

What Can I Bring?

Lesson 4

Unit One: Christ-Centered Life

Scripture: Matthew 2:1-12

Life Focus: Let us focus on giving instead of getting.

Stupid Giving vs. Wise Giving

What do you want more than anything? While that question has any number of answers, the world of Internet retail offers many gifts that people probably *don't* want. At one online store, a less than discerning gift giver can purchase a Sigmund Freud action figure, camouflage golf balls, or a glow-in-the-dark toilet seat!

A model of wise giving can be seen in those men we know as the Magi. The Magi were *generous, guided, and grateful.*

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Hide It in Your Heart

On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

—*Matthew 2:11*

For a pre-session or take-home activity, lead kids in memorizing this key verse, using the puzzle found on your *Young Teen Resources* CD.

Matthew 2:1-12

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

⁴When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

⁶"But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;

for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."

⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

Today's Challenge

We've all heard that it is better to give than to receive. This lesson will help you put that truth into practice.

Step 1

Setting the Stage

Remember gifts you have given or received in the past.

Step 2

Searching the Word

Describe the characteristics that made the Magi good givers.

Step 3

Making It Real

Explain how you can demonstrate the Magi's characteristics today.

Step 4

Living It Out

Choose to give a gift of service to someone.

Encountering God's Word

GENEROUS Matthew 2:1, 2

Somewhere in the East, perhaps in Persia or Babylon, priestly stargazers were scanning the heavens. Since many Jews still lived there after the days of the captivity, these pagan astrologers were probably familiar with Jewish prophecies about the Messiah. While their ideas often were misguided, God used aspects of their openness to lead them to Bethlehem.

One night they saw a star that had not been there previously.

Since it seemed logical for a Jewish king to be born at the royal palace in Jerusalem, the Magi went there (Matthew 2:1). Asking King Herod where

The Magi were willing to give, no matter the cost.

they could find the royal newborn, they said, "We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him" (v. 2). Their eagerness

to give to the baby king cost them an arduous thousand-mile journey, but these men saw that such a quest was worth the cost of leaving their comfort zones.

Henry Parsons Crowell was a businessman who founded the Quaker Oats Company. Never content with the amount of money he gave to others, Crowell gave away 70 percent of his income for 40 years of his life! This type of generosity is never easy, but its wisdom has its rewards.

GUIDED Matthew 2:3-9, 12

Once in Jerusalem, the trail ended. The Magi needed to seek wisdom in order to deliver their gifts.

In response to their query, Herod asked the teachers of the law where the Messiah was to be born. "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written" (v. 5). The prophet they quoted was Micah, whose Old Testament book was written 700 years before Christ. Micah predicted that out of little Bethlehem, easily overlooked by many, would come the ruler who would be the shepherd of God's people Israel

The Magi sought wisdom in their giving.

(v. 6). This prophecy, found in Micah 5:2, ends with a striking statement not included by Matthew. Micah said the new king would be

also an ancient king, "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

But the Magi had no idea how much their innocent words would upset King Herod. (He was such a jealous king that he even had some of his own sons killed so they could never try to unseat him.) Herod then called "secretly" for them (Matthew 2:7). His secrecy indicated his evil intent.

He wanted to know the exact time the star had appeared. As later verses would show, he planned to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem and this "exact time" would help identify how old the child might be. Then Herod sent the Magi to Bethlehem to find the child, claiming that he wanted to worship him also.

But they were open not only to wisdom from political and religious leaders. In fact, being willing to hear the prompting of God himself, they later foiled Herod's plans (v. 12).

Lady Huntingdon of eighteenth-century England also sought guidance in her generosity. She used her wealth to help finance the preaching of the great evangelists of her day. As a result, a spiritual awakening reached the very height of English society.

GRATEFUL Matthew 2:10, 11

Having traveled a thousand miles west, the Magi then followed the star six miles straight south from Jerusalem to Bethlehem (v. 9). They came to the "house" (no longer a stable) and found "the child" (no longer an infant, probably several months old by this time), and presented the treasures they had brought for Him. (The fact that there were three gifts gave rise to the later tradition that there were three wise men.) Providentially, the valuable gifts could help finance the holy family's upcoming flight to Egypt (vv. 13-15). Prophetically, the incense and myrrh were a foreshadowing of the perfume and spices with which Jesus would be buried.

The Magi recognized the value of the one to whom they gave.

As valuable as these gifts were, the Magi recognized that the value of the child they sought was far greater. They did not come boldly, asking recognition and favor for their tribute, but they "bowed down and worshiped" Jesus.

John Wesley discovered that people of his day who owed even the smallest debt were imprisoned. Wesley calculated how much it cost for him to live and decided to use the rest of his earnings to set prisoners free. When we recognize that Jesus sets us free, our gratitude prompts us to give generously to free others.

The Magi have provided a good example for us today. Like the ancient wise men, we should seek Jesus regardless of cost. We should seek wisdom from God's Word. When we find Him, we should gladly give Him our worship and our treasures. From the Magi we can learn that the real joy is in giving, not in getting.

Life Focus: Let us focus on giving instead of getting.

Use one of the following activities to help your students remember gifts they have given or received in the past.

QUICK STEP Gifts Remembered

As students arrive, distribute paper and pens. Ask them to list as many gifts as they can think of that they have given in the past.

After all have completed their lists, ask them to make the following notes. (They may mark a gift in more than one way.)

- Place a **K** by a gift that you gave because you expected a gift in return.
- Place an **L** by a gift that you gave to keep someone from having hurt feelings.
- Place a **\$** by each gift over which you worried about spending either too little or too much money.
- Place a **J** by a gift that was given simply out of love.

Ask students to share how they marked their lists. Ask them to think of any other motives for gift giving. Lead into Bible study with these words: **Giving gifts can be done for a variety of reasons. One way to learn how to give properly is to observe good givers. Today we'll look at the Magi and see three characteristics that made them good givers.**

Gift Bluff

As students arrive, give each one a sheet of paper, a pen, and these instructions: **Consider two of the strangest gifts you have ever received. Then make up a strange (but believable) gift you have not received. List these three gifts in no particular order on your paper. Don't let anyone else see.**

After all students have arrived and have made lists, ask for a volunteer to read his or her list. Then ask for a show of hands from the rest of the class, voting on the item that they think is the made-up gift. The one who made the list gets one point for every person fooled. Continue this process until all have read their lists. Lead into Bible study by saying: **We all have received unusual gifts. While a lot of people give, not everyone is good at it. One way to learn how to give properly is to observe good givers. Today we'll look at the Magi and see three characteristics that made them good givers.**

The Scene

For an opening activity based on a current events, download The Scene online. Go to <http://www.21stcc.com/> and click on "Downloads." There you'll find a free article with discussion questions to begin this week's lesson.



Time

10 minutes

discussion

Materials

paper, pens

Time

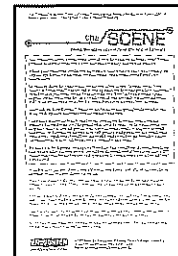
10 minutes

game

Materials

paper, pens

news



Step 2 Searching the Word

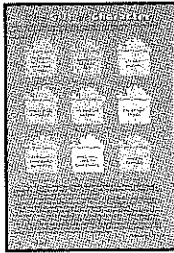
Life Focus: Let us focus on giving instead of getting.

Use one of the following activities to help your students describe the characteristics that made the Magi good givers.

Time
20 minutes

puzzle

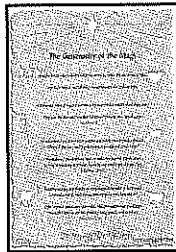
Materials
Young Teen Student, pens



Time
20 minutes

creative writing

Materials
Young Teen Resources Sheet 2 (or Young Teen Resources CD, projection equipment), Bibles, pens, paper



Teaching Tip

If your class does not enjoy creative writing activities, convert this into a discussion/lecture activity. Post (or project) Sheet 2. Sing the song together. Then help the class compare this song to the Bible text.

QUICK STEP The Gift of Character

Have the students turn to page 16 of their books and match the characteristics of good givers with the verses provided in today's text.

As they work, help them as necessary, explaining the text with the help of *Encountering God's Word*. When work is done, have them share answers.

The correct responses are: 1="they bowed down and worshiped him" (v. 11); 2="found out from them the exact time the star had appeared" (v. 7); 3="until it stopped over the place where the child was" (v. 9); 4="We saw his star" (v. 2); 5="Where is the one" (v. 2); 6="gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh" (v. 11); 7="Magi from the east came to Jerusalem" (v. 1); 8="having been warned in a dream" (v. 12); 9="search carefully" (v. 8).

Lead into the following lesson section with these words: **The Magi have provided a good example for gift givers today. Like the ancient wise men, we should seek Jesus regardless of cost. We should seek wisdom from God's Word. When we find Him, we should gladly give Him our worship and our treasures. From the Magi we can learn how to be better givers.**

Generosity of the Magi

Divide the class into three groups and give the following Scripture assignments from Matthew 2:1-12:

Group one: The Magi were willing to give, no matter the cost (vv. 1, 2).

Group two: The Magi were willing to seek wisdom in their giving (vv. 3-9, 12).

Group three: The Magi were willing to recognize true value when they gave (vv. 10, 11).

Tell groups to read their portion of the text and find evidence in that passage of the truth of their assigned statement. Then have them summarize their text by using a familiar song.

As groups work, move among them to help with the assignment as needed. *Encountering God's Word* and the sample song on Sheet 2 will help you.

When group work is done, allow groups to share and explain their songs. Post (or project) Sheet 2 and review the points of the text summarized there. Comment and question as necessary to make sure all points are made clearly and completely.

Lead into the following lesson section with these words: **The Magi have provided a good example for gift givers today. Like the ancient wise men, we should seek Jesus regardless of cost. We should seek wisdom from God's Word. When we find Him, we should gladly give Him our worship and our treasures. From the Magi we can learn how to be better givers.**

Life Focus: Let us focus on giving instead of getting.

Use one of the following activities to help your students explain how they can demonstrate the Magi's characteristics today.

QUICK STEP What Are You Building?

Divide the class into groups of three to five students. Turn with them to page 17 in their student books. There they will find a parable about giving. The groups should read and analyze the parable, comparing it to the attitudes they saw in the Magi. All groups should answer the questions on the page and prepare to report their answers to the class.

As groups read and discuss, visit each one briefly to help as necessary. After groups are finished, reconvene and ask the groups to report. Move to the final lesson step by saying: **The giving attitudes of the Magi have great practical importance. How can we choose to give today with those same attitudes?**

Removing the Stop Signs

Before class, cut each poster into the shape of a giant stop sign.

Divide the class into groups, giving each group a stop sign and access to magazines, glue, markers, and scissors. Review the three points from the Bible study concerning the Magi's attitudes toward giving. (See the main points from *Encountering God's Word*.) Each group should think of attitudes and circumstances in people's lives that can keep them from being as generous as the Magi. Then groups should look in the magazines and find images and words that represent those "stop signs" and create a collage of those words and images on their posters.

As students work, move among the groups to help them. Prompt them as necessary to think of words such as *debt*, *fear*, *greed*, *selfishness*, *pride*, *worry*, *distance*, *apathy*, and *busyness*. You may offer suggestions as to how those could be illustrated.

Allow groups to display and explain their completed work. Close with these words: **The giving attitudes of the Magi have great practical importance. How can we choose to give today with those same attitudes?**

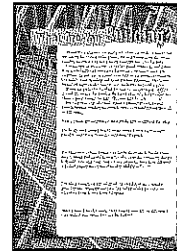
Time

20 minutes

report

Materials

Young Teen Student, pens



Time

20 minutes

art

Materials

red poster board (1 for each 3-5 students), old magazines, scissors, glue, markers

Step 4 Living It Out

Life Focus: Let us focus on giving instead of getting.

Use one of the following activities to help your students choose to give a gift of service to someone.

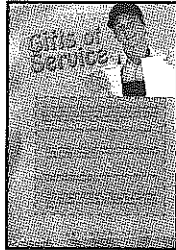
Time

10 minutes

self-evaluation

Materials

Young Teen Student, pens



Time

10 minutes

prayer

Materials

index cards, pens

QUICK STEP Gifts of Service

Have students turn to page 18 in their student books and spread out around the room. Give them time to work through the self-evaluation questions. They will be challenged to think of their talents and how they can use those talents to fulfill the needs of others. After a few minutes, gather back together and allow volunteers to share their answers.

Say: As we learned through the Magi, our attitudes make all the difference when we give. Let's take time now to pray that our hearts will be right as we give to others. Form a circle and ask students to pray silently for the person on their right. Pray for the giver's heart and the hearts of those who will receive the gifts.

Distribute ENCOUNTER—*The Digital Magazine*. You can either print these articles and hand them out or e-mail them to your students each week.

Care Coupons

Say: Consider simple acts of service you could give to someone else. It may be sweeping a floor, reading a book, washing dishes, walking a dog, raking leaves, shoveling snow, or cooking a meal. Give each student a card and a pen and have them create coupons for these acts of service. Then challenge them to give the coupons out this week and put into action their acts of service.

Say: As we learned through the Magi, our attitudes make all the difference when we give. Let's take time now to pray that our hearts will be right as we give to others. Form a circle and ask students to pray silently for the person on their right. Pray for the giver's heart and the hearts of those who will receive the gifts.

Distribute ENCOUNTER—*The Digital Magazine*. You can either print these articles and hand them out or e-mail them to your students each week.



Here's what's in ENCOUNTER—*The Digital Magazine* this week:

- "Birthday Gifts for Jesus"
- "Shelter Santa"
- "The Best Counselor"