

Learning to Receive God's Gifts

☒ One year I gave my young daughter, Amanda, a little jewelry box with a tiny ballerina that danced when the lid was open. I put a small piece of jewelry that she had been requesting for a long time inside the box.

When she opened the gift and saw the jewelry box, she squealed and remarked on every detail. "Oh, Mommy, this is so beautiful! This is the prettiest box I've ever seen."

Eager for her to see all I had for her, I said, "Amanda, open it up." She opened the box and saw the ballerina twirling to the delicate music.

"Oh, the dancer is so pretty!" she exclaimed, and was about to put the box away when I said, "Amanda, do you see there's something in there?"

She discovered a tiny drawer and pulled it out carefully. "The pearl earrings I wanted! Oh, thank you, Mommy!" she exclaimed as she ran off to put them on. I sat there thinking, She would have been happy with just the pretty box.

Imagine someone giving you a present. You say, "Thank you so much for the gift. The paper is beautiful, the bow is breathtaking and I will cherish it forever." Then you put the gift on the table and let it sit unopened. How sad the giver would be after spending

time,
effort and resources to give it to you.

God gives us first His Son, Jesus, and then the gift of His Holy Spirit. From these two gifts all others flow, for all good things are given to us from God (see Rom. 8:32; James 1:17). Of the many things He gives us, four gifts in particular are essential to our emotional healing, restoration and continued wholeness—love, grace, power and rest.

Unbelievable Love

After I received Jesus I could sense the strong presence of God's love, and I had no trouble believing He loved everyone.

Everyone else, that is. I had a hard time believing He loved me. It

took some time of walking with Him and receiving His deliverance before

God's love really sank into my being.

Man's love is conditional—limited. God's love is unconditional and unlimited. Human love helps us grow, but God's love

transforms us. It burns away insecurity, limitations and fear.

If you think God couldn't love you because you're not worth loving, you have to understand that He loves differently from us.

You can do nothing to make Him love you more—and nothing to make Him

love you less.

Receiving God's love means that we don't have to do desperate things for approval or be depressed when we don't

receive

love from other people exactly the way we feel we need it. It takes the pressure off relationships and frees us to be who we were made to be.

If you have doubts about God's love for you, ask Him to show it to you. The love of God is not just a feeling. Because God is love, just spending time in His presence in prayer and praise causes His love to permeate your being. Opening up and receiving it not only satisfies your needs but also makes you better able to love others, even people for whom you have no natural affinity.

If no matter what you do you still don't believe God loves you, you may need deliverance from some bondage. Ask Him to show you what it is and to tell you whether you should seek the help of a Christian counselor.

Not As We Deserve

In my early 20s, my lifestyle was determined by my desperate need for love. One disastrous byproduct of this lifestyle was two abortions in less than two years.

When my husband and I later decided to have a baby, months went by, and I didn't get pregnant. I thought surely I was being punished for the abortions.

"God, I know I don't deserve to give birth to new life after twice destroying life within me," I prayed. "But please have

mercy and help me to conceive.”

God graciously answered that prayer—not only once, but twice—and gave me my two children as a testimony of His mercy and grace toward me. He gave me what I did not deserve.

Grace comes into effect when God refrains from punishing a person who is guilty. Mercy is God’s compassion for our misery beyond what may be expected. We need both.

If it weren’t for God’s grace and His mercy, we wouldn’t even be saved, for the Bible tells us, “by grace you have been saved” (Eph. 2:8, NKJV), and “according to His mercy He saved us” (Titus 3:5).

Before we met Jesus we were guilty and miserable, but His grace and mercy have saved us.

People who have been abused, rejected or emotionally damaged often find it hard to receive God’s grace and mercy. They also have a harder time extending them to someone else. And one of the stipulations for receiving mercy is giving it to others.

The difficult part of receiving God’s grace and mercy is maintaining a balance between thinking I can do whatever I feel like doing because God’s grace will cover it all and feeling, on the other hand, that everything in my life depends totally on what I do. Neither extreme exemplifies grace and mercy.

Our success depends on God, not on what we do. But we have to act on God’s Word as He reveals it to us and show our

love for

Him through obedience. This allows Him to enable us to do things we otherwise could not, and it frees Him to bless us in any way He desires.

Powerful Authority

Late one evening, shortly after our son was a year old, I had to go to the drugstore to pick up prescription medicine for his cough. I rushed in, made the purchase and left just as they were turning out the lights.

The parking lot was now empty and dim, and I felt nervous walking to my car alone. About a third of the way there, I saw a man on a bicycle move from the shadows at the side of the building.

Jesus, help me! God protect me! I prayed silently as I continued walking. Just as I was approaching the car, the figure jumped off the bicycle and grabbed me from behind.

In that instant, I whirled around and said with a power and authority that I have not been able to duplicate since, "Don't touch me or, in the name of Jesus, you're a dead man!"

My assailant was a young man, but large and strong enough to overpower me. I turned to him so fast I was able to see his expression change from aggressive to stunned. My eyes met his dead-on, and nothing in me backed down.

"Someone is watching us, and He will never let you get away with touching me," I said as I quickly unlocked the door

and

opened it without breaking eye contact. The young man stood motionless

as I got in the car, started the engine and pulled away.

“Thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus!” I said as I drove home. Needless to say, I never tested God by going into dark parking

lots alone after that, but I believe His power manifested at that

moment as a gift.

You can’t conjure up, take or demand God’s power; you can only receive it from Him.

If you feel powerless and weak in the face of your circumstances, then thank God that He says, “My power is made perfect

in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9, NIV).

Our power comes from the Holy Spirit working in us (see Acts 1:8). To deny Him a place in your heart is to limit the power of

God in your life.

The devil will always challenge the authority that you have been given over your world. Don’t allow yourself to be tormented

when life seems to be falling apart. Let God enable you to rise above

the limits of your life.

God’s Gift of Rest

My friend Mary Anne said to me one day, “There is unrest in your spirit, Stormie. I see it surface occasionally.”

Though she had

been right about me often, I was not convinced.

Later that week, Mary Anne phoned to tell me she felt God had revealed to her that my unrest was because of unforgiveness toward my father.

When I asked the Lord if there was any truth to what she said, a tidal wave of pain, rage and hidden unforgiveness toward my father poured forth. I confessed that sin before God, and tears flooded out, cleansing every part of my being.

Hidden unforgiveness had kept me from trusting all male authority figures, including God. I felt I needed to take care of things myself. It was a subtle, subconscious thing that manifested in me not as rebellion, but as unrest.

After this time of deliverance I entered into a place of deep rest such as I had never known before. It was a place that God had provided for me, but because of my own hidden sin I had not been able to receive it.

Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28, NKJV). When we choose to rest in God, He reveals all that stands in our way.

The Bible teaches that invariably these three things will disturb our rest:

- Sin. It separates us from all God has for us, including His rest. We worry, we doubt, we have bitterness and unforgiveness, and we don't always observe times of rest.

- Rebellion. We are rebellious if we refuse to fast when God calls us to fast, if we refuse to give when God tells us to give, if we refuse to exercise when God speaks to us about the care of our bodies, if we refuse to forgive others and if we keep going when He tells us it's time to rest.

- Anxiety. We are pressed in on all sides by trouble and fear, and we feel that the only way to find rest is to escape. But God commands us to pray and deliberately take time to rest in Him.

God's gift is that we should have one full day of rest each week and not lose anything by doing so. This means rest for the soul as well as rest for the body—a day away from concerns, problems, deadlines or obligations. Ask Him to remove anything that stands in the way of the rest He has for you.

Our heavenly Father gives us His love, grace, power and rest, but often we don't possess all He has for us because we don't realize the gifts are there for us. We must be prompted, like my daughter Amanda, to open up the box and take possession of our inheritance.

Stormie Omartian is the best-selling author of six books, including Stormie, The Power of a Praying Parent and The Power of a Praying Wife. She and her husband, Michael, have two children, Christopher and Amanda. Adapted from Finding Peace for Your Heart by Stormie Omartian, copyright 1998. Published by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission.