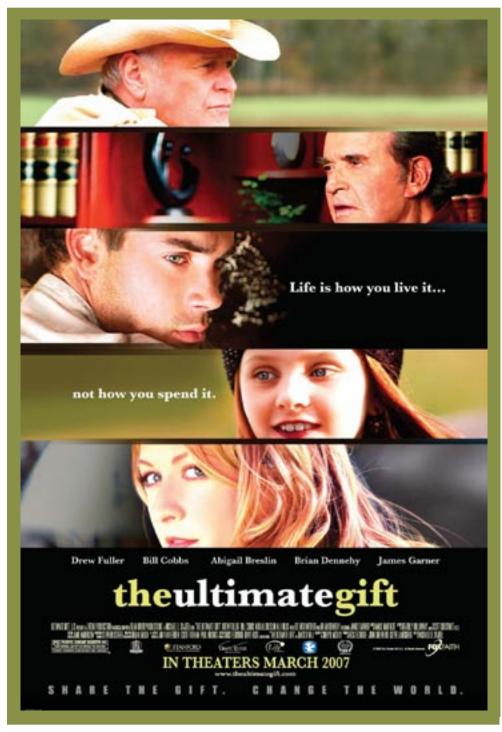


A facilitator's guide for youth leaders, educators and families to accompany the book and movie, *The Ultimate Gift.* Ages 12-18













Dear Group Facilitator:

The Ultimate Gift, a best-selling book by Jim Stovall and upcoming film, tells the story of twenty-four-yearold Jason Stevens. When Jason receives word that his billionaire great uncle, Red Stevens, has passed away, he eagerly awaits his portion of the fortune. Like his other greedy, unappreciative relatives, Jason seems to only care about his financial gain. When it is finally Jason's turn to collect his inheritance, Mr. Hamilton, Red Steven's lawyer and best friend, provides him with a very different fate. Prior to his death, Red recorded a series of video messages, describing twelve tasks that Jason must complete in order to receive his ultimate gift. Through a yearlong journey, Jason discovers life-changing lessons, forges meaningful relationships that he never knew could exist, and learns to give back to others in need.

The Ultimate Gift, in both book and movie form, touches on important life lessons such as the power of love, family, friendship, laughter and even problems. The story inspires people to realize that "the only way you can truly get more out of life for yourself is to give part of yourself away."

This guide, The Ultimate Gift: Your Gift to Others, is structured for use before or after viewing the movie and/or reading the book. It offers group and individual activities for youth ages 12 -18. It is provided by the National Collaboration for Youth, an organization which provides a unified voice for its coalition of more than 50 national, nonprofit, youth development organizations. The 30-year-old organization concentrates on improving the conditions of youth in the United States and enabling youth to realize their full capabilities. As a result, youth empowerment and development play a central role in the activity guide for The Ultimate Gift.







Steps for Youth to Take with The Ultimate Gift: Your Gift to Others Program

STEP 1: See the Film and Read the Book

THE MOVIE: The Ultimate Gift opens in theaters on March 9, 2007. Youth may also see the movie when it becomes available on DVD.

THE BOOK: The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall, is a best-selling novel. It is widely available in libraries and book stores.

STEP 2: Participate

Take part in exciting reading, writing and interactive activities that address the 12 gifts of the story. These include:

- The Gift of Love
- The Gift of Friends
- The Gift of Work
- The Gift of Money
- The Gift of Problems

STEP 3: Take the Lead to Help Others

Using examples of the generosity demonstrated by the story's lead character, Jason Stevens, young people are urged to learn to take on responsibility by designing and conducting a service project that allows them to give away part of themselves to others in need. Youth are also encouraged to learn about the "Show of Hands" initiative, in which teens are connected to the charities they want to support.

Use the free, downloadable service-learning supplement to assist in the planning and managing of The Ultimate Gift service projects. Please visit www.youthFILMproject.org to download the supplement and to learn more about the film and book.

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Notes for the Facilitator

The Ultimate Gift is a motivational story about self-discovery and generosity. At first defiant and resistant to the twelve-task journey, Jason eventually recognizes the life-changing process that he is undertaking. The culmination of the twelve gifts provides Jason with the knowledge that leading a lazy, self-centered life is a life unfulfilled. Although Jason finally receives his ultimate fortune, his new outlook causes him to devote his money and time to helping others.

In the following activities, youth will be exposed to each of the twelve gifts that Jason experiences. They will have the opportunity to address each theme and engage in activities and discussions that provide insight into their importance. Through the completion of this activity guide, youth will gain an understanding of their ability to make a lasting positive impact and lead a rewarding life.

Important Note

Please take note that the book and movie versions of *The Ultimate Gift* have significant differences. The book is broken into twelve distinct gifts, not all of which are interconnected, while the movie has a clear storyline, built around several key characters that do not have large roles in the book. These include Emily, the young girl with cancer, and her mother Alexia, who plays Jason's love interest. In the book, Red Stevens is Jason's great uncle. In the movie, he is portrayed as Jason's grandfather.





"He who loves his work never labors"

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 27)

Activity 1: The Gift of Work

ACTIVITY TYPE: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

In The Ultimate Gift, Jason has not worked a day in his life. Unlike Red Stevens, who worked diligently to earn his fortune, Jason has always been provided with a luxurious lifestyle. He does not recognize the value or necessity of having to work hard to earn money.

Jason's first task involves setting fence posts on the Texas ranch of Red's longtime friend, Gus Caldwell. Grudgingly, from dawn to dusk, Jason engages in exhausting, hands-on labor. With each passing day of this tedious work, Jason's attitude gradually changes. He begins to gain an appreciation for and satisfaction from his toil on the fields.

Read the following passage from the book:

An amazing transformation had taken place. Jason was browned by the sun, lean from his physical labor, and working steadily as we arrived. He waved to us and walked over to join us as we got out of the truck.

"Jason, did you dig all of those post holes and set all of those posts yourself?" I asked.

He seemed to have a gleam in his eye as he answered, "Yes, sir. Every one of them. And they're straight, too."

The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall; RiverOak. 2001. p. 36



"He who loves his work never labors."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 27)

Activity 1: The Gift of Work

Your Own Work

Have you ever had a job? This can be anything from helping watch a younger sibling, to working as a clerk at a store, to interning at a law office, to working at a summer camp. If so, describe one of your jobs in the box below:

This job was:	
My responsibilities included:	
The amount of time I put into this job was:	
Lessons/ Information I gained from this experience:	
How will this job help me prepare for future work?	

You just had the opportunity to reflect upon a work experience you had in the past. Although you are young and should focus time and energy into your education, here is your chance to brainstorm about a possible future career. Think about your present skills and interests. and also about abilities that you wish to acquire in the future. Jason had no interest in shoveling dirt and placing fencing posts in the ground, but through this difficult process, he gained an understanding of the value of hard work. He is now capable of incorporating this work ethic into future jobs.

A Future Job

In the future, a job I would like to have is:
In order to do this job effectively I will have to learn and do the following:
By successfully taking on this job, I should feel:



"Money is nothing more than a tool. It can be a force for good, a force for evil, or simply be idle."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 38)

Activity 2: The Gift of Money

ACTIVITY TYPE: INDIVIDUAL

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

Through the gift of money, Jason learns that it is more important to give than to receive. No matter how poor or dire your situation is financially, there is always someone who is worse off.

In the past, Jason took money for granted because everything was provided to him with no effort on his behalf. When Jason is stripped of his apartment, car and other belongings in the movie, he does not know where to turn. On the video screen Red Stevens tells Jason the following:

Red

Jason, you have no concept whatsoever of the value of money. Money has always been available to you, like the air you breathe. Let's review some highlights of your recent past. - a \$25,000 per night suite in Paris with a personal chef, whom you tipped heavily - toured the Bourdeaux region in chauffeured hot air balloons? - a week of heli-skiing in San Moritz - a small fleet of exotic cars. - the latest in everything, including women? But, the past is the past, and I figure you've probably had a pretty tough month.

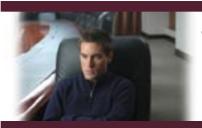
Adapted from The Ultimate Gift screenplay; The Ultimate Gift Experience, p. 46

When Mr. Hamilton provides Jason with a \$1500 check for the work he completed on Gus's farm, Jason could probably use the money for his own expenses. However, Jason is required to give away the money to someone who is facing a real problem. Jason chooses to cover the late rent payments of his new acquaintance, Alexia; she has depleted her savings to cover the medical costs of her sick daughter, Emily. The unpaid rent equals \$1600, so Jason resorts to pandering on the street to come up with the last \$100.

In the book version of *The Ultimate Gift*, Jason is instructed to give away the \$1500 to five deserving people. Here is a list of the recipients:

- \$200 to a fund-raising car wash of Boy Scouts, trying to raise money to go to their Jamboree
- \$400 to pay for the car loans of a young woman with a sick baby
- \$300 to pay for the Christmas toys of a struggling family with two small children
- \$200 to a an older woman to cover the heart pills for her husband; \$20 extra dollars for the same woman to take her husband out for his favorite lunch
- \$700 for a new engine in the car of a young man named Brian

The sum of these donations adds up to \$1800, so Jason even decides to chip in \$300 of his own money.



"Money is nothing more than a tool. It can be a force for good, a force for evil, or simply be idle."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 38)

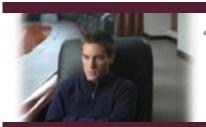
Activity 2: The Gift of Money



Key Questions

- What does Jason learn about the value of money after being stripped of his belongings (in the movie version)?
- In the movie, how do you think Jason feels after giving the money to Alexia? Why?
- Do you ever walk by homeless people on the streets of your town or city? How do you
- What are some of the positive aspects of having a lot of money? What can be some of the down-sides of being very wealthy?
- Similarly, what are positives that can arise from going through a financial struggle? What are the downsides of constantly worrying about expenses?
- If you had excess money like Jason, would you rather keep it for yourself or give it away to someone in need? Why?





"Money is nothing more than a tool. It can be a force for good, a force for evil, or simply be idle."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 38)

Activity 2: The Gift of Money

How Would You Give Away \$1500?

Put yourself in Jason's shoes. You have just been handed a check for \$1500 and must give it away. Although it might be tempting to keep the money for yourself, you too, should realize that there are people out there who probably need the money more. Pick five people or organizations you would give the money to. These could be real people in your life who are struggling to make ends meet or they could be people you don't personally know (i.e., "I'd give \$300 to help buy new school supplies for children affected by a hurricane"). Try to pick people or foundations that really mean something to you. For example, if you have a family member affected by AIDS or cancer, you might be interested in donating the money to an organization that does research towards curing these illnesses.

Why?

Maybe you can follow-through and actually give some of your money away to these deserving people or organizations. Instead of \$1500, maybe you can come up with \$15.00 of your own money or \$150.00 from a fundraising event!

Check-Out This Resource

Inspired by The Ultimate Gift and created by Once Upon a Family, "Show of Hands" in an online initiative aimed at connecting teenagers with the charities they want to support.

To learn more about this movement and to join, please visit www.raiseahand.org



"It is a wealthy person, indeed, who calculates riches not in gold but in friends."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 49)

Activity 3: The Gift of Friends

ACTIVITY TYPE: GROUP DISCUSSION AND PARTNER ACTIVITY

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

Jason Stevens begins his journey without any true friends. In the movie he has a girlfriend named Caitlin and "friends" who party at his penthouse apartment, but in reality these are people taking advantage of his wealth. When Jason cannot pay for a fancy dinner because his credit cards are declined, Caitlin is incredibly annoyed. This is a sure sign that she does not truly love him! When Jason loses all his belongings, including his apartment, he has nowhere to stay. All of the people he thought were his friends refuse to take him in.

Red Stevens is an example of someone who has developed exceptionally strong friendships during his lifetime. This is evident in the way that Gus Caldwell accepts Jason, a stranger to him, onto his ranch for a month. Although there were many people, including lawyers, accountants, and family members, to gain from Red's wealth, there were plenty more who gained from his generous nature and kindred spirit.

In the book version of *The Ultimate Gift*, Jason is instructed to find out what he feels are the principles that inspire true friendship. After the month is over, Jason reports back to the group:

> He began. "I thought a lot about friendship this month, and I tried to come up with the principles that define friendship. The best I can do is say that friendship involves loyalty, commitment, and a process that includes sharing another person's life. It even goes deeper than that, but it's hard to put into words."

> > The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall; RiverOak. 2001. p. 54

In the movie, Jason is told to come back at the end of the month with one true friend. He returns with the young girl Emily, whom he meets by a park bench near the town hospital one day. At this point in the story, Jason, Emily and Alexia (Emily's mother) hardly know each other; Emily pretends she is Jason's true friend as a favor. However, their interaction develops into an unexpected friendship that changes Jason's perspective on life and impact on the world around him.



"It is a wealthy person, indeed, who calculates riches not in gold but in friends."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 49)

Activity 3: The Gift of Friends



Group Discussion Questions

Think about and discuss the following questions that relate to friendship.

- Jason is asked to describe the principles of true friendship. What do you believe are the 5 qualities of friendship that are most important? List them below and then share them as a group. They can be descriptive words or sentences.
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.
 - 5.
- Is it more important to have a lot of friends or a few good ones? Why?
- Does a good friend have to be similar to you? (e.g., same age, gender, likes and dislikes, etc.) Why or why not?
- What do you expect from your friends? How should they treat you?
- What do you do for your friends? How do you treat them?
- What are some of the challenges of making new friends?



"It is a wealthy person, indeed, who calculates riches not in gold but in friends."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 49)

Activity 3: The Gift of Friends

Conduct an Oral Interview

In The Ultimate Gift, Jason learns a lot about his great uncle through the video montage that he created prior to his death. During his 12-step journey, Jason recognizes the legacy Red has left behind as a result of his close friendships. He even sacrificed a kidney to help save the life of his lawyer and best friend, Mr. Hamilton.

By taking part in this journey, Jason not only learns about himself, but has a glimpse into his estranged great uncle's life. Although Jason never had the chance to conduct a formal interview with Red, he is lucky to have this rare opportunity to get to know him better.

Oral history projects preserve part of an individual's life history – as viewed through that person's eyes, experiences and memories. Think about an adult or senior (this can be a family member, neighbor, teacher, etc.) that you would like to know more about. Find out about this person's childhood and the person/people who had the greatest impact on his/her life. Use the oral interview to learn more about the importance of friendship.

Getting Started

This activity can be done in partnership with another group member. While one person interviews by asking questions, the other can take written notes or record what is said on tape. If you can gain access to a video camera, this is a great opportunity to capture the moment on screen, just as Red's messages are conveyed to Jason through video.

- Make an appointment to talk with the person and interview them. Tell the person you will need approximately an hour of their time.
- Make sure you have all your supplies pencil, paper, recorder/video camera if possible. And your partner, of course!
- Make a list of 10-12 questions that you would like to ask. Here are some examples, but come up with your own, too!:
 - Where were you born and when?
 - What was your family like growing up?
 - What are some major events that took place during your lifetime? How did they affect you?
 - Who was your closest friend growing up? Did you remain friends with that person into adulthood?
 - Who is/are the person/ people who made the biggest impact on your life? Why? How did you change as a result of the person/people?
 - Do you remember someone saying something to you that had a significant impact on how you lived your life? What was it?
 - What were the most difficult choices you ever had to make? Do you think you made the right decisions? Would you go back and do anything differently?
 - What do you feel are the main principles of friendship?
 - Give examples of how you have been a friend to others.

After conducting your interview be sure to thank the person for his/her time. Tell him/her that you will share what you write and ask permission to share their story with others.

Back as a group, convert your notes into stories or compile the recordings and video clips. Discuss what you learned about the people and the importance of friendship. If permission was granted, share your interviews with others in your community. Think about displaying your work at a local library or community center. Also, be sure to share your stories with F.I.L.M.! We will happily post your stories on the F.I.L.M. website and newsletter for all to see.



"Education is a lifelong journey whose destination expands as you travel."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 59)

Activity 4: The Gift of Learning

ACTIVITY TYPE: GROUP ACTIVITY

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

In The Ultimate Gift we learn that Red Stevens, even with his success and fortune, never had the benefit of a formal education. On the other hand, Jason Stevens had the privilege of going to one of the top ranked universities in the country. Despite his formal education, Jason never really appreciated nor took advantage of the wealth of knowledge that was provided to him. Red Stevens spent his life reading, thinking and observing so he could become a well-educated man. To really understand the value of education, Red sends Jason to a small village in Ecuador, South America, where a small library stands in his honor.

There, Jason experiences a strikingly different culture and way of life. For nearly a month he becomes an assistant at the library, helping villagers with their book selections. Although the book supply is limited, the villagers travel great distances to exchange what they just read for a new book. Jason gains the following knowledge from this assignment:

> Jason hurried a few steps in front of us, turned to block our path, and said, "Hold it right here. I did everything that you said, I worked hard in the library, and I looked at every book they had in that dinky little place. There was nothing new to be learned there. The only thing that I found out is that there are good and simple people who will get up hours before daylight and will walk many miles along mountain trails to get a tattered old copy of a book. The only thing I can honestly say I know now that I didn't know when we left here four weeks ago is that the desire and hunger for education is the key to real learning.

> > The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall; RiverOak. 2001. p. 67



Key Questions

- What is the lesson that Jason learns about education? Why was he sent to Ecuador to discover it?
- How do books expand the world in which we live?
- Do you have a favorite book? What impact has it had on you?
- What is your favorite academic subject? Explain.



"Education is a lifelong journey whose destination expands as vou travel."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 59)

Activity 4: The Gift of Learning

Cultural Awareness

By going to Ecuador, Jason immerses himself in a setting and culture that differs greatly from the lifestyle he is accustomed to. This experience greatly expands his learning capacity and openness to new places, people and situations. Red teaches Jason that in addition to having a formal education - high school, college, etc. - it is important to learn and grow from everyday interactions and experiences. Not everyone has the ability to travel to foreign countries, but that doesn't mean that you can't learn about various cultures that have converged here in the United States!

It's important that people share their cultural backgrounds, traditions and customs with one another so that they are enriched with new information and ways of thinking. The world is a diverse, beautiful place and the more we know about one another, the more likely we are to find peace and understanding.

Share Your Cultural Traditions

As a group you can share aspects of your cultural or ethnic backgrounds. Plan and execute a cultural awareness fair in a local youth center, library or school where people can come and experience various foods, songs, and other traditions. If your family has been established in the U.S. for many generations, you can offer some of your favorite everyday American foods or family traditions that would enhance the fair.

Below are some types of items you could contribute to the fair; Jot down some ideas under each bullet point to help you brainstorm.

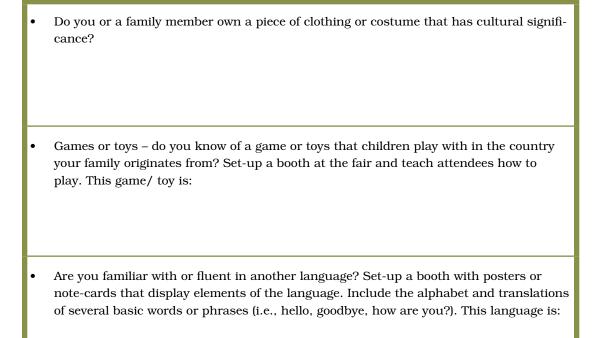
- A recipe for a favorite food that represents an aspect of your culture if possible, bring in the dish for participants to try! Make photo-copies of the recipe so people can try making it for themselves at home. My recipe would be for:
- Is their a special song or dance that you would like to share? Make sure your youth center or school has a stereo you can borrow, and play the song/ perform the dance for others. Explain the importance of the music and/or dance; describe any instruments that are playing. A song/ dance that I would like to share is:
- Artwork of any kind is there a painting, sculpture or other artifact lying around your house that has cultural significance? If so, ask permission from an adult family member to put it on display at the fair. Do some research and write a description of the artwork for all to read. A piece of art I can think of is:



"Education is a lifelong journey whose destination expands as you travel."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 59)

Activity 4: The Gift of Learning



After deciding upon one or more items that each person in your group can contribute, begin to plan the event. Invite family and community members and other youth in your school or youth center. Encourage attendees to bring an item that signifies their culture, too.

This activity will surely expand your knowledge of various cultures and traditions throughout the world!



"Problems can only be avoided by exercising good judgment. Good judgment can only be gained by experiencing life's problems"

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 69)

Activity 5: The Gift of Problems

ACTIVITY TYPE: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Link to the Film and Book



Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

In The Ultimate Gift, Red teaches Jason that it is important to go through difficulties in life. He regrets sheltering Jason and the rest of his family from life's problems:

"One of the great errors in my life was sheltering so many people - including you - from life's problems. Out of a misguided sense of concern for your well-being, I actually took away your ability to handle life's problems by removing them from your environment."

"Unfortunately, human beings cannot live in a vacuum forever. A bird must struggle in order to emerge from the eggshell. A well-meaning person might crack open the egg, releasing the baby bird. This person might walk away feeling as though he has done the bird a wonderful service when, in fact, he has left the bird in a weakened condition and unable to deal with its environment. Instead of helping the bird, the person has, in fact, destroyed it. It is only a matter of time until something in the bird's environment attacks it, and the bird has no ability to deal with what otherwise would be a manageable problem.

If we are not allowed to deal with small problems, we will be destroyed by slightly larger ones. When we come to understand this fact, we live our lives not avoiding problems, but welcoming them as challenges that will strengthen us so that we can be victorious in the future."

The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall; RiverOak. 2001. pp. 70-71

Red uses this metaphor of the bird to teach Jason that struggles are necessary steps towards self-growth. In the movie, Jason is stripped of his money and belongings, but realizes that there are people dealing with much greater problems. Jason learns that Emily is battling cancer and that her mom is struggling to pay their rent. Mr. Hamilton lost his wife when she was very young, but through the experience, learned about the ability to overcome and the will to move on. In the book, Jason is instructed to find people with problems in each stage of life – a child, a young adult, an adult and an older person – and to describe the benefits or lessons that can result from each situation. On the following page is chart that depicts the people, their problems, and the lessons gained:



"Problems can only be avoided by exercising good judgment. Good judgment can only be gained by experiencing life's problems"

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 69)

Activity 5: The Gift of Problems

Person and Problem	Lesson/ Benefit
Emily is a young girl that has a rare form of cancer. She spends her special day in the playground, instead of traveling somewhere else	Jason realizes that Emily has more courage and joy in her life than any other human being could have
Jason has lived a selfish life, never realizing that real people have real problems	Jason learns lessons from seeing the people he meets deal with their struggles; Jason realizes that joy comes from overcoming or learning to cope with problems
Bill Johnson, a middle-aged man, and his wife have lost his their jobs and are trying to make money doing odd jobs (like washing Jason's car); they have three children to support	The problem of money affects their family life positively; they are spending more time with their children and their children have learned the value of money and work
An older man is dealing with the tragedy of his wife's death	The older man celebrates his wife's life and feels grateful for having her in his life for nearly sixty years

Fill-in Your Own Chart of Problems

Using the chart with details from the book as an example, fill-in the chart below. Think carefully about lessons or benefits that can be gained from going through the following struggles.

- 11	
Problem	Lesson or Something to Gain
You are struggling in math class. Instead of putting in extra time after school to prepare for the upcoming exam, you decide to cheat off a friend. You are caught by your teacher and now must face the consequences.	
A close friend of yours was the victim of a terrible car accident. She is confined to her bed in the hospital. It is really difficult to see her in this condition and the trip to the hospital is long. Nevertheless, you continue to visit her.	
You applied to several colleges, but did not get into any of them. You are incredibly disappointed and do not know what to do after high school.	
A Real Problem That I Have Encountered	



"Some people are born into wonderful families. Others have to find or create them. Being a member of a family is a priceless privilege which costs nothing but love."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 82)

Activity 6: The Gift of Family

ACTIVITY TYPE: GROUP DISCUSSION

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

Jason Stevens comes from a prominent, large family in name, but in reality it is a broken family with few healthy relationships. In the movie, Red urges Jason to get something positive out of their family, and Jason reluctantly decides to take Alexia to meet his family during Thanksgiving dinner. The entire meal is spent arguing over finances and components of Red's inheritance. Jason suggests that everyone says something they are thankful for, but the relatives just laugh him off. What Jason learns from his negative interactions with family members is that even the worst family situations can teach a valuable lesson. For Jason, it's that he is capable of going out and creating a positive family for himself. This all begins through his promising relationship with Alexia and her daughter, Emily.

Families provide roots and heritage, but they are not always centered on blood relationships. In the book, Jason becomes a substitute houseparent at the Red Stevens Home for Boys, a positive place for boys who are in and out of foster homes. During his stay there, Jason becomes a father, brother, friend and teacher to the three dozen boys. This experience teaches Jason a valuable lesson about family:

> "You know what's amazing? Not one of those boys has a family, but each of them knew more about a family than I did. I think family is not as much about being related by blood as it is about relating through love."

> > The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall; RiverOak. 2001. p. 92





"Some people are born into wonderful families. Others have to find or create them. Being a member of a family is a priceless privilege which costs nothing but love."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 82)

Activity 6: The Gift of Family



Group Discussion Questions

- When you think about the word "family," what characteristics come to mind?
- Jason feels that love is the key to family, and that relationships through blood do not always constitute love. Some people, who are not born into strong, loving families, have to find and create their own families. Give examples of some positive people in your life who make up "family" - remember, these do not have to be people related by blood.
- How do certain family members support you? How do you support them?
- Describe a relationship in your family that you would like to improve. What steps can you take to address it?
- How does Jason heal the relationship with his great uncle Red Stevens, despite him already being dead?
- Why do the boys from the Red Stevens Home for Boys know more about family than Jason, who comes from a large family?

Family Tree Exercise (Optional)

After engaging in this discussion on the importance of family, you may wish to extend your learning by doing research and creating a family tree. Family trees provide insight into your heritage and cultural roots. Ask a parent or guardian for information on relatives as far back as they can remember.



"Laughter is good medicine for the soul. Our world is desperately in need of more such medicine."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 94)

Activity 7: The Gift of Laughter

ACTIVITY TYPE: INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP READING

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

During the seventh step of his journey, Jason is asked to find an example of someone who is experiencing difficulties in his/her life, but can continue to laugh in the face of hardship. During the course of the month, Jason meets David Reese, a blind man he interacts with on a commuter train. Instead of mourning his inability to see, David is able to crack jokes about his condition. He sums it up nicely when he remarks.

> "Mr. Hamilton, sometimes in life, either you laugh or you cry, " he said. "And I prefer to laugh."

> > The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall; RiverOak. 2001. p. 100

In the movie, as a hostage in the jungles of Ecuador, Jason does not know if he will even survive. His life is clearly in danger. At one point, Jason's fears and anxiety cause an unexpected burst of emotion. The absurdity of his situation causes Jason to explode with tears and laughter.

Have you ever laughed when you really should have cried? Laughter does not only relieve us of emotion and uplift our spirits, but it also provides health benefits, too!





"Laughter is good medicine for the soul. Our world is desperately in need of more such medicine."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 94)

Activity 7: The Gift of Laughter

Reading on the Health Benefits of Laughter

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What are the health benefits of humor and laughter?

The sound of roaring laughter is far more contagious than any cough, sniffle, or sneeze. Humor and laughter can cause a domino effect of joy and amusement, as well as set off a number of positive physical effects. A good hearty laugh can help:

Health Benefits of Laughter

reduce stress

protect the heart

lower blood pressure

connect you to others

elevate mood

foster instant relaxation

boost immune system

make you feel good.

Laughter activates the chemistry of the will to live and increases our capacity to fight disease. Laughing relaxes the body and reduces problems associated with high blood pressure, strokes, arthritis, and ulcers. Some research suggests that laughter may also reduce the risk of heart disease. Historically, research has shown that distressing emotions (depression, anger, anxiety, and stress) are all related to heart disease. A study done at the University of Maryland Medical Center suggests that a good sense of humor and the ability to laugh at stressful situations helps mitigate the damaging physical effects of distressing. Some other specifics about laughter's affect on the body are listed below.

Laughter's Effects on the Body

Laughter lowers blood pressure.		
Humor changes our biochemical state.	Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases infection fighting antibodies. It increases our attentiveness, heart rate, and pulse.	
Laughter protects the heart.	Laughter, along with an active sense of humor, may help protect you against a heart attack, according to the study at the University of Maryland Medical Center (cited above). The study, which is the first to indicate that laughter may help prevent heart disease, found that people with heart disease were 40 percent less likely to laugh in a variety of situations compared to people of the same age without heart disease.	
Laughter gives our bodies a good work- out.	Laughter can be a great workout for your diaphragm, abdominal, respiratory, facial, leg, and back muscles. It massages abdominal organs, tones intestinal functioning, and strengthens the muscles that hold the abdominal organs in place. Not only does laughter give your midsection a workout, it can benefit digestion and absorption functioning as well. It is estimated that hearty laughter can burn calories equivalent to several minutes on the rowing machine or the exercise bike.	



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Activity 7: The Gift of Laughter

Humor improves brain
function and relieves
stress.

Laughter stimulates both sides of the brain to enhance learning. It eases muscle tension and psychological stress, which keeps the brain alert and allows people to retain more information.

How does humor improve mental and emotional health?

Humor is a powerful emotional medicine that can lower stress, dissolve anger and unite families in troubled times. Mood is elevated by striving to find humor in difficult and frustrating situations. Laughing at ourselves and the situation helps reveal that small things are not the earth-shaking events they sometimes seem to be. Looking at a problem from a different perspective can make it seem less formidable and provide opportunities for greater objectivity and insight. Humor also helps us avoid loneliness by connecting with others who are attracted to genuine cheerfulness. And the good feeling that we get when we laugh can remain with us as an internal experience even after the laughter subsides.

The Doctor says "You'll live to be 60!" "I AM 60!" "See, what did I tell you?" - Henny Youngman

Mental health professionals point out that humor can also teach perspective by helping patients to see reality rather than the distortion that supports their distress. Humor shifts the ways in which we think, and distress is greatly associated with the way we think. It is not situations that generate our stress, it is the meaning we place on the situations. Humor adjusts the meaning of an event so that it is not so overwhelming.

Here are some additional things we can do to improve our mood, enjoyment of life and mental health.

- Attempt to laugh at situations rather than bemoan them this helps improve our disposition and the disposition of those around us.
- Use cathartic laughter to release pent-up feelings of anger and frustration in socially acceptable ways.
- Laugh as a means of reducing tension because laughter is often followed by a state of relaxation.
- Lower anxiety by visualizing a humorous situation to replace the view of an anxiety-producing situation. \

Why do we need humor to stay healthy emotionally?

A healthy sense of humor is related to being able to laugh at oneself and one's life. Laughing at oneself can be a way of accepting and respecting oneself. Lack of a sense of humor is directly related to lower self esteem. (Note that laughing at oneself can also be unhealthy if one laughs as a way of self degradation.)

Humor is essential to mental health for a variety of reasons:

Mental Health Benefits of Laughter

- Humor enhances our ability to affiliate or connect with others.
- Humor helps us replace distressing emotions with pleasurable feelings. You cannot feel angry, depressed, anxious, guilty, or resentful and experience humor at the same time.
- Lacking humor will cause one's thought processes to stagnate leading to increased distress.
- Humor changes behavior when we experience humor we talk more, make more eye contact with others, touch others, etc.
- Humor increases energy, and with increased energy we may perform activities that we might otherwise avoid.
- Finally, humor is good for mental health because it makes us feel good!



"Laughter is good medicine for the soul. Our world is desperately in need of more such medicine."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 94)

Activity 7: The Gift of Laughter

What are the social benefits of humor and laughter?

Our work, marriage and family all need humor, celebrations, play and ritual as much as record-keeping and problem-solving. We should ask the questions "Do we laugh together?" as well as "Can we get through this hardship together?" Humor binds us together, lightens our burdens and helps us keep things in perspective. One of the things that saps our energy is the time, focus and effort we put into coping with life's problems including each other's limitations. Our families, our friends and our neighbors are not perfect and neither are our marriages, our kids or our in-laws. When we laugh together, it can bind us closer together instead of pulling us apart.

Remember that even in the most difficult of times, a laugh, or even simply a smile, can go a long way in helping us feel better

- Laughter is the shortest distance between two people.
- Humor unites us, especially when we laugh together.
- Laughter heals.
- Laughs and smiles are enjoyed best when shared with others.
- To laugh or not to laugh is your choice.

Information taken from http://www.helpguide.org/life/humor_laughter_health.htm

How can you get your laughs in?

This article shows that laughter can be beneficial for both physical and mental health. A recent study showed that by the time a child reaches nursery school, he or she will laugh about 300-400 times a day. Adults only laugh an average of 17 times a day. Here are some tips for continuing your laughter into adulthood!

- Keep an eye out for everyday humor look for funny situations and silly activities that take place around you each day.
- **Observe infants and younger children** to see how they find enjoyment and amusement in very ordinary things
- Play games, listen to comedians and read joke books
- Read the daily comic strips in the newspaper
- Learn new jokes and create your own visit http://kids.yahoo.com/jokes/ to read funny jokes for kids and submit your own
- If you hear a joke you really like, write it down, or tell it to someone else to help you remember it.
- Have fun with everything you do
- Spend time with people and friends who have positive outlooks
- Avoid people, conversations and media sources (T.V., movies, etc.) that are negative



"Faith is all that dreamers need to see into the future."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 103)

Activity 8: The Gift of Dreams

ACTIVITY TYPE: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

Red Stevens believes the gift of dreams is the greatest gift because is allows us to go out and get any other gift we want out of life. As a young boy Red dreamed of becoming the greatest oil and cattle tycoon in Texas, and through his hard work and determination, that dream was fulfilled.

Red

When I achieved my dreams it was like going home to a place I'd never been before. You don't know that feeling, do you? The first few gifts I have given you have been practical. Show up, do this, do that. Then the gifts started needing you to provide input. They needed intuition. Still, your average person is too weighted down. Jason, you need to be free, free to dream. Then act on that dream. You need to come up with a dream. Jason, this is the time for you to dream.

Adapted from The Ultimate Gift screenplay; The Ultimate Gift Experience, p. 95

In the book, Jason is asked to make a list of all the things he would like to do and be and have in his lifetime. He is told to prioritize the list as he realizes which ones generate the most passion. This is a difficult task for Jason because he never put time or thought into what he wanted to accomplish in his life; just living day-today had been enough for him. At the end of the month Jason decides that his true passion is being able to help other young people, like himself, lead a good, fulfilling life.





"Faith is all that dreamers need to see into the future."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 103)

Activity 8: The Gift of Dreams

What Are Your Dreams?

Like Jason, you are now asked to make a list of your dreams. These are organized into short-term goals for the coming year and long-term goals for the indefinite future. Remember, your dreams will develop and

My Dreams/ Goals for the Coming Year:					

Fun Idea to Extend the Learning

After filling-out your personal goals and dreams, note your age and the date on the top of the sheet. Fold the sheet up and seal it in an envelope. Each year write a new list of short-term and long-term dreams and revisit the sheet from the prior year. Did you meet your short-term goals in the past year? If so, what are new goals for the coming year? If not, what are steps you can take to address them? How have your long-term dreams changed throughout the years?



"The only way you can truly get more out of life for yourself is to give part of yourself away."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 112)

Activity 9: The Gift of Giving (F.I.L.M. Service Project Component)

ACTIVITY TYPE: GROUP ACTIVITY

Dear Young People:



Think about a service project that your group would like to do to reach out to others in need of friendship and support. In the book, Jason Stevens is asked to give something to someone else for thirty days. However, the gifts have to come from him; they cannot be Red's money or the items money can buy. At first Jason thinks he has nothing. Yet, he soon realizes that these gifts

do not have to be physical presents. Jason has the ability to give of himself and his time to others. Below are the 30 days of giving that Jason successfully completed:

DAY 1 Gave an elderly couple his parking space in a crowded lot				
DAY 2 Shared an umbrella with a woman who didn't have one in a storm				
DAY 3 Donated a pint of blood at the hospital				
DAY 4 Called a neighbor who needed new tires to tell him there was a sale going on				
DAY 5 Helped an older woman carry her packages to her car				
DAY 6 Watched a neighbor's children for her				
DAY 7 Visited the Center for the Blind and read articles to visually impaired students				
DAY 8 Served lunch at the soup kitchen				
DAY 9 Wrote a note and sent a poem to a friend				
DAY 10 Took a neighbor's kids to school				
DAY 11Boxed and moved donated items for the Salvation Army				
DAYS 12, 13 Hosted visiting foreign exchange students				
DAY 14Helped a local Scout troop with their weekly meeting				
DAY 15Jump-started a man's car				
DAY 16 Wrote letters for people who were in the hospital				
DAY 17Walked dogs at a local animal shelter				
DAY 18 Gave frequent flyer miles to a high school band planning a trip to a parade in California				
DAY 19Delivered meals to disabled and older people				
DAYS 20,Took a group of inner-city kids camping and fishing on a trip with the Scout troops				
21, 22, 23				
DAY 24 Helped a local church with their rummage sale				
DAYS 25, 26 Helped build a Habitat for Humanity house				
DAY 27 Let a local charity use his home for a reception				
DAY 28 Helped a neighbor rake the leaves out of his yard				
DAY 29 Helped bake cookies for the elementary school bake sale				
DAY 30Gave cookies from the bake sale to Mr. Hamilton and Miss Hastings				



"The only way you can truly get more out of life for yourself is to give part of yourself away."

– The Ultimate Gift (p. 112)

Activity 9: The Gift of Giving (F.I.L.M. Service Project Component)

Think about ways that you can reach out to a person or group of people who would appreciate your kindness and generosity. You may be inspired by one or more of Jason's generous activities listed above, but it is very important for you to organize your own ways to take the lead! Like Jason, you have the power and capabilities to become a community leader and friend.

Look for ways to work in cooperation with adults.

- Plan and conduct your project with the guidance and support of an adult partner.
- Read some of the tips for working well with adults below.
- Have your adult partner(s) read the tips for adults.
- Brainstorm your project ideas and plan the steps to carry it out. Use the F.I.L.M. service-learning supplement, available at www.youthfilmproject.org
- Then, get to work!!

3 Tips for Kids Working With Adults

- 1) Most adults have good intentions. Remember, they are simply not used to working in partnership with young people.
- 2) When adults criticize you, it doesn't necessarily mean they are putting you down or don't value your contribution; it may mean the adult is treating you the same way he/ she would another adult.
- 3) Adults may not be aware of the capabilities of young people. Show them what you know.

3 Tips for Adults Working with Kids

- 1) Share the responsibility of leadership. Provide guidance, but avoid total control. Be sure to share decision-making.
- 2) Listen carefully to youth and try to understand their perspectives, without interrupting or reinterpreting.
- Share all work activities, even the tedious ones.



"In those times when we yearn to have more in our lives, we should dwell on the things we already have. In doing so, we will often find that our lives are already full to overflowing."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 121)

Activity 10: The Gift of Gratitude

ACTIVITY TYPE: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Link to the Film and Book:



Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

During his tenth assignment, Jason is to learn about the importance of gratitude. Before announcing the task, Red shares the following story with Jason:

"While still in my youth, shortly after going out on my own to conquer the world, I met an elderly gentleman who today would be described as homeless. Back then, there were a lot of people who rode the trails, traveling throughout the country doing just a little bit of work here and there in order to get by. It was during the Depression, and some of these so-called hobos or tramps were well educated and had lives full of rich experiences.

Josh and I traveled together for almost a year. He seemed very old at that time, but since I was still in my teens, I may have had a faulty perspective. He is one of the only people I ever met of whom I can honestly say, 'He never had a bad day.' Or if he did, there was certainly no outward sign of it. Traveling about as we did, we often found ourselves wet, cold, and hungry. But Josh never had anything but the best to say to everyone we met.

Finally, when I decided to settle down in Texas and seek my fortune there, Josh and I parted company. Settling down was simply not a priority in his life. When we parted, I asked him why he was always in such good spirits. He told me that one of the great lessons his mother had left him was the legacy of the Golden List.

He explained to me that every morning before he got up, he would lie in bed - or wherever he had been sleeping - and visualize a golden tablet on which was written ten things in his life he was especially thankful for. He told me that his mother had done that all the days of her life, and that he had never missed a day since she shared the Golden List with him.

Well, as I stand here today, I am proud to say I haven't missed a day since Josh shared the process with me almost sixty years ago. Some days, I am thankful for the most trivial things, and other days I feel a deep sense of gratitude for my life and everything surrounding me."

The Ultimate Gift, by Jim Stovall; RiverOak. 2001. pp. 122-123



"In those times when we yearn to have more in our lives, we should dwell on the things we already have. In doing so, we will often find that our lives are already full to overflowing."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 121)

Activity 10: The Gift of Gratitude

After a month of brainstorming, Jason comes up with the following ten things he is thankful for that make up his Golden List:

- 1. Good health
- 2. Being young
- 3. Having a wonderful home
- 4. Friends
- 5. Education
- 6. Places he's been able to travel
- 7. Car
- 8. Family ability to improve relationships and create family relationships with new people
- 9. Value and use of money
- 10. Steps leading up to the ultimate gift

Create Your Own Golden List

Remember, you can be thankful for anything or anyone. Nothing is too big or too small!
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

6. 7.

8. 9.

10.

Write a Letter of Gratitude

Red teaches Jason that it is important to express gratitude for the people and things that have enhanced your life. Think about a person who has had a significant impact on your life thus far. This can be anyone - a friend, family member, teacher, doctor, etc. Reach into your heart and express thankfulness for his/ her words, support and actions. Be sure to send the letter to the person so he/she is aware of their influence.



"Life at its essence boils down to one day at a time. Today is the day!"

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 131)

Activity 11: The Gift of a Day

ACTIVITY TYPE: INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITY

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

As Red Stevens approaches his imminent death, he begins to think about how he would live the last day of his life. Because life is nothing more than a series of days strung together, learning how to live one day to is fullest is equivalent to living a meaningful life. In the movie version of *The Ultimate* Gift, Emily is close to her death when Jason returns from Ecuador. She asks Jason if she can fulfill her dream and go horseback riding. In Texas, on Gus's ranch, Emily's dream is fulfilled. Or so Jason thinks, until he realizes that Emily was fulfilling her mother's dream.

Read the following excerpt from the screenplay, a conversation between Jason and Emily after their day of horseback riding.

Jason

Are you looking at butterflies?

Emily

No, Jason, I'm looking at stars.

Jason

When you asked me to set this up, I sort of thought you were, you know, asking because riding horses was your favorite thing to do.

Emily

Get real. Horses are smelly and sweaty.

Emily smiles her small, quilty smile.

Jason

What's your dream, Emily? If you could do anything- anythingwhat would be your dream?

Emily

My dream...was...a perfect day. And I'm just finishing it. (turning to him) My dream was to be with people I love, that love each other, who love me.

Jason, pierced by the dream he gave her, looks away.

Jason

The gift of a day.

Adapted from The Ultimate Gift screenplay; The Ultimate Gift Experience, pp. 95 - 96



"Life at its essence boils down to one day at a time. Today is the day!"

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 131)

Activity 11: The Gift of a Day

Jason fulfills Emily's perfect day, but has trouble thinking of his own. In the book, Jason is told to come back after a month with a description of his last day. He returns with the following scenario:

Jason's Perfect Day

- Wakes up early in the morning
- Before getting out of bed, creates his mental Golden List
- Early breakfast outside with a group of special friends, telling them how much they mean to him; gives them the gift of getting the most out of their lives
- Calls people who have been special to him (i.e., Gus Caldwell, people from the Red Stevens Library, etc.); also calls family members and others with whom he has not had a good relationship
- Takes his friend Brian to his favorite restaurant and asks him to share his dreams
- Walks in the park with Emily, followed by a trip to the art museum and brief outing on a sailboat around Boston Harbor
- Evening banquet for all his friends and their friends; shares gifts that Red left to him and videotape the event so others could learn from the gifts

What is Your Perfect Day?

In the space below, devise your own perfect day, including the people and places that are meaningful to you.

Time of Day	Where?	What are you doing?	Who are you with?	Why?
Morning				
Afternoon				
Evening				



"Love is a treasure for which we can never pay. The only way we keep it is to give it away."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 138)

Activity 12: The Gift of Love

ACTIVITY TYPE: GROUP DISCUSSION

Link to the Film and Book

Note: This may be read aloud by a group member/the facilitator for all to hear, or it may be individual reading before the activity.

In his final month of gifts, Red introduces Jason to the gift of love, the gift that encompasses all of the other gifts in addition to anything good in life. In the movie and book, Jason learns about the power of love through his year-long journey of gifts. In the movie, Jason recognizes his own ability to love through his relationship with Alexia and her daughter Emily. With Emily, he develops the kind of love that a brother would feel for a sister or two close friends might sense. With Emily's impending death, Jason feels this love this most. With Alexia, Jason experiences a blossoming romantic love that he never experienced in prior relationships. His relationship with Caitlin was built around trivial material things like luxurious vacations and fancy dinners. Jason's love for Alexia is built around a mutual commitment to Alexia's dying daughter, Emily.

In the book, Jason is asked to investigate how love is incorporated into all the other eleven gifts. Below is a list that summarizes his findings:

- 1. **The Gift of Work** Gus had a great love for Red and passed that on to Jason; a certain love comes from a job done well
- 2. **The Gift of Money** learn how to love people and use money (not love money)
- 3. The Gift of Friends think about others that you love and their well-being first
- 4. **The Gift of Learning** love for knowledge
- 5. The Gift of Problems look at your problems through a spirit of love, as something to face
- 6. The Gift of Family families are present when love is present (without love families are just a group of people who share a family tree)
- 7. **The Gift of Laughter** in order to love life, you have to enjoy it
- 8. **The Gift of Dreams** passions and dreams represent the love we feel inside
- 9. The Gift of Giving when you give out of love, both the giver and the receiver have more than they started with
- 10. The Gift of Gratitude experience love when we enjoy and remember all of the things we have been given
- 11. The Gift of a Day if Jason had a day left to live, he'd want to experience as much love as possible and pass it on to as many others as possible



"Love is a treasure for which we can never pay. The only way we keep it is to give it away."

- The Ultimate Gift (p. 138)

Activity 12: The Gift of Love



Group Discussion Questions

- Love comes in countless forms; describe various feelings of love that can be felt between people (i.e., love between friends)
- How can Jason use the experiences and lessons he has gained during the twelve gifts to forge loving relationships with his estranged relatives? Is it possible for them to change,
- Describe the differences in the relationships between Jason and Caitlin and Jason and
- How do you demonstrate your love for friends and family? How do they show their love towards you?
- What does it feel like to be loved and cared for?
- Which of the twelve gifts is the one that you are lacking the most? How can you do a better job at incorporating that gift into your life?
- Are there other gifts that you would add to the list of twelve? If so, explain.
- How does Jason demonstrate leadership and maturity at the end of the story? How do the gifts develop these qualities in Jason?



The Ultimate Gift

In the process of completing the twelve gifts, Jason even learns to love his great uncle Red, with whom he never had a real relationship with during his lifetime. In the completion of his twelve gifts, Jason learns that "life lived to its fullest is its own ultimate gift." (p. 149). Jason now has the will-power and resources to lead a meaningful life and to pass on his wisdom to others in need of inspiration. In the movie, Jason uses the millions of dollars he receives from Red's inheritance to establish "Emily's House," a facility to house children suffering from diseases and their families. In the book, Jason gains control over Red's entire charitable trust fund, which supports the Red Stevens Home for Boys, the Red Stevens Library Program, various scholarship programs, hospitals and many other institutions.

How will you live "The Ultimate Gift"? How will you pass it along to others?





The Ultimate Gift: Post Program Evaluation

Organization:

Facilitators of *The Ultimate Gift: Your Gift to Others* program - Please take a few moments to answer the questions below. It should only take about 5 minutes. One you have submitted the survey you will be entered to win a copy of the DVD, book and an activity guide. Good Luck!

____ City/State:

Contact Name:	Contact Email:	
Organization Website:		
Approximately how many youth does your organ	nization serve?	
How do you classify your organization?		
☐ School Based	☐ Library or Museum	
☐ Faith Based	☐ Child Care	
☐ After School	☐ Community Based	
☐ Out of School	☐ Unsure	
☐ Parks and Recreation	☐ Other (please specify)	
Approximately how many youth completed one Steps include: See the Movie and Read the Book, Service Project	or more steps in the <i>The Ultimate Gift</i> program? Participate in Activities from the Activity Guide, Complete a	
What age range participated in the program? $_$		
Please rate your overall impression of the activity	zy guide.	
Not at all useful or appropriate for my organization Comments	Moderately Useful Useful and appropriate for my organization	
Please give us any additional feedback and/or s F.I.L.M. programs.	uggestions you have to help us improve our future	
May we contact you for additional information? If yes, what is the best way to contact you?	□ Yes □ No	