

THE GOD OF AMAZING GIFTS

Extra Ideas

Here you will find extra ideas to help you further explore the teaching from *The God of Amazing Gifts*. These are designed to help you take opportunities in your day to explore with your children the big themes of that day's Bible teaching.

Some are suggestions for conversation starters; others are activities to help you enact what you've talked about. There are two ideas for each day, as well as some other general ideas for family activities and conversation over the course of Advent.

Ideas for Activities

- Put on a nativity play (you could dress up yourselves, or use toys, build Lego scenes or make a shadow-puppet show). As well as narrating the story, encourage your children to tell the audience what we learn about God the Gift-Giver and his Christmas gift at each stage of it.
- Make homemade Christmas cards along a gift theme and include a verse or truth about God the Gift-Giver and/or his Christmas gift.
- If you're making Christmas gingerbread or other cookies, make them gift-shaped! Why not bake them as gifts for friends and family and include a gospel, evangelistic book, or invitation to a church service to help them find out more about God's Christmas gift?
- If you make a traditional Christmas pudding on stir-up Sunday, why not encourage everyone to thank God for something as each ingredient is added or each person takes their turn to stir?

Ideas for Conversations

- Do your children have an Advent calendar? You could encourage them to pause as they open it each day and give thanks for gifts God has given them—one gift for every door opened so far. A great way to encourage a practice of thanksgiving!
- Whenever you're choosing, making or wrapping Christmas presents together, let that prompt a discussion about gifts you have enjoyed from God that day.
- If the children are allowed to examine some Christmas gifts ahead of opening them to guess the contents, talk about the clues (promises/ prophecies) God gave people to help them recognise the Messiah when he arrived.
- Lots of writing of names happens in the run-up to Christmas: Christmas cards, envelopes, gift labels, maybe even place settings. Get your children involved, and as you work through your list of names, see if they can remember the meanings of the names Jesus and Immanuel. Ask: what does each name show us about God's Christmas gift? And: what other names did Isaiah call the promised child in Isaiah 9 v 6?

Session-Specific Ideas

Day 1: Best Gift Ever

- If you have a time of family prayer, invite everyone to brainstorm words to describe God and what he's like. Turn each of those descriptions into prayers of praise. It could be as simple as saying, "God, you are... wow!"
- As you fill jugs or glasses with water at a meal, or run baths, ask the children who it was that David thirsted for. Why was that so amazing in his circumstances? What did that tell us about God?

Day 2: The Greatest Giver

- Set an alarm for three to four different times over the course of the day. When it goes off, pause and look back over the last hour: what gifts from God have you enjoyed in that time? Thank him for them!
- If you are preparing a meal together, invite your children to help you identify where each ingredient comes from. Where did today's psalm tell us all our food comes from ultimately?

Day 3: Thanks or No Thanks?

- At a moment in the day when it's natural and right to express thanks, use that as an opportunity to remind your children about Romans 1 and people's failure to give thanks to God.
- If you find yourself swapping one item for another or swapping places with someone, ask the children what exchange or swap people make, according to Romans 1—what do we love instead of the Gift-Giver?

Day 4: A Very Old Promise

- If you find yourselves waiting for someone or something today, talk about how God's people in the Old Testament waited and waited for God's promised gift. How exciting it must have been for the first people who realised he'd arrived!
- If you'd like to look at some other Old Testament verses about God's promised gift, here is a small selection: Isaiah 53; Jeremiah 23 v 5-6; Daniel 7 v 13-14; Micah 5 v 2.

Day 5: What Sort of Giver?

- Is there a Christmas film you might enjoy watching as a family? Talk together afterwards about what you discover in the film about a key character. Ask what Mary discovered about God as the angel announced Jesus' birth.
- If your family enjoys Scrabble or Bananagrams, work together to spell out as many words as you can that tell us something about God's character. You could lay out "powerful" and/or "gracious" as a starting point. If you want to increase the challenge, make sure the words are all interconnected as in the real games!

Day 6: Just What We Need

- If you give thanks before your meals, invite the children to give thanks for all the different needs God has met for them that day. Finish by thanking him for meeting our biggest need.
- Look out for an opportunity to swap with your child at some point in the day to take in their place something that is in some way unpleasant—a chore, even perhaps a punishment for something they've done wrong. Hopefully they will be at least grateful, perhaps amazed, by this little picture of grace! Talk to them about how amazing it is that Christ died in our place for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous.

Day 7: Christmas Presence

- Plan when you are going to spend some time together in the day, even if it will be short. Begin your time together, whatever activity you're enjoying, by thanking God for being with you by his Spirit and for his forever presence.
- Encourage one another to spend some time alone with God in prayer, thanksgiving, and in his word before you go to bed.

Day 8: How to Receive

- Look out for ways you can show God's concern and kindness towards the poor and those in need today.
- If you find yourself discussing pain or need in your own lives or in the wider world, talk about how difficulty and brokenness can make us more likely to realise that life isn't as it should be and we aren't as we should be, and can show us that we need God's mercy.

Day 9: Out with the Old

- Do you have old toys or clothes that your children have grown out of that they could make a gift of to someone? As you parcel them up to give away, you could discuss what "out with the old" means when we talk about repentance, for example. What else does "out with the old" mean in terms of our relationship with God?
- Watch out for other "out with the old" moments in the day that you could use to start conversations on this topic: putting out the rubbish, for instance; putting old newspapers or other paperwork out for recycling; gathering and disposing of leaves in the garden, etc...

Day 10: Joy That Lasts

- Consider taking up one of the following "fuels for joy" this Advent:
 - Bring songs of praise that remind you of God's goodness into daily life. Could you choose a small selection of songs to listen to, sing regularly and learn together as a family?
 - Have a regular time of thanksgiving together. What regular slots are there in your day when you are together and could simply list the gifts God has given you and thank him for them?
 - Revisit the truths you come across in your Bible times or Sunday services. Could you share "One thing that has struck me about God today" as part of a daily meal?
- If there is a moment of particular laughter, fun or celebration in your day, tell the children, "We're just like the shepherds who met Jesus— bubbling over with joy!"

Day 11: For the Whole Family

- If you would like to pray for and support God's family around the world, you will find helpful resources at these websites: www.operationworld.org and www.opendoorsuk.org/resources/prayer
- Who could you invite from your neighbourhood into your family home, who you haven't welcomed before— for a coffee, a meal, or to play?

Day 12: Worth the Cost

- If you find yourself making a journey today, remind the children of the long journey the Magi were willing to undertake in order to find Jesus. Ask: why was Jesus worth that cost?
- Are you having to make any spending decisions? Talk to the children about how you weigh up whether a particular purchase is worth the cost. Ask: what had the Magi realised about Jesus? What did Herod value more highly than Jesus?

Day 13: Undeserved

- Learn Ephesians 2 v 8-9 by heart together. Try the following to help you memorise it:
 - Try setting it to a tune you're all familiar with.
 - Break it down into phrases to begin with. Have fun repeating bits of it together—loudly, quietly, in silly voices, to a rhythm, taking turns with words.
 - Write it on a dry-erase board and practise saying it together, gradually rubbing out words.
 - Use a ball: bounce a ball between you, saying a word of the verse for every bounce. Or throw a ball to one another. Whoever catches it has to say the next word in the verse.
- Give your children a gift—just because! It could be as simple as a cookie or other treat when they're not expecting one. Tell them it is a gift of grace: an undeserved, unearned gift that you've given them just because you love them. Remind them that salvation is God's gift of grace.

Day 14: The Gift of the Future

- What fellow Christians do you know (personally or around the world) who are facing really hard times at the moment? Why not spend time praying for them together? Pray for their relief, but also pray that knowing the gifts God has promised them in the future will give them joy and hope now.
- Talk about something connected to your family that you are all looking forward to (such as a family gathering, a holiday, or another family tradition). Ask: what do God's children get to look forward to because they are part of his family?

Day 15: God with Us

- At moments when you are helping each other in some way, pause and discuss the different ways God's Spirit helps us. Are there any others you've come across elsewhere in Scripture? Share ways you have experienced the Spirit's help today or this week.
- If you find yourselves preparing, serving or eating fruit today, run through the fruit of the Spirit together and ask your children if there's a particular element of the Spirit's work they'd like prayer for.

Day 16: Family Conversation

- You might like to learn the Lord's Prayer together and/or come up with drawn symbols to help you remember the different elements of the prayer. There are many Lord's Prayer colouring sheets online if you want to print and colour in copies.
- Have a time of prayer where you practise using the different elements of the Lord's Prayer as a model for your own prayers.

Day 17: Gifts for Today

- Shopping-trip prayers: do you have any (online or in-store) shopping to do today with your children? Before you start, pray with them asking God to give you what he knows you need. Afterwards, with the children, thank him for the things he provided. Tell him you trust that he knows best about anything you weren't able to get.
- If you're preparing sandwiches together, for instance, talk about what "our daily bread" means for our prayers. Give your children the opportunity to share with you any needs they'd like to talk with God about

Day 18: When Gifts Don't Seem Good

- As a household, decide on a key word or a phrase that you agree to say to one another when something goes wrong in your day to remind you that God is working through that event to make you more like Jesus. It might be something silly, designed to help you smile in the moment. Or it could be words from Scripture to help you recall the truths of today's passage: "in all things God works..." It might be a statement and response: "This is the day that the Lord has made", "Let us rejoice and be glad in it".
- If appropriate, before bedtime, share your highs and lows from the day and ask what opportunities God gave you all in the day to become more like Jesus.

Day 19: Giving like God

- If relevant and appropriate, talk with your children about any relationships you know they are finding difficult at the moment. If there's someone who they've been upset by, can they come up with a way they can do something kind for them? Help them work out how and when they can put their idea into practice.
- If you spot an opportunity while you're with your children to undertake a random act of kindness, enjoy doing that together. Or suggest that they look out for an opportunity in their day.

Day 20: Giving up and Taking On

- If today you notice a member of your household (or your church family) doing something costly to serve someone else or in their service of Jesus, pause to point it out, thank them and thank God for it!
- Organise for your children to serve and wait on you at dinner as if in a restaurant. The more they have to "give up" and "take on" to do so, the better! Discuss how you all felt in your respective roles of serving and being served. Ask: what did Jesus give up and take on in order to serve us?

Day 21: Not Ours to Keep

- How confident are you and your children that you'll know what to say if you get an opportunity to tell someone the gospel "message of reconciliation"? Why not practise together at home? You could use a gospel outline such as Two Ways To Live or Who Will Be King? to give you ideas. Work out what you'd say and practise it together. Then have a go at telling it to a stuffed toy!
- Invite your children to design a poster or note to put by the front door reminding you all each time you leave the house that you are Christ's ambassadors.

Day 22: Gifts for God's People

- As kids put on their coat, hat or shoes, or wash their face, hands or teeth, remind them of the image of the body which Paul uses to describe the church. Say different body parts and for each one see if your children can name a gift of the Spirit.
- Could you contact someone in your church family together to thank them for the ways you see them using their gifts for the good of God's people?

Day 23: Giving That God loves

- If your children have some sort of income—pocket money, birthday gifts or a paid job—and you think it's appropriate, invite them to consider if they would like to give some of that money away, either as a one-off gift or as a regular tithe. Judge how to do it in a way that is a genuine invitation (not an expectation) and gives them freedom to decide against it or to amend their giving in future. God loves a cheerful giver!
- If your household is blessed with many gifts this Christmas season, could you give away some of what you receive to others who have less?

Day 24: Giving Ourselves

- If you are discussing with your children what gifts they are hoping to give or have chosen to give to family members or friends, ask them what they would give to God if they could. What does Psalm 86 show us we can give to God?
- Take time together to think about your routine. Do you have moments in your day or week when—either individually or together—you all remind yourself what Jesus has done for you, learn from God's word about his character and his ways, or express your praise for him? Invite suggestions about how and when you could incorporate those into daily life.