

The Unopened Gift (Part 1)

Holidays, birthdays and special occasions are celebrated differently by everyone. But all have at least one thing in common—gifts!

Whether given in surprise or on the heels of great anticipation, as adults we simply love to give gifts. Receiving them, on the other hand, can be challenging.

Sure, there are things we'd love to have or do—things we dream about—if time and expense were not a factor. It's fun to imagine, but in the day to day, for most of us, what matters more than getting what we'd liked to have is receiving what we actually get with grace.

Because as beings created by God to be givers, we long to give back something better than we've received, such as affirmation and the joyful satisfaction of approval.

However, today the chances are greater than ever that what we find under the tree or stashed in a favorite pocket is much more difficult to receive with grace or to give back such winning approval with integrity.

The reason is delicate but fairly simple: Gifts that once originated out of love with hours spent on their selection have gradually become high-pressured obligations that can only be remedied by efficiency. As a result, we now prefer the almighty gift card. By rationalizing its mutual benefits, we find immediate relief from the stress of time wasted shopping or making stealthy returns.

It's sad but true, but as of last year, trend reports show that gift cards were requested more often than any other type of gift purchase. In fact, according to the National Retail Federation, a whopping 80 percent of holiday shoppers each spent an average of \$155 on gift cards. But who's complaining?

By offering such great flexibility, the cost savings in time and effort alone are well worth the lack of personal touch, right?

Perhaps so, but by taking a closer look, we can more clearly see that our newfound efficiency often comes with a hidden price tag—a potentially significant one for such a negligible amount of added convenience. It has also been reported that last year, consumers lost more than \$2 billion on gift cards that were purchased but never used.

Could it be that by making life a little more convenient, we are simply wasting our money on top of the wasted opportunity to meaningfully touch the life of a loved one? By definition, this is nothing more than a waste of gifts for all involved.

A More Significant Waste

Another bundle of wasted gifts, one that isn't measured by statistics or reported on by the media, is the type with exponentially more value than seasonal trinkets. These are the gifts that God has actually taken time to select with great intention and given to each of us specifically:

“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet. 4:10, NASB).

We can all agree that our yearning for significance is perhaps the best indicator that God created us with a purpose—something He simply wouldn't do without also giving us the elemental components, or “gifts,” to carry it out. So why do we exhaust ourselves searching for what He obviously wants us to know and employ? Could it be for the very same reason we fail to use those gift cards?

Absolutely! We've learned to overlook and ultimately waste what we've been given by assigning it too little value in the day-to-day scurry toward worldly success—something we refer to

as “reality.” As a result, His plan is shoved to the side like an unopened box in a dark little corner of our identity, while sitting quietly there, waiting to be unleashed, are purpose, passion and the deeper reality of lasting significance.

In part 2 of “The Unopened Gift,” we’ll take a look at some of the common ways we inadvertently overlook what we’ve been given and end up missing the mark—the true calling God has assigned to each of us individually—and how to receive it with grace for the benefit of others.

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