

STOP, No More Gift for a gift, gift

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Usually the story of the Magi is read after Christmas because it happened a year after Jesus was born. It's about wealthy people from Iraq who could have sent their gifts by messenger but they didn't. I am using this scripture today because embedded in it are some lessons all of us need to learn for our everyday life.

Pay, if you will, very close attention the action of the wiremen themselves and their motives. The wise men started is all - Giving gifts, receiving gifts.

Read Matthew 2: 1-12

There are three kinds of gifts we give at Christmas time.

The first one you can see if you will look real closely in the Malls in Canton on Christmas Eve where hundreds of people are rushing around getting **a gift for a gift, gift**.

You know what I'm talking about! Basically, **the gift for a gift, gift** is a gift you give to someone because you were surprised by an unexpected gift you receive from them. So you figure out how much gift was worth and buy a gift of about the same value. And, be honest, you are only doing it so you won't hear later someone tell you that that person complained:

"Oh, yeah. I got them something nice and they didn't get me anything in return."

The second kind of gift you will receive I call **a gift for a favor gift**. The person who gives you this gift, gives it because he or she expects something in return and I guarantee you they keep score.

The problem is, you and I aren't honored by these gifts and the payment the gift giver receives in return is not a personal one but only an indifferent payment of a debit owed. That's one of the points the Magi are making: **gifts should be personal**.

The third gift is one that the wise men gave which I call **a grace gift**. A grace gift is one that is totally un-repayable.

I know I got a grace gift a while ago from my grandson Luke who one day out of the blue looked said: "I love you Papa". There was no way I could ever tell you how much those four words meant to me and to my daughter Melissa who was standing right there and had tears welling up in her eyes.

And the best example I can give you is **the gift God gave to us in his Son who would take our sins upon Himself.** *"There's no way you and can ever repay that gift." And it's impossible to measure the cost of a grace gift.*

Still another kind of Grace Gift you will experience is **Hospitality** And it is a grace gift this church knows all about. You bless so many people when they come to visit this church because you welcome them into your midst by giving a grace gift of yourself.

Grace gifts can also be a gift of service.

Alvin Gray lived at least 20 minutes from the church in Moorcroft, Wyoming. It was a cold Sunday. The temperature was at least 0 if not lower, there was at least 2 feet of snow on the ground. I had convinced myself that no one would be coming to church. Then I hear it – the door opened, someone stomped their feet to get the snow off. My surprise it was Alvin! I said, why are you here - he smiled and said – well I knew it was going to be too bad and those city people coujldn't make it.

Just as I never expected Alvin that morning, no one expected those wise men to bring gifts to Jesus, either. A Muslims coming to worship a Jew- honestly! I mean, you talk about a surprise. They were totally unexpected.

The Magi's gifts were permanent, were personal and they were given with joy in their hearts.

So here's one challenge for you today: Can you think of a gift that would meet those criteria for those you love?

Here's a hint, the gift won't cost you anything, it will be unexpected and it will be remembered for a life time.



On the front of the bulletin are five ways you can give the gift of love this Christmas. Each of us has a primary love language. If you want your wife or another member of your family or friends to know you love them, *you need to learn to speak their particular love language.*

For some of us, our love language is an **affirmation**. I can't tell you how many men and women have over the past years and said to me,

"I work my tail off every day, yet my spouse acts like I haven't done a thing. I never get a single word of appreciation."

If your spouse's primary love language is **words of affirmation**, your spoken praise and appreciation will fall like rain on parched soil. Before long, you will see new life sprouting in your marriage as your spouse responds to your words of affirmation: *" thanks for taking the garbage out."* Just those simple words will begin to turn a relationship around.

Do you remember the old saying, "Actions speak louder than words"?

If **acts of service** are your spouse's primary love language, nothing will speak more deeply or more powerfully than simple acts of service.

"I don't understand David. Every day he tells me that he loves me, but he never does anything to help me. He just sits on the couch watching TV while I wash the dishes, and the thought never crosses his mind to help me. I'm sick of hearing 'I love you.' If he loved me, he would do something to help me."

Maxine's primary love language was acts of service (not words of affection), and even though her husband, David, loved her, **he had never learned to express his love in a way that made her feel loved.**

In every society throughout human history, the giving and receiving gifts has been perceived as an expression of love. Giving gifts is universal, because there is something inside the human psyche that says *if you love or appreciate someone, you should gift that person.*

If someone's primary love language is **receiving gifts**, you will make that person feel loved and treasured by giving gifts on birthdays, holidays, anniversaries and "no occasion" days. The gifts need not be expensive or elaborate. Even something as simple as a homemade card or a few cheerful flowers will communicate your love to your spouse. *Little things mean a lot to a person whose primary love language is receiving gifts.*

If your love language is **quality time**, then someone giving you, his or her undivided attention is one of the best ways to show you that person cares.

"But I can watch TV, read a magazine and listen to my wife all at the same time."

Well, I am glad you have that gift but To your spouse, 20 minutes of your undivided attention – listening and conversing – is like a 20-minute refill of his or her love tank.

Men, if you really want to impress your wife, the next time she walks into the room while you are watching a sporting event, put the television on mute and don't take your eyes off her as long as she's in the room. If she engages you in conversation, turn the TV off and give her your undivided attention.

We have long known the emotional **power of physical touch**. That's why we pick up babies and touch them tenderly. Long before an infant understands the meaning of the word *love*, he or she feels loved by physical touch.

The problem is, if you live in a family that does not show its affection by hugging, you may never feel you are really loved If physical touch is the primary love language, something as small as a person's touch on your shoulder will communicate more than anything else that you care.

I need to give you a warning here.

Don't assume that your love language is the love language of others because it probably is not!
Don't excuse yourself by saying: But they should now I love them. Well, they may not!

If you really want to make a difference in others' lives and for that matter your own, find out what those close to you love language is and sacrifice enough of yourself to meet that need.

Someone once wrote:

"They were going to be all they wanted to be, tomorrow.

None would be braver or kinder than they, tomorrow.

A friend who was troubled and wearied they knew, would be glad for a lift and he needed it too, and on him they would call and see what they could do, tomorrow.

Each morning they stacked up the letters they'd write, tomorrow. And thought of the folks that they would fill with delight, tomorrow.

The greatest of people, they just might have been. The world would have opened its heart to them, but, in fact, they passed on and faded from view and all that they left when their living was through was a mountain of things that they intended to do, tomorrow."

The best gifts are memories.

- ✓ Don't wait till your kids are grown.
- ✓ Go home and MAKE some memories with them right now.
- ✓ If there is someone you have intended to call because you wanted to affirm who they were, do it today.
- ✓ Don't let another opportunity for service or performing a random act of kindness slip by you.
- ✓ If that person says they need a hug, give it to them.
- ✓ Take time to focus on one person at a time to the exclusion of all others
- ✓ And for goodness sake, don't put off that gift you were going to give someone but never found the time to make it. Do it now.

Take time to discover the love language of those close to you.
Remember not everyone is like you.

Like the Magi this morning

- ✓ take the time to make your gift personal
- ✓ And Give gifts this Christmas that will make a memory that will last for a life time.