



# TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

## A Story Worth Reading

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I found myself wondering the other day whether today's high schoolers are assigned the short story, "The Gift of the Magi" by the American author William Sydney Porter (1862-1910), better known by his pen name, O. Henry. I also wondered how many would understand it if they did. I don't mean "understand it" in the sense of comprehending the words and ideas, but in the sense of being able to identify with and apply its lesson.

If you've not read it lately — or ever — I urge you to do so. When you've finished, recommend it to your children and grandchildren. Or get them together and read it to them — maybe on Christmas day after they've ripped through the packages. Better yet, read it *before* Christmas, while they are making their lists of things they simply must have. (Yes, it is available on the internet; you can even find audio versions.)

If it's been awhile, here's a review. O. Henry tells about a young married couple who are short of money but desperately want to buy each other Christmas gifts. Both hit on variations of the same idea, an idea that O. Henry presents as the real issue in gift giving.

Aside from encouraging reading, good literature, and quieter family times, why do I think re-reading "The Gift of the Magi" is a good idea?

First, we love good stories and good stories often make and reinforce a point in ways other methods do not (witness Jesus' stories).

Second, O. Henry's story comes at an important virtue from a different direction and teaches it effectively. It also opens doors for other conversations. You can talk about the identity of the "magi" who gave rise to the title, or about what they did. Or, you can skip the magi and focus on God's greatest gift (remember John 3:16?). Or, you can take time to look at other Bible stories to which O. Henry refers.

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Third, it teaches countercultural values today's youth need to hear as often as we can tell them. The reason I wonder how many today will understand it is because, like us, our children are inundated with the notion that they "need" more of the newest and latest to be truly happy. We should seize every opportunity to teach that life is about being, not having.

Jesus cautioned us often — and from different angles — not to put too much trust in the wrong kind of treasures (read Luke). Anything that helps reinforce that truth is worth exploring.

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