

**UNITED
AMERICA**
WAYNE BAKER

**Family Treasures
Guide**

By David Crumm

Read The Spirit Books



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A United America **discussion guide**

What's your treasure?

This guide to an activity we call *Family Treasures* is one in a series of discussion guides that readers may want to use while talking about Dr. Wayne Baker's book.

Using the word “treasures” is likely to spark thoughts of treasure hunting. Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* has been re-made more than three dozen times for radio, TV and movie theaters. PBS's *Antiques Roadshow* has been a hit since 1979 because it suggests that anyone might have a valuable treasure gathering dust at home. The idea of finding hidden treasure shows up in stories from the world's oldest sacred literature—and it fuels customers for state-run lotteries around the world, today.

In this exercise, we invite participants to turn the focus of this quest toward their own family and identify an object that they “treasure,” not for its monetary value, but as a symbol of values they have inherited. These objects may be as tiny as a meaningful lapel pin or as large as a chair. One woman whose family emigrated to the U.S. from Iran brought in a centuries-old Persian carpet, which she unrolled in the center of her discussion group. Of course, the objects need to be manageable for participants, because the power in this exercise lies in the care people take as they bring out their object and tell the story behind it.

One group leader, after she began teaching from Dr. Wayne Baker's book, started referring to this activity as "Adult Show & Tell." That phrase can mislead participants, because we are not asking them simply to bring in something from a current hobby or a recent vacation. However, the "Show & Tell" phrase does identify a powerful truth: Most adults have few opportunities to bring out a treasured object and share its story with friends, let alone with strangers in the public setting of a discussion group. Consider this: While our daily conversations may vigorously buzz across cups of coffee, cell phones and social media, we rarely have an invitation to reach back and tell heart-felt stories about ways our lives were shaped, years ago.

Along with the *American Images* and *Taste of Home* exercises, this *Family Treasures* activity often summons deep emotion. Group leaders have told us about total strangers who have bonded over stories of objects as simple as a grandfather's "dog tags" or a grandmother's candy dish, a hard-earned Cub Scout merit badge or a piece of embroidery created with a mentor, a work-worn hammer from an old tool chest or even a seasoned cast-iron fry pan. We have seen truly precious objects: jewelry, rare stamps, the antique Persian carpet and even a 100-year-old baseball card. And we have heard stories with great emotion spun around objects no one else would even recognize: a chunk of copper ore from a mine or an iron handle from an old wood-burning stove. This exercise invites surprises!

Preparation & Response

This activity works best if you are using it during a discussion series, as opposed to a one-time discussion of United America. Participants need to feel comfortable with the group and the leader; and they need to hear about the activity usually a week before they are expected to bring their objects. We have heard from many participants that the week of pondering this activity was a lot of fun. Some people think about several possible objects before they settle on “just the right story to tell the group.” This means they have enjoyed a number of memories throughout that week of preparation.

THE VALUES: We suggest that group leaders print out colorful single-page flyers that list the 10 values in United America. (Two versions of the flyer are downloadable from the [book's resource page](#).) Having a flyer handy, as you describe this activity, will remind participants of the core values as they contemplate which object they will choose when they go home.

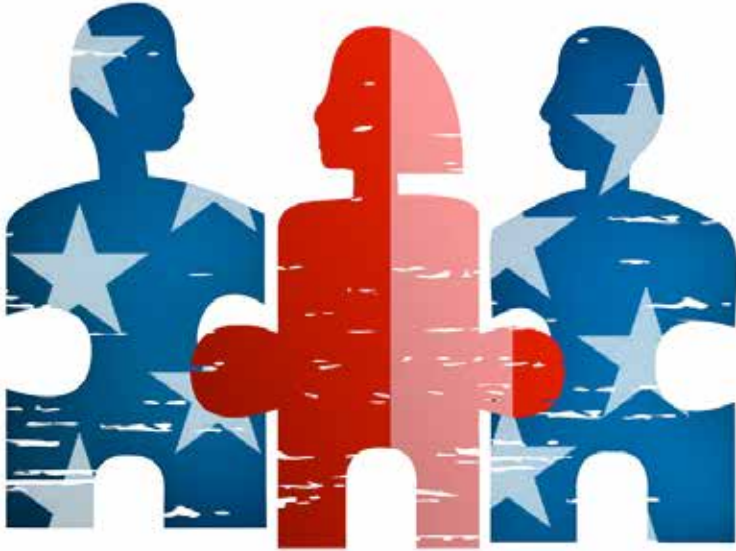
THE QUESTION: We typically introduce this exercise by saying: “We tend to develop our strongest values in our families, however you like to define your family from a large extended network of people to the smaller circle in your own household. For this activity, we invite you to think about an object—something you can pick up and carry—that reminds you of a value instilled in your family. As you choose your object, try to select a ‘treasure’ that you would never want to lose, but whose story isn’t obvious to someone simply seeing it for the first time. Consider the 10 American Core Values listed in Dr. Wayne Baker’s book and see if you can find such an

object that connects with one of those values. Then, next time we meet, we will invite some of you to stand up, show your treasure and tell its story.”

Some participants may ask if they can bring in a photo album and we have heard from groups where albums were shared. If a participant wants to choose a photograph as an object, our advice is this: We find there are much more memorable experiences, and better storytelling, if the person selects a single photograph that embodies a fondly remembered story.

PACING THE STORIES: We’ve heard from group leaders who discover that nearly everyone wants to participate in this activity, often necessitating more than one session of sharing these stories. You may choose to include several stories each time you meet to discuss United America. We do advise that leaders urge each participant to choose a single object and story.

CONSIDER: In a number of discussion groups, someone has volunteered to record the stories. Short videos can be produced on smartphones or other small hand-held devices. After hearing these stories, participants often say they wish someone could provide a video clip the storyteller could share with family and friends. Discuss this possibility with your group.



UNITED AMERICA

The surprising truth about American values,
American identity and the 10 beliefs that a large
majority of Americans hold dear

WAYNE BAKER

Preface by Brian McLaren

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