

# Getting Giving

## Inspiring Imitations of God's Love

December 17, 2023

Today we're exploring why gift giving is so important to everything God's getting done! Cuz there's not *one part* of His plan that *doesn't* involve a spirit of giving and there's not one time of the year where we're closer to *that spirit* than Christmas! So, since we're *in* the season, let's take a look at how we're *living* as we ponder: **What's so great about giving?**



Well, ask any *kid* this question and they'll give the *obvious* answer; **giving is great cuz someone gets stuff!** And it's usually *them!* When I was a kid, I liked getting *anything!* The *quality* or *cost* didn't matter; some of the *cheapest* gifts were my *favorite*, some of the most *expensive* weren't. And I mean, what kid *doesn't* have swordfights with wrapping-paper tubes *before* spending any time with their *actual* presents!



But the point is this: **value is in the heart of the receiver!** What a present is *worth* is a *subjective* assessment made *only* by the one *getting* the gift. Unless of course, *someone* leaves the tag on... *like my wife*. She chronically *forgets* to take them off and then spends hours *securing* them in a gorgeous, ribbon-wrapped, *Fort Knox* that makes it a *crime* to reopen and *check* for tags. So, *I'm* always on duty Christmas morning to *spot* forgotten tags, *grab* the gift, and *peel* the price off like a ninja!



And *why* am I so worried about it? Cuz **price tags affect how we feel about what we receive.** They reveal the value *someone else* has assessed *before* the *receiver's* heart gets to decide what it's worth to *them*. And that *stinks*, cuz all givers want *real responses* from receivers because **sincere feelings have to start in our own heart.**



For where *your* treasure is, there *your* heart will be also. [Notice it's not 'where *someone else's*' treasure is.] – Matthew 6:21 NIV

So, as children, *our heart* continues treasuring the *gifts* we're given year after year until *slowly*, the *strangest* thing happens; **our attention turns to the giver!** The more we *receive*, the more we witness what *giving* looks like; and *it looks fun!* I remember *recognizing* the incredible *power* my parents wielded on Christmas; they could *create* authentic emotions of *shock*, *awe*, *disbelief*, and *delight!* They were like "*joy dealers*" and *everyone* was addicted to what *they* offered!

And because of that *appeal*, *we all want in!* It usually *starts* with an *ornament* made at school but quickly *escalates* until suddenly, you're fourteen and pitching in with siblings to change dad's life with a brand-new lawn mower! And with *each* experience, we start to treasure *giving* a little *more* and *getting* a little *less*. Then one day, we see, **our getter heart was subtly swapped for a giver's.**

[Because] As water reflects the face, so one's life reflects the heart. – Proverbs 27:19 NIV

And after becoming a *parent*, giving *my* kids gifts, and watching *them* grow up, I'm happy to see that *same* heart reflected by *their* lives as they start moving from *getter* to *giver*. Because it's not just good behavior – **going from getter to giver saves our life!**



Y'see, **we were all born with a heart condition that'll kill us if left untreated, pride.** It's the *me-first* motivation of our flesh that's only familiar with the *material* world; so naturally, **it convinces us that gains come from getting and losses come from giving.** But down here:



The heart is *deceitful* above all things and beyond cure. [Wait – did he just say '*beyond*' cure?!] – Jeremiah 17:9 NIV



Yeah – cuz **human hearts can't comprehend how giving leads to living, not loss.** We're stuck on *material* math; *me* minus *something* equals *less* me! And *me* no like that! And it would take a *supernatural* heart transplant from an out-of-this-world *source* to *shift* our perspective.



[So, good thing God promises] I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; – Ezekiel 36:26 NIV



And like we said *last week*, everything we need to be *complete* came packaged in Jesus as the first Christmas present ever given! So now,

If anyone is *in* Christ, the new creation has come [along with its new heart!]: The old has gone, the new is here! – 2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV

And *Jesus'* heart makes it *clear* where we stand on *giving*, cuz He said:

'It is more blessed to *give* than to *receive*.' – Acts 20:35 NIV

But here's the problem – **our flesh is still fighting to reject His heart transplant.** So it takes a lot of *effort* to *sustain* it as we *adapt* to its *new* desires. We have to learn why we believe what *it* believes; why giving is *better* than receiving. But **teaching anyone anything is an uphill battle!** Cuz

The student is not above the teacher, – Luke 6:40 NIV

And **assuming the inferior role of student has always been an unwelcome attack on our ego!** In fact, believing *we know best* is such a prideful *problem* – *it's* what got us kicked out of paradise!

So what's God to do with us *stubborn* students? How can *He* get *us* to learn the lesson we need to live when we *don't* want *any* input at all? Well, **He tricks us.** Like a holy Tom Sawyer!

Remember how *Tom* tricked his buddy Ben into painting Aunt Polly's fence for him? He *convinced* Ben that there was no greater *pleasure* or *privilege* than painting *this* fence; and maybe, if Ben *traded* him his apple, Tom might *let* him paint a little. And by the end of the day, *every* boy who passed by wound up *giving* something to Tom for the *honor* of doing *his* chore *for* him! Because, *Tom* knew what *God* knows, **making something desirable inspires our action!**

Well, the same way Tom hid *doing chores* behind our desire for *pleasure*, **God hides learning lessons behind our desire for power!** When I was a kid on *Christmas*, the most *attractive* part of *giving* was the *power* my parents wielded as the *gatekeepers* of joy; but in *pursuing* that power, my *selfish* heart was *tricked* into saving up my hard-earned money – to practice *selflessly giving it all away!* Aint it just *poetic* how **God exploits our selfish heart to accomplish selfless deeds!**



But just like *that* – we find ourselves learning what *giving* is all about! Cuz regardless of *how* we got there, **every time we give, we feel what it's like to live with God's heart.** And it's *not* the *power* or *control* that ends up making it *attractive*, it's the real *responses* from the *receivers!* It's the *feeling* of a caring *connection*. It's the *relationship*. It's LOVE.



And it's the *special* love that we only learn from a position of *power*. The kind that's not *forced* or *coerced* and *doesn't* come from a place of *obligation*. The kind that only comes from the *heart*. So **God wants us giving cuz that's when His heart starts beating in our chest.** And we can see His *desire* for this development in Scripture, like when He says:



I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings. – Hosea 6:6 NIV



He wants *actions* of the *heart*, not *offerings* of *obligation*. Cuz let's be clear, **God doesn't need anything from us.** So if He ever *asks* for something, **giving it is for our benefit, not His!** And giving *sacrifices* from a position of *obligation* is good *practice* to *prepare* a *child's* heart, but **mercy means we've begun living with our new heart.**

It means *we're* giving because we *want to*, *not* cuz we *have to*. And *that's* priority #1 for Jesus!

[Like He said,] If you are offering your gift at the altar and *there* remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift. – Matthew 5:23-24 NIV

Because *Jesus* knows, the *more* we give things like *mercy* *freely* from the *heart*, the *more* we'll *learn* about *real* *love*; and the *more* we *know* about *real* *love*, the *more* we'll *share* in *His* *heart*. Which is why when the rich young ruler says *he's* followed all the *obligations* of the *law*,

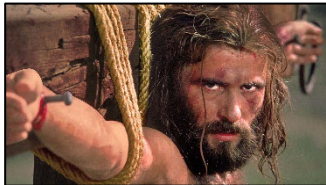
Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me." – Matthew 19:21 NIV

Cuz *there's* an order of operations; **getting gifts leads us to giving gifts** and then **giving gifts leads us to getting God's heart.** And as we *understand* and *appreciate* the *value* of His *heart*, we are again *inspired* to *imitate* as our *attention* turns to the *ultimate* Giver. And just like *kids* at *Christmas*, we want to try giving like He does. Which we're *encouraged* to do:

Follow God's example, therefore, as *dearly loved children* and **[in turn,]** *walk* in the way of *love*, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us – Ephesians 5:1-2 NIV



But right *there*, things *change*. Cuz we just saw the *tag* left on *God's* Gift. He gave Himself. **Giving us His heart and His love cost Him His life**. He packed *all* of His infinite *presence* and *power* into a single *vulnerable* human body just so *we* would see that the *relationship* He wanted with us – was worth *more* than *everything* in existence. Because He wanted His gift to *teach* us that **value is in the heart of the receiver because only love gives things value**. And He *gave up* all *other* material value to prove it – which meant He couldn't come as a blazing *fire* the way He did with *Moses*, nor could He come as the *mighty* whirlwind *Job* saw or the earth-quaking *thunder* that shook David...



Rather, He made Himself *nothing* by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to death **[So that mere humans could say]** – Philippians 2:7-8 NIV

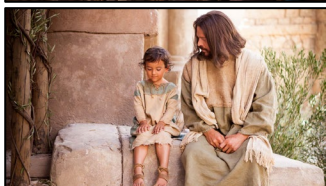


To us a child is born, to us a son is given, – Isaiah 9:6 NIV



Because everything He was, was now in *our* hands and under *our* control. And when we *see* the God of the universe is willing to lose *all* of His *material value* just to come here and save *us*, **we all get a glimpse of love's ultimate power**. Making it *our* ultimate *desire*! Cuz

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And **[seeing love's life-saving power even after loss of life]** we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.– 1 John 3:16 NIV



For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that *whoever* believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. **[And if you've received His Son, you should]** – John 3:16 NIV

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. – Luke 6:36 NIV

**[Cuz that's part of receiving God's heart! And]** Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of *God's mercy*, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, – Romans 12:1 NIV

**[Because]** The student is *not* above the teacher, *but* everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. – Luke 6:40 NIV

Cuz **as we give, God gets us to not only learn about His heart, but slowly swap it out for His! So, take the bait!** Surrender yourself like *He* did and *see* what happens! Because if God can *entice* us to try wielding the ultimate *power* of ultimate *giving*, we're guaranteed to learn the lesson that *saves* our life: **Love conquers all**. Even the grave.

**[Because]** God is love. – 1 John 4:8 NIV

And by giving *Himself* to us, **the infinite value of His infinite love gave us infinite life**. So now the question *is*, **do you want to be like your Teacher?** Cuz when God gave you His heart through His Son, you were *also* given the power to give *life* to *others*. All it takes is giving 'em a gift so good, it turns their attention to the ultimate Giver! And if there's one thing to learn from Christmas, it's that there's no better gift to give, than *yourself!*