Life is how you live it...

not how you spend it.

Discussion Guide
About the Film

_The Ultimate Gift_ is a story about a young man's inspiring journey to discover the ultimate gift. At his grandfather's death, Jason Stevens (Drew Fuller) is presented with an unlikely inheritance—a crash-course on life—taking him on a path that will change him forever and answer the ultimate spiritual question: “What is the relationship between wealth and happiness?” Featuring an all-star cast including Golden Globe winner and six–time Emmy nominee Brian Dennehy, Academy Award and Golden Globe nominee James Garner, and Academy Award nominee Abigail Breslin, the film is the winner of the Heartland film Festival’s Crystal Heart Award. Directed by Michael O. Sajbel, _The Ultimate Gift_ is based on Jim Stovall’s best-selling novel, which has sold more than a million copies.

About the Discussion Guide

_The Ultimate Gift_ is a film for the entire family will enjoy. It provides an opportunity to discuss the importance of wealth related to happiness. Understanding the themes of the film—the significance of a work ethic, the meaning of true friendship, an appreciation for money earned, the gift of another day, and dreams that help others—is the reason these and other topics are addressed in the movie and why we’ve created this Discussion Guide. With this booklet, you can utilize the messages in _The Ultimate Gift_ as a group discussion tool.

The lessons are supplemented with movie clips you’ve either received or downloaded online. These clips were specifically selected to help you set the tone and furnish the context for your discussion or Bible study. There are also suggested scriptures for your group to study in-depth, and we’ve provided several discussion provoking questions based on the different scenes. This guide is an easy way to kick-start interesting discussions within your small group, and it works without any of your group having seen the film. However, it is recommended that you announce your intentions of using the film clips ahead of time. For example, the week before you intend to have a clip-oriented discussion, you might show the film trailer (included with the clips) to your group or congregation and let them know that you will incorporate it into your discussion the following week (or the next time you meet). This will allow your members the opportunity to view the film themselves (rent or purchase) if they so desire.
Discussions
In an effort to help you reinforce the themes and messages of *The Ultimate Gift*, we have chosen clips from the film that you can show to your group. These clips can be downloaded online at www.foxfaith.com or shown through a specially made DVD that you can request at the same website. These DVD clips are followed up with questions and scripture found in the Discussion Guide. The questions should draw your group members into a conversation about what they have just seen. It is not necessary to tackle these topics in a row or all in one session. If you would prefer just to cover one or two, feel free. It is all up to you.

First of all, introduce the discussion by saying something like this: “We’re going to talk about several topics that relate to money and its relationship to happiness. We have some scenes from the movie *The Ultimate Gift* that we are going to watch and then analyze to see what we can learn from them.” Next give a brief overview of the film. Then play the clip you have selected. Once the clip plays, then open the floor for discussion using the questions and scriptures that are provided or use some of your own. To finish, you can close each session by giving the brief “Lesson to Learn” provided at the end of the topic.

**NOTE:** Since some of your group members have likely not seen the film, it is a good idea to provide them with the context of the clip before watching it. This can be found in the italicized text that precedes the questions and scripture references for that particular clip.

Please keep in mind that you do not have to get through all the clips in order to have a successful discussion. Also, you do not need to sacrifice a good conversation to finish the scenes. As we mentioned above, discussion times go best when you allow freedom, but still provide the framework that will point to lessons in God’s word.

**THE GIFT OF WORK**

**Clip: The Will**

Before his death, billionaire “Red” Stevens videotapes his last will and testament. In the first scene, “Red” reveals how Jason will ultimately discover his inheritance. In the second scene, Jason is at the Texas ranch of his grandfather’s friend Gus. It is there that Jason will receive the first gift, but it requires meeting certain expectations. The final scene occurs after Jason has spent a month under Gus’ guidance.

**Questions:**
- “Red” Stevens tells his grandson Jason that there will be a series of gifts leading up to the ultimate gift. What is it about Jason’s behavior and attitude in the first scene that may have prompted his grandfather to withhold the inheritance?
- Upon arriving at the ranch, Gus tells Jason that breakfast is at five in the morning. In scene two, what is missing in Jason’s character that allows him to oversleep? What lesson is being taught? Now read Proverbs 6:9-11 & 13:18. Discuss what we can learn from these scriptures.
- In scene three, Gus tears down the fence without saying a word. What is the intended message for Jason? How does Jason’s attitude and work ethic change during his stay? What is his motivation? When you have a job to do, what motivates you—intrinsic or external factors? Read Proverbs 6:6-8 and discuss the kind of employee an ant would be.
- For a Christian, what work ethic is expected according to the scriptures: Romans 12, Ephesians 6:6-7, & Colossians 3:22-24. How do you measure up to God’s standards?

**Lesson to Learn:**

“Red” Stevens is a man who knows the effort and commitment it takes to hold a job. His grandson Jason does not. He is a young man born into money, a member of a family that lacks appreciation and an understanding of what it takes to earn a living. Recognizing the inclination that Jason has for wasting his inheritance, “Red” decides to pass on to him a series of gifts, each one with an important lesson that Jason can accept or reject, succeed at or fail. Since the grandson is blatantly disrespectful and arrogant, a kid who believes his grandfather owes him his trust fund even though he has never worked a day in his life, the lesson isn’t easily learned.

The first gift takes Jason to a ranch in Texas where “Red’s” longtime friend, Gus, teaches Jason the meaning of work. It begins when Jason receives instructions to be up at five o’clock for breakfast, an order that he chooses to disregard because of his lack of respect for his host. From Jason’s perspective, he has the “right” to sleep in and the attitude that no one is going to tell him what to do. But like a good parent or boss, Gus shows him there are consequences for refusing to shoulder responsibility. And like a smart child, Jason gets the message. However, once he is out on the range away from the watchful eye of his boss, Jason procrastinates and plays; another blatant act of disobedience based on disrespect. It’s not until it dawns on him that the gift is only available if he finishes the job that he starts to put up the fence posts. Here again, Jason doesn’t understand that work is more than just getting the task done in any way he pleases. Consequently, Gus tears the fence posts down, communicating without ever saying a word that Jason is not doing a good job. At least now, Jason “gets it.” He tackles the job vigorously and even feels good about the results, telling Gus when he drives out to pick him up that he’s not ready to quit. Gus knowingly tells him that on a ranch, “work is never done” while he eyes the fence posts with approval. It is apparent that Jason has taken pride in the quality of his work, but he is still...
motivated by one thing—money. Rather than having an intrinsic value that prompts him to do the work well because it’s the right thing to do, Jason is only motivated to finish so he can claim the “gift.”

As Christians, we need to ask ourselves about our motivations. Do we work diligently as long as it is under the watchful eye of a supervisor, but once we have some privacy we spend time surfing the Internet or making personal phone calls? Is there a feeling that we deserve good pay, even if we don't give our employer our best? And do we figure that our completed task is “good enough,” or do we do a job well because what we produce represents Jesus Christ? We should ponder these ideas in light of the scriptures.

The Bible speaks often about work and its importance. In the very beginning, God asks Adam and Eve to take care of the garden. (Genesis 2:15) Also, the New Testament tells us there are expectations concerning how work is done, that we should do our assignment as if we are doing it for the Lord. By following the guidelines set forth in the scriptures, we set an example for others, including our children. According to biblical standards, a good work ethic isn’t an option. It’s a command straight from God’s Word.

THE GIFT OF FRIENDS & THE GIFT OF MONEY

Clip: A Friend
Clip: In Her Shoes

After another visit to his grandfather’s attorney, Jason learns that the next gift requires him to find a true friend. But when his money runs out, there’s only one person who will stand by him—Emily. In scene one, Jason meets her after he intervenes to prevent a theft. In scene two, the next gift reunites Jason with Emily when he rescues a stolen purse belonging to Emily’s mom. Inside he discovers overdue bills.

Questions:

• With his credit cards terminated by his deceased grandfather, Jason finds that Emily is the only person willing to help him complete the second gift. At the park in scene one, why is it important to Emily that money isn’t part of the friendship “deal”? Describe the difference between Emily’s perception of friendship and Jason’s.

• Read John 15:12-13, Romans 13:9-10 & John 13:34-35 and discuss the biblical description of a true friend. Now think of one of your friends who fit this description. How would you rate yourself as a friend on a scale of 1-10, with ten as the highest?

• After receiving his paycheck from the ranch, Jason’s next gift requires that he find someone who needs the money more than he. In the second scene, how does he exceed the requirement imposed by his grandfather? What is his motivation and what has it taught him about money?

• In Psalm 82:3-4 and Matthew 25:35-40 the scriptures gives us directives about using our resources. Discuss a way that you can use your money to help someone in need and then read Proverbs 19:17.

Lesson to Learn:

Jason agrees to accept the second gift, only to find that all his belongings, including his car and apartment have been confiscated. Even his credit cards and his cell phone have been terminated, all part of a plan by his late grandfather. Without a place to stay and penniless, Jason quickly learns who his true friends are—and there are none. In order to fulfill the requirements of the gift, Jason must find one true friend. By chance he encounters Emily while he is homeless in the park, resulting in her agreeing to be his friend.

Emily’s perception of friendship is much different than Jason’s. She wishes to have a relationship that isn’t purchased and is quite pleased when it is apparent that no money is attached. In her world, friendship is based on caring about the other person. Because Emily thinks highly enough of Jason and she’s concerned about his dire predicament, she wants to come to his aid. It is the loving thing to do and Emily believes that she is signing on as a longtime friend. Jason, on the other hand, is used to buying friendships or relationships, whether it’s women that he wines and dines, or male friends with whom he extravagantly parties; when he tires of a relationship he feels free to cast it off for another. In his world, friends are to be used.

It isn’t until Jason is on his quest with his second gift assignment, that he once again connects to Emily through a “small miracle.” As a result, he sees Emily’s suffering and the financial
struggle that she and her mother, Alexis, are going through. For once, he understands what it is like to be destitute; he is able to “walk in their shoes.” Instead of only giving part of his paycheck to pay their rent, he gives beyond what he has, and raises money on the streets.

This kind of friendship is what scriptures speak of when our Savior tells us to “…love one another as I have loved you…” The greatest love ever known to mankind—Jesus Christ—is our example. When we obey His commandment, it means laying our life down for someone else—putting their needs ahead of ours, whether it is with our time or money. We’re asked to do for others what we would want someone to do for us. This doesn’t just mean our neighbor next door. In our community and in our world, we have the opportunity to use our resources to alleviate poverty, to fund research, and to bring comfort to those who suffer. Whether it is at home or abroad, we are called to be a true friend. Won’t you reach out with your hand of friendship to those in need? When you do, you are touching the hand of God.

THE GIFT OF A DAY
Clip: Do It Now
Clip: Merry Christmas

Jason returns from an extended absence after completing another gift. He learns at the hospital that Emily’s condition is terminal. In scene one, Emily tells him that her wish is for the Christmas Day she missed with Jason. In scene two, they are able to spend the “holiday” together.

Questions
• In the first scene, Emily realizes that her time is short and wants to spend the missed Christmas holiday with Jason. In the second scene, how does the fulfillment of her wish demonstrate Jason’s true feelings for Emily? What has noticeably changed in the way he achieves happiness?

• Read Philippians 2:3-4. Compare Jason’s actions with these verses. Now share with the group how you plan to focus on others. If you had one more day, what would be your wish and with whom would you want to spend it?

• Emily wants her special day to bring happiness to her mom and asks Jason for a horseback ride. How would you bring joy to another person through your wish?

Lesson to Learn:
Life sometimes hands us a card we aren’t expecting. Such is the case with Alexia when she receives the news that Emily’s leukemia is terminal. Knowing the time is short, Emily asks for only one thing—Christmas Day. Because Jason was detained in another country while he completed the gift of learning, he unavoidably misses the special day. Nevertheless, he develops a plan to give Emily a perfect Christmas on the ranch in Texas, one complete with snow, Christmas lights, and a horseback ride.

It’s interesting to see how Jason has changed in the last several months, going from a self-centered individual to one who cares about others. Instead of living to make an impression on his friends with the amount of money he has, he now finds happiness by being interested in someone else. He is truly the embodiment of Philippians 2:3-4. However, this attitude is something that Emily learned early. From the moment she meets Jason, she cares about what he is doing. When he hesitates to take the trip abroad, fearing that she may die before he returns, it is she that insists that he go. And when an opportunity presents itself for her to have a beautiful day, she chooses a wish that will bring joy not only to her mom, but to Jason as well.

We can only hope that it doesn’t take a tragedy to make us realize how precious each day really is; that life is not about getting, but about giving; and happiness doesn’t come from all we accumulate, but from what we can give away—especially love. The Bible is filled with many scriptures that pertain to love and caring about others. There’s a reason. God knows
that true happiness comes when we learn how to be givers rather than takers. In His wisdom, He reveals that it is truly the way to have a perfect day.

THE GIFT OF DREAMS

Clip: Find a Dream
Clip: Emily's House

In scene one, Jason is at a loss as to how he will complete the final gift that his late grandfather assigns. Later, he admits to the board that he doesn’t have a dream, but he knows he can help others. With his inheritance in hand, Jason presents his vision of what he can accomplish in scene two.

Questions:
- At the end of Christmas Day in scene one, Jason is at a loss to decide upon a dream. What does Emily say that eventually gives him an idea? Why do you think he has had trouble thinking of a worthy dream?
- In the second scene, Jason is passionate about his vision. Describe how his dream provides him with the ultimate gift? Like Jason, God designed you for a purpose. Do you know what is your life’s purpose? Read Colossians 1:16b & Ephesians 1:11.
- Have you allowed yourself to dream? If you could do anything, what would it be? What is stopping you from pursuing your dream? Read Mark 9:23 and discuss how this verse makes you feel about your dream.

Lesson to Learn:
It isn’t surprising that Jason doesn’t have a dream readily available when Emily asks about his dream. After all, he has lived a number of years egocentrically, confined to one way of thinking—party, party, party! But thanks to his late grandfather’s assignment, Jason has begun to think outside the “box.” Now he understands the woes of the less fortunate, giving him insight into the opportunities that money can provide for them. He also is equipped with the ability to work hard. Armed with this new knowledge, strength, and the idea that Emily provides when she tells what it means to be surrounded by those she loves, he pursues his new dream. Jason is a man who has passion and now knows his purpose.

Who would have thought that Jason would develop the character to sustain a building project! But God knows His plans for Jason and what it will take for them to occur. Meeting Emily was not an accident, nor was reconnecting with her at a later time. Every step he has taken is leading him to the purpose for which Jason is designed. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” God accomplishes what needs to be done here on earth through people—just like you. So allow yourself the opportunity and permission to dream a beautiful and good dream. When you do, it’s amazing the wonderful things you and God can get done together!
The Ultimate Gift is a story about a young man's inspiring journey to discover the ultimate gift. At his grandfather's death, Jason Stevens (Drew Fuller) is presented with an unlikely inheritance—a crash-course on life—taking him on a path that will change him forever and answer the ultimate spiritual question: “What is the relationship between wealth and happiness?” Featuring an all-star cast including Golden Globe winner and six–time Emmy nominee Brian Dennehy, Academy Award and Golden Globe nominee James Garner, and Academy Award nominee Abigail Breslin, the film is the winner of the Heartland film Festival’s Crystal Heart Award. Directed by Michael O. Sajbel, The Ultimate Gift is based on Jim Stovall’s best-selling novel, which has sold more than a million copies.

The Discussion Guide draws out the themes in the film and provides an opportunity to discuss money and its relationship to happiness: the significance of a good work ethic; the meaning of true friendship; appreciating hard-earned money; the gift of another day, and dreaming to help others. These and other topics are complete with thought provoking questions, related scriptures, and helpful lessons.

To supplement the lessons, clips from the movie have been offered as a visual aid. These clips are available for downloading at www.foxfaith.com or may be shown through a specially made DVD that you can request at the same website. The clips and the guide, used in Sunday school classes, other small groups, or by parents will provide you with an opportunity to initiate discussion.

For more information and additional Church Resource material, go to www.foxfaith.com.