each of us talents, abilities, and personalities that are unique to us. Picture an enormous box of assorted chocolates. Each candy is filled with something delicious and different. Similarly, God fills us with personality traits and skills that He creatively chose for His special purpose. Maybe we haven't even discovered all of them yet. Adventures await as we uncover and explore our God-given talents and gifts!

You have a one-of-a-kind shape and flavor, created from a set of ingredients God used just for you. And your life is packaged like no other.

Romans 12 gives us a list of gifts that we may draw from, and once again, we see the word picture of the one Body and its many members with different functions and gifts.

#7 dig in!

- a. Read **Romans 12:4–8** and write out the gift list. We each have unique and specific opportunities (using our treasures, time, and talents) that fall within these many broad gifts, given according to His grace. In the space below, write one or more of the **Romans 12** gifts that speaks to you, based on your responses when asked to *Take a Bite* above.

b. Pray, ponder, and discuss how you may use these gifts. Share ideas with others in your group. Get specific. For example, if your gift is leading, where does or could that take place? In what capacity? For and with whom?

What about gifts and talents you've been afraid to use? Don't let them sit on the shelf; resist the notion that they should be saved up or stored. When you or others recognize a gift you have, ask God how He'd like you to use that gift *now!*

- You think of the person you've noticed who needs help putting food on the table, and you are a generous giver. Step out. Don't wait.
- Or maybe you have a friend or family member who needs encouragement and you are a good listener. Go to her now. Pray *for* her and offer to pray *with* her.
- The church is looking for volunteers to teach, and you love sharing God's Word. Don't be afraid to give teaching a try.
- A short-term mission opportunity has just been announced, and the team is looking for another person to serve. You love a challenge, and serving is right up your alley. Inquire!

Unlike chocolate with its short shelf life, our saved or stored-up God-given gifts won't appear to spoil. But if we don't use them, they cannot benefit others. People would miss out on the rich blessings and grace of God they could receive through us. May we, as members of the Body of Christ, serve others, give generously, and reach out in His name using our God-given gifts! To Him be the glory!



*Living a Chocolate Life,
we use God's good gifts!*

PRAYER

Sweet Supplication

Dear God, please forgive me for often storing up and saving Your good and abundant gifts, for failing to use them for Your purposes. Give me the desire to grow in Your Word and in the unity of faith as a member—a vital ingredient—of the Body of Christ. Show me how and where I may use my many gifts today for the benefit of others and for Your glory. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

✦ TAKE A BITE

Think about the many treasures you possess and how you can share them in the name of Christ to help others and to show His love. What needs have been brought to your attention? How and where can you provide these God-given treasures for others near you? far away?

✦ TAKE A BITE

When and where have you set aside, saved up, or stored some of God's gifts, not using them as you know you should?

Triple Chocolate Rocky Road Brownie Pizza

12 oz. (2 c.) milk chocolate chips, divided
¼ c. unsweetened baking cocoa
2 c. mini marshmallows, divided
1½ c. flour
1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. salt
⅔ c. vegetable oil
4 eggs, slightly beaten

2 c. sugar
½ c. coarsely chopped nuts
¾ c. white chocolate chips
1 tbsp. butter
2 tsp. vanilla

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Cut parchment paper to fit a 15-inch round pizza pan or pizza stone. Combine flour, sugar, cocoa, baking powder, and salt. Set aside. Combine oil, eggs, and vanilla; add to dry ingredients. Mix in 1 c. chocolate chips and 1 c. marshmallows. Do not overmix. Spread batter in prepared pan or on pizza stone. Sprinkle remaining 1 c. chocolate chips, 1 c. marshmallows, and chopped nuts over the top. Bake 20 to 25 minutes; let cool. Melt white chocolate chips and butter in saucepan over low heat. Drizzle over cooled pizza. Let set. Slice and serve. *As you savor each bite, marvel at how every vital ingredient worked together to create the whole pizza!*



CHOCOTIVITY

Your Chocolate Personality!

As God continues to reveal to you the unique and amazing gifts He has given you for the good of others and for His glory, consider how your personality plays into the expression and use of your gifts. Are you the nut-filled variety? a cherry cordial, perhaps? a chewy caramel or a rich truffle? As we consider the personality traits with which God has filled us, we can better understand and fulfill the purposes He has for us, using those unique traits to share His love with others. While the following is not an actual personality test, it does provide a glimpse of primary personality types, *chocolate style*, for you to examine. Circle those that apply to you most, and discuss all, as they may apply in lesser ways. (You may be “filled” with a little of each of these, but one or two will likely dominate.) Ask for input from each woman in your group and from others who know you well.

Nut-Filled = Industrious; Worker Like the busy squirrel that stores food for the winter by filling trees with nuts, this not-so-nutty personality works diligently and efficiently behind the scenes; she gets the job done. She is organized and pays attention to detail too.

Cherry Cordial = Loyal; Pleaser Open this special chocolate to find a big red heart (cherry). This tenderhearted personality is always thinking of others, loves to please, and would give the shirt off her back if someone needed it. You can count on her in times of need.

Caramel-Filled = Outgoing; Communicator Like a thick, chewy, caramel-filled chocolate (the kind that you have to chew and chew), this personality is always moving her mouth to communicate freely and lovingly toward everyone around her. Bubbly and extroverted, she loves the company of others.

Dark Truffle-Filled = Motivational; Leader The strong, bold flavor of a dark chocolate truffle makes this candy the perfect match for this dominant personality. Bite into the center and your taste buds wake up and pay attention. Through her words and actions, and by her example, she leads others well.