

Our Daily Gifts

A Practice of Gratitude

A Lesson in Stewardship



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Our Daily Gifts is a contemplative prayer practice in the form of a story that offers a framework for children to observe the gifts they have received that day and to name them in the community of their church-school classroom, or worship or youth group. The storyteller explores the many varieties of gifts, then models a practice of giving thanks for a gift he or she has received. The children are invited to **notice their own gifts**.

As the story continues, the children and storyteller wonder how the gifts each one has received **can also become a gift** when they are given again—to others or the world. Tactile objects support the children as they discover their own gifts and offer them back again as gifts by placing stones into a bowl of water (the “pool”) and watching how the water is changed with the addition of each “gift.”

Our Daily Gifts can be offered as short, regular practice every week in a class or children’s worship time—or once or twice a year in a class or in worship. It is flexible enough to integrate into any curriculum.

Our Daily Gifts can also be readily adapted for **all age groups** and multigenerational settings—including retreats, Advent practice or Lenten series.



Materials needed

- ▶ a round,* clear bowl, “seeded” with some starter stones (*round is essential for good ripples);
- ▶ a collection of “stones”—which may include any of the following:
 - stones;
 - shells;
 - handmade beads;
 - marbles;
 - your inspiration!
- ▶ a pitcher, filled with water; and
- ▶ a basket or bowl to hold the stones before they are added to the “pool.”

Tip

If the bowl of stones is to be left out for any period of time beyond the Daily Gifts exercise, consider adding a teaspoon of either bleach or salt to the water to keep it clear.

1 Inviting reflection on the gift of water

Pour water into a clear, circular bowl while talking about the gift of water—

“We are connected to God in so many ways. One of them is being connected to God and to one another through the gift of water.”

“Here is the water that holds the gifts that have been given before. God was there and is here now in the gift of **the water of Creation**. God was there and is here now in the gift of **the waters that opened up to let God’s people be free**. God was there and is here now in the gift of **the water of the Jordan River** when Jesus was baptized and in the gift of **the water that baptized you** (or may some day when you choose to be baptized). God is here in the gift of this water and in all the gifts that we have been given. The gift of this water helps us remember **the gifts of right now**.”

“Like the water, **we are connected to God by the gifts that God has given us** and which connect us to one another.”

“There are so many different gifts, so many kinds of gifts. Sometimes it feels as though there are too many to count; other times it is hard to think of even one.”

“Gifts can be—

... the kind of things that come
wrapped in wrapping paper;

Outline for the practice

Notice that the practice is essentially three steps, repeated, then followed by the addition of transformed gifts to the “pool”—and closed with a prayer.

- 1 **Invite** the group and yourself to enter the reflection **through the pouring forth of water** and words about water. Invite one another to think about gifts—**easy ones as well as hard ones**.
- 2 **Share silence**—with an open, comfortable posture that stimulates each person’s silent pondering of their gifts.
- 3 **Name the gifts**—one at a time that the silence has brought forth to each heart present. (Naming is possible silently or aloud—since God always hears!)
- 4 **Invite** each heart to consider what God is calling him or her to do with that gift. What does the gift that comes forth seem to be?
- 5 **Share silence**. Encourage the opening once again of hearts and hands to all the possibilities.
- 6 **Name that gift** (silently or aloud) and mark it by adding a stone to the “pool” of gifts that have come before.
- 7 **Welcome** the addition of transformed gifts to the “pool.”
- 8 **Close** in communal prayer.

... the gift of your **favorite thing to eat** for breakfast;
... the gift of the **sound of the birds singing**;
... the gift of the **bluest sky** you have ever seen;
... the gift of a **new friend**;
... the gift of a **hug** from someone who loves you;
... the gift of someone telling a joke that makes you **laugh really hard**."

"Sometimes gifts can be **difficult**. Things happen that don't feel at all like presents or good things; yet later we understand why that hard/difficult gift was given."



2 Sharing in silence

"Let's take some time to sit in silence and think of a gift that comes into your mind. Perhaps it is an easy one. Or it may not seem like a gift at all—it may be a worry or a problem. Usually the first gift that comes to mind is exactly the right one to be pondering."

"I wonder if you can think of any other kinds of gifts? Let's **open our hearts by settling our bodies into a giving posture**. For me, it looks like this and feels very comfortable. Take a moment to **find a giving position**, for your body, that feels right."

Tip

Pace, and a sense of calm, are very important. As the storyteller, you must set this tone. Preparing prayerfully before the exercise may help you to get into the right spirit and enable you to lead others into the same spirit.

You might choose to pray the Ignatian **Examen** to help you feel grounded in your own sense of gratitude and for your personal gifts of today.

Supplemental resources

Other passages and poems that you may find valuable for self-preparation or for sharing during the exercise include—

- ▶ Isaiah 55
- ▶ Genesis 1:1–10
- ▶ Psalm 104:4–13
- ▶ Matthew 3:13–17
- ▶ John 4:4–14
- ▶ "What Have You Given Away Today?" by Georgie B. Adams
- ▶ e. e. cummings' poem, the first line of which is "i thank You God for most this amazing" (**XAIPE**, 1950)

Allow a good 30 seconds of silence as you model how to be still. Allow time for true wonder. Set a tone of welcoming responses—but not expecting them or judging them.



3 Naming
our
revealed
gifts

Ask the participants—

“I wonder what gift came into your heart?”

“Now is the time to **share our gifts out loud** if we want to. We’ll take turns so that every one can be heard. It is just fine if you would like to hold it in your heart and not say it out loud. God will know what it is, either way.”

Allow those present to share their gifts in random order. Going around the circle is orderly but it also encourages individuals to anticipate “their turn” rather than to really listen to what others are saying.



Examples of responses

“Yes, that sounds like a gift you love very much.”

“That is a different gift; it is alive.”

“That sounds like a hard gift.”

“Hmmm.”

“Wow.”

“Yes, those are all truly gifts.”

Go first (modeling how it might be done) if need be—or if the family/group is ready to share, interject your gift as the space in the silence allows.

Tip

Your goal throughout the exercise is to effectively disappear so that the story tells/unfolds itself.

4 Inviting transformation of our gifts

"Now that you are holding one gift in your heart, you can **create a new gift from the gift you had already received.** While **this may sound impossible, strange or silly**—let's see how we can do that together. Let's open our hearts once again by **settling our bodies into a giving posture.**"



5 Sharing in silence

Invite some additional silence here.



6 Naming our transformed gifts

"I received the gift of _____.
The gift that I am going to give is _____."

"To mark that gift, I am going to choose a stone. Watch because you may want to do something like this with your gift, too."

◀ Thoughtfully select a stone from the basket.

"Here is the water of **the gifts given in the past** and **the gifts given today** and of **all the gifts that today holds.** God is here in the water of gifts that have been given before, the water of now, and the water of the gifts of the future."

"The gifts, just like the water, are always changing. And God is always there in them, giving them, helping us to understand how to share the gifts that we've been given."

"And when you give a gift to the world, **it changes everything.**"

"Listen and watch, the gift I give is now **part of the water** and when it enters it **changes the water**. Can you hear it? Can you see it? Even though I tried to drop it in close to the center, it made the water change and ripple. Giving gifts from the gifts that you have been given changes everything!"

"Look—my stone is part of all the other stones that people have already added who have given gifts. The group of stones is changed just because I added mine, just like the world changes when we give gifts to the world out of that which we have received from God."



7 Welcoming transformed gifts to the "pool"

"Now you can add your gift and change the water. Let's do this one at a time. As you add it, name the gift—either aloud, or silently, in your heart."

"Wow, look at all the new gifts that have been added!"



8 Closing in communal prayer

Close in communal prayer—perhaps sung, whispered, or in movement. Suggestions include the Lord's Prayer, e. e. cummings's "i thank You God"—or really anything!

◀ Drop the stone into the center of the bowl, gently.

Further questions for group reflection

(Use some or all, depending on the community.)

I wonder—

- ▶ ... what were the gifts in **those other stones** that were already there?
- ▶ ... how many gifts **God** can really give?
- ▶ ... how many gifts **you** can really give?
- ▶ ... why there are **easy** gifts?
- ▶ ... why there are **hard** gifts?
- ▶ ... **where** all the gifts come from?
- ▶ ... **how many** gifts there can ever be?
- ▶ ... why we are **given** gifts?
- ▶ ... if you think we need to **give** gifts?
- ▶ ... **why** we give gifts?
- ▶ ... **who** the gift giver really is?

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Our Daily Gifts was created by **Sally Thomas**, a long-time Godly Play storyteller and trainer, whose experience and language of the gifts of God has been formed in Godly Play sanctuaries with generous children of all ages. She is grateful for all the gifts that the Godly Play community has given her. You may write to Sally at **millvalleysally@yahoo.com**.

The project was underwritten by the Department of Stewardship, Episcopal Diocese of California—Jennifer Kitt, Chair.



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