

“FIVE GIFTS”

During his children’s message, on a Thanksgiving Sunday, the minister asked the boys and girls that surrounded him – What does Thanksgiving mean to you? One little boy said: “It means a big dinner.” A girl happily said: “Thanksgiving means a day off from school.”

When he put the same question to the adults in the congregation, a young woman said: “Thanksgiving means a day away from the office. I am at the office every day except Sunday, and I do appreciate, now and then, a day that is really my own.” A travelling salesman said: “It means a day at home. Last year I spent 169 nights away from home. I have three children. Thanksgiving weekend, I love being home with my family.”

I, for one, agree with all four of them. Don’t you? There’s nothing like sitting down to enjoy an old fashioned turkey dinner with all the trimmings; and who would turn down an opportunity to be at home with family and friends.

But surely Thanksgiving is more than turkeys and trimmings, a day off and doing nothing. I hope it’s an annual reminder for all of us to take the time and thank each other for the gifts we have received from one another. Gifts that have enriched our life and have given us a reason for living.

And while we are at, let us not forget to thank our Creator – our help is ages past and our hope for years to come. A God who gave us His only Son to be the Way when we are lost; the Truth when we are confused; and Life when we feel like giving up.

Today, I'm going to talk about five gifts. I am going to talk about five gifts you can give to anyone. As I share these gifts with you, all I ask you to do is to reflect on them, and when the time comes, I encourage you to give them away. Whatever you do, don't hang on to them, the returns will surprise you; more than that, they will be a source of blessing to all around you.

THE FIRST GIFT IS ACCEPTANCE

I don't need to ask you, but I will anyway, just in case. Is there anyone here this morning who would honestly say: "I don't care whether I am accepted or not?" Every single one of us, from the youngest to the oldest longs for acceptance. We'd give anything to be accepted by those around us – be it family members, neighbours, friends or co-workers. We want to be accepted for who we are – great or small or somewhere in between.

If this is the case, that as human beings, one of our needs is to be accepted and loved the way we are, can you think of a better gift to give to anyone, than to accept them and love them with no strings attached?

I can think of a minister in our denomination who would have dropped out of his theological studies had it not been for my wife's uncle who accepted him for who he was, while the rest of us made fun of him and were critical of him. My uncle shared with him the gift of acceptance.

THE SECOND GIFT IS SELF-CONFIDENCE

I believe there is good in all of us. {I must admit, it took me sometime to arrive at this conclusion.} One of the best gifts you can give me, is to accentuate the positive in me, and quit harping about all my faults. This is one of many gifts that my parents passed on to me, starting from as long as I can remember. They gave me the gift of self-confidence –

anywhere from learning how to drive a car, to becoming a minister of the Gospel. They instilled in me self-confidence.

When I come to think of it this was one of Jesus' gifts to the people of His time -He praised them! He praised what was good in them and only then, did He point out any changes they needed to make to have this life in all its fullness. In most cases, He let them see for themselves the changes they needed to make in order to become authentic individuals

One of the great favors you can do for those around you is to help them build self-confidence, and not keep dwelling on their faults.

THE THIRD GIFT IS A LIFE FREE OF NEEDLESS FEARS

I said - "needless fears". Because there are times when our fears are justified, and sooner or later we have to deal with them. Psalm 34:4 tells us how: "I prayed to the Lord, and He answered me; He freed me from all my fears." But I am talking about "needless fears".

Over a period of years a medical doctor kept track of his patients' fears. This is what he found out -40% were afraid of things that never happened; 30% were afraid of past events about which they could do nothing; 12% were afraid of some imaginary illness; 10% were afraid of what might happen to a loved one ; only 8% of their fears were justified; 92% of our fears are needless!

If there is any truth to this doctor's experiment, why not put it to practice in your life and then pass that gift to others? As we heard in today's reading "There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear." [1 John 4:18]

THE FOURTH GIFT IS APPRECIATION

Teach your children and grandchildren, for that matter, anyone you know, to appreciate what comes their way – the ordinary and the

special, the small and the great, the expected and the unexpected, the planned and the casual, the good and the bad. I threw the “bad” in the mix because I believe in a God who uses those trying experiences to teach us valuable lessons.

Above all remind those around you “to thank God for today”. One of God’s gifts to us. Here is what someone wrote:

THANK GOD FOR TODAY

“This is the beginning of a new day.

I can waste it, or use it for good.

What I do today is important

because I am exchanging a day of my life for it.

When tomorrow comes,

this day will be gone forever –

leaving in its place something I have traded for it.

I want it to be gain, not loss;

good, not evil;

success, not failure;

in order that I shall not regret

the price I paid for today.”¹

THE FIFTH AND FINAL GIFT YOU CAN GIVE TO THOSE WHO TRAVEL WITH YOU IS **FAITH**, and by that I mean to have faith in themselves.

When Jesus was asked: “What must I do to receive eternal life?” He responded, “*You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your being, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself.*” [Luke 10]

¹ Anonymous

In your dealings with people keep reminding them that they are created in God's image. They are not an accident. There is something special about them. As Henri Nouwen put it – they are “God's beloved”; they are not “nobodies”.

Furthermore, encourage those around you to have faith in others, who are also God's children, “chips of the old block” as someone put it.

And above all, promote and practice a faith in a God – “who's got the whole world in His hands,” our Rock and our Redeemer.

May I ask you a personal question? My question is – HOW BIG IS YOUR GOD? Forty years ago, J.B. Phillips told the people of his time -“Your God is too small”. Phillips explained – “that the trouble facing many of us today is that we have not found a God big enough for our modern needs.” How many of us realize that the Bible uses 196 names to describe God?

I mentioned the gift of –ACCEPTANCE, SELF-CONFIDENCE, A LIFE WITHOUT NEEDLESS FEARS, APPRECIATION, FAITH. These are five gifts you can give to your children, grandchildren anyone else that crosses your path, or shows up at your doorstep.

Here is the good news: You don't have to go out and buy them, you have them already, you have them because some generous person gave them to you in the first place. Don't even take the time to wrap them up, just give them away. Here is something else you should know -none of these gifts go out of style. They are gifts for all seasons!

This message was given by George C. Vais

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