

**“The Indescribable Gift”
2 Corinthians 9:15**

Big Idea – God gave us the greatest gift anyone has ever given or received.

2 Corinthians 9:15 “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!”

“Thanks be to God for his gift that is too wonderful for words.”

Listen as this young wife and mother recounts a humorous Christmas story:

“My husband and I had been happily (most of the time) married for five years, but hadn't been blessed with a baby. I decided to do some serious praying and promised God that if He would give us a child, I would be a perfect mother, love it with all my heart and raise it with His word as my guide. God answered my prayers and blessed us with a son. The next year God blessed us with another son. The following year, he blessed us with yet another son. The year after that we were blessed with a daughter.

My husband thought we'd been blessed right into poverty. We now had four children, and the oldest was only four years old. I learned never to ask God for anything unless I meant it. As a minister once told me, "If you pray for rain, make sure you carry an umbrella."

I began reading a few verses of the Bible to the children each day as they lay in their cribs. I was off to a good start. God had entrusted me with four children, and I didn't want to disappoint Him.

I tried to be patient the day the children smashed two dozen eggs on the kitchen floor searching for baby chicks. I tried to be understanding when they started a hotel for homeless frogs in the spare bedroom, although it took me nearly two hours to catch all twenty-three frogs.

When my daughter poured ketchup all over herself and rolled up in a blanket to see how it felt to be a hot dog, I tried to see the humor rather than the mess.

In spite of changing over twenty-five thousand diapers, never eating a hot meal and never sleeping for more than thirty minutes at a time, I still thank God daily for my children.

While I couldn't keep my promise to be a perfect mother, I did keep my promise to raise them in the Word of God.

I knew I was missing the mark just a little when I told my daughter we were going to church to worship God, and she wanted to bring a bar of soap along to "wash up" Jesus, too.

Something was lost in the translation when I explained that God gave us everlasting life, and my son thought it was generous of God to give us his "last wife."

My proudest moment came during the children's Christmas pageant. My daughter was playing Mary, two of my sons were shepherds and my youngest son was a wise man. This was their moment to shine. My five-year-old shepherd had practiced his line, "We found the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes." But he was nervous and said, "The baby was wrapped in wrinkled clothes."

My four-year-old "Mary" said, "That's not 'wrinkled clothes,' silly. That's dirty, rotten clothes." A wrestling match broke out between Mary and the shepherd and was stopped by an angel, who bent her halo and lost her left wing.

I slouched a little lower in my seat when Mary dropped the doll representing Baby Jesus, and it bounced down the aisle crying, "Mama-mama." Mary grabbed the doll, wrapped it back up and held it tightly as the wise men arrived. My other son stepped forward wearing a bathrobe and a paper crown, knelt at the manger and announced, "We are the three wise men, and we are bringing gifts of gold, common sense and fur."

The congregation dissolved into laughter, and the pageant got a standing ovation. "I've never enjoyed a Christmas program as much as this one," Pastor Brian laughed, wiping tears from his eyes. "For the rest of my life, I'll never hear the Christmas story without thinking of gold, common sense and fur."

Matthew 2:11 says that the gifts the wise men actually gave were gold, frankincense and myrrh. But, who gave the greatest gift at Christmas time, and what should we do with that gift?

2 Corinthians 9:15 15 Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

God gave the world a great gift – 2 Cor. 9:15

John 3:16 16 "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

Rom. 5:15 – 18 “...what a difference between our sin and God’s generous gift of forgiveness. For this one man, Adam, brought death to many through his sin. But this other man, Jesus Christ, brought forgiveness to many through God’s bountiful gift. The result of God’s gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man’s sin. For Adam’s sin led to condemnation, but we have the free gift of being accepted by God, even though we are guilty of many sins.

Eph. 2:8,9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Romans 6:23 – “...the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”

Jesus Christ gave gifts unto the world

Ephesians 4:7 Christ gave each one of us the special gift of grace, showing how generous he is.

4:11-12 Christ gave gifts to people—he made some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to go and tell the Good News, and some to have the work of caring for and teaching God’s people.

12 Christ gave those gifts to prepare God’s holy people for the work of serving, to make the body of Christ stronger.

1 Peter 4:10 10 God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.

Matthew 7:11 So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask him. What kinds of gifts do we have through Jesus Christ?

What are you doing with the gift God has given you?

What are some of the gifts that Jesus Christ gives to us?

1. His constant presence

Psalm 34:18 "The Lord is near to those who are discouraged, he saves those who have lost all hope."

The first way God encourages us is He says, "I'm with you." "The Lord is near"-- He's not left you. Some of you had tough times this year. Maybe 2022 was a disappointing year. You didn't get the promotion you thought you were going to get. You didn't close a sale, you thought you were going to close. You didn't

complete the project that was delayed. Your hopes and dreams and the things you'd hoped would happen didn't materialize.

Where is God in all that? He's where He's always been. He hasn't left you. Immanuel -- God is with us! He encourages me in disappointing times by reminding me, I never go through anything alone. He is with me. The darkest part of the night is when the light shines the brightest. He's with me.

Hebrews 13:5 "Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be satisfied with what you have. God has said, "I will never leave you; I will never forget you."

He encourages me by helping me realize He's got a design, a plan, a purpose for my life.

Jeremiah 29:11 "The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans to prosper you, not to harm you, to give you hope and a future."

Note the ideas of "hope" and "future". God says, I don't want to hurt you. I want to help you. I created you. I have a future and a hope for you.

God uses disappointments to get our attention.
Disappointments are His appointments.

It's like a red flashing light. He wants to say to those of you who have been through disappointing experiences recently, "Yes, you have had pain and problems. But my purpose for your life is far greater than the problem that you're facing and there is a purpose behind it." He encourages us when we are disappointed.

Then, notice another gift we have through Christ:

2. His strength in our trials

Philippians 4:13 is a great verse.

Philippians 4:13 (Amplified) "I have the strength for all things in Christ who empowers me. I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses inner strength into me."

Some of you need to put this verse on your refrigerator. "I have the strength for all things..." I'm ready for anything and equal to anything." I am competent, I am capable, I am able to handle whatever comes my way.

\On my own power? No way! But with the power that God puts in my life through Jesus Christ. Nothing can devastate me in 2005 no matter what happens because I can face it. Not on my own, but He will strengthen me when I'm distressed.

One lady, whose family had been through some difficult times, wrote this letter to her pastor at Christmas, "It's that time of year again. Actually, it's been a very trying year for our family. We're glad to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. We are slowly picking up the pieces and recovering from four major traumas in our lives that happened within six months." The wife's mother died, the husband and wife both lost their jobs and their daughter left home.

"We've grown immensely from our struggles. Our character has been developed in the process. We've exchanged our complacency for sensitivity, humility and gratitude. We've gained a new outlook on life. When you're struggling to make a house payment, all of a sudden a new car and a new dress just doesn't seem so important. God taught us that all we have is a gift from Him and we shouldn't take it for granted. We're still struggling financially and emotionally. But God has been very real to us.

I hope all of you remember the reason for the season and our prayer is that you might know God personally and seek His plan and wisdom for your life. We can honestly say that through all our struggles this year, we would not have traded God's love and our growth and character development for all the money in the world. Having it all cannot replace peace of mind and spirit. God is real and He is good."

That is a letter from somebody who knows the meaning of Philippians 4:13. "I can handle anything with the power that Christ gives me in His strength.

God said, "As thy day, so shall thy strength be," Deuteronomy 33:25. Whatever the pressures, there will be adequate strength.

Psalm 23:4 "Even though I go through the valley of the shadow of death or (the deepest darkness), I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me." The darkest part of the night, that's when the light shines the brightest.

There are 150 Psalms in the book of Psalms.

The theme of Psalms in one sentence: "Life is hard, but God is good." That's the theme of Psalms.

When you start trying to say, "Life is good and God is hard" you're off base. Life is hard, but God is good! He says, I will not only encourage you when you're disappointed but I will strengthen you when you're distressed.

Notice another gift through Christ:

3. His guidance and direction for my life

When I'm confused, when I don't know which way to go. John 8:12 "Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the world. So if you follow me, you won't be stumbling through darkness, for living light will flood your path.'"

What are you worried about? What has got you uptight? What is it that is keeping you awake at night, keeping your stomach churning? You're going to have to make some major decisions in the next year; I don't know what they are and you don't either. But I guarantee you, you will have to make some major decisions

On what basis are you going to make those major decisions? "I **felt** it was the right thing to do?" Feelings are highly unreliable. You might have just eaten a bad pizza the night before. It's not a good idea to make decisions just on feelings. "Everybody else is doing it" is not a very good reason either. The majority is often wrong.

When you face doubts, there is a reliable source that you know will always give you the right advice and never steer you in the wrong direction. Is there any place in the world you can get that kind of advice?

Yes. It's called God's word. It won't steer you the wrong way.

Psalm 119:105 "Your words are a flashlight to light the path ahead of me and keep me from stumbling."

It is the only reliable guide for life. It's a flashlight. It illuminates. It keeps you from stumbling, helps you to see things clearly.

Atheist Russia for years mocked the Bible. It was fascinating to watch the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Some years ago this amazing quote from Gorbachev was in Time magazine, "We, in the Soviet Union, have changed our opinion on some matters such as religion. The moral values that Christianity has generated and embodied for centuries can help in the work of renewal for our country." That's not Billy Graham, that's Gorbachev saying that. That puts him ahead of a lot of politicians in America who wouldn't say that. What kind of an upside-down world do we live in? He's saying, We admit it! We were wrong! For

74 years the Communist regime tried to stamp out, snuff out any spark of spirituality in the Russian people and the people of the other republics. They failed because the moment they let it happen again things blossomed.

There's a spiritual revival, a spiritual awakening going on in that nation. Why? Because darkness cannot stamp out the light no matter how hard it tries. It can't extinguish it.

4. His power to change us to be like Him

Philippians 2:5 "In your lives you must think and act like Christ Jesus."

Did you know that when you get depressed, God doesn't want to just pat you on the back and say, "Cheer up!" He wants to change you. In fact, He wants to use the depression to help you learn some new attitudes, new thoughts, new approaches, new choices. He doesn't want to just keep you going; He wants you to change. He can change you. He says, Don't drive out the darkness, just flip on the light.

Ephesians 5:13 "It is possible for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also."

When the light of God shines in on my life, it brightens me up and it takes me out of that pit of despair and the light of God fills my life and I start glowing, I start being a bright person shining out.

Ephesians 5:9 "The light produces in people all that is good and right and true." When you allow Christ to fill your life with His spirit, it brings out the best in you.

Listen to this Christmas card from a Christian psychologist. "The greatest breakthrough in mental health was conceived long before Adler, Jung or even Freud." You open it up... "It's the conception of Jesus Christ."

He can do for you what maybe years of therapy haven't done. He dispels the darkness in my life. He is the light. Not anything or anybody else.

This Christmas, you may feel overwhelmed. Maybe you're going through one of these dark days -- the dark day of disappointment, or distress or doubt or depression. The good news is because of Christ, there is now a light in the world that can drive away that darkness.

1 John 2:8 "The darkness in our lives disappears and the new light of life in Christ shines in." It shines in our lives!

When I think about the first Christmas, it's amazing to me about the star the wise men saw to follow from the east. I'm sure many other people saw it. It was in the sky, anybody could see it. Probably millions of people saw that bright, unusual light. But they didn't do anything about it. Millions did nothing about it. But wise men followed the light. That's why they were wise! It's one thing to know there's a light in the world. It's another thing to follow the light.

The point is, you can choose darkness or light. You can choose to live in the dark nights of the soul, or the "winter of discontent" as Shakespeare called it. You can live in those dark nights. Or you can choose to live in the light. God shines the sun on everybody. But you can go live in a cave. It's your choice. God shows you the light but you can choose to go blindfolded or say, "I'm going to close my eyes. I'm not going to look" and enforce darkness on your own life.

CHRISTMAS DINOSAURS

A preacher's family had started putting up a nativity scene in their front yard. All of them were carrying out the little statues to put in the nativity scene. Finally everything was in place - Mary & Joseph & the manger & the baby, & angels & shepherds & all the barnyard animals.

Then little Scott came out carrying one of his favorite toys, the figure of the fierce Tyrannosaurus Rex, king of the dinosaurs. It was one of those plastic figures that you inflate, & in comparison to the other figures it was an enormous thing, towering over them all, & certainly not something to have in a nativity scene.

The Dad said, "I tried to tell him, 'Scott, you have to take that back because it doesn't belong there. Dinosaurs existed thousands of years before the baby Jesus, & it just doesn't belong in a nativity scene.'"

But little Scott insisted, so they finally put it there behind all the other figures - a fierce dinosaur hovering over the manger & everything else.

Then he said, "As we stood back & looked at it, we realized that maybe that dinosaur says more than we realized. For over each of us there is this menacing character that threatens to rob us of all our joy & peace & cheer."

"But Christmas reminds us that the baby in the manger is stronger than all the dinosaurs in your life or mine. And God has given us the victory through the gift of His Son."