

Gifts from Above!



MERRY CHRISTMAS!

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Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

James 1:17



One of the great joys of parenting takes place when observing our child opening a long awaited Christmas gift. Days earlier the child has identified the gifts that are tagged with their name and the anticipation builds as imagination runs wild with speculating about what might be inside the package. Finally the moment comes and without any hesitation at all, that little kid eagerly rips open the gift to receive what is inside.

Likewise it gives our heavenly Father great joy to observe his children as they receive the amazing gifts that he has tagged with our own name on.

On December 25th, we celebrate the most amazing gift that Father God has ever given; his Son, Jesus, a gift offered to every person in the whole world! What joy there is in heaven then whenever a person actually receives this Gift!

But wait there's more!

The gift of Jesus Christ is just the beginning of many gifts Father God is showering down on his children!

While the gift of the person of Jesus includes gifts of salvation, new and eternal life, and much more, Jesus also has a special gift that he offers which God spoke about at the very beginning of his ministry. God said that Jesus would 'baptize' with the gift of the Holy Spirit...

"...the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down on and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'"

John the Baptist (John 1:6, 32-34)

"...But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you."*

Jesus (John 16:7)

* The Counselor is the Holy Spirit. John 14:26

On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." Jesus (Acts 1:1-5)

The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off for all whom the Lord our God will call. Peter (Acts 2:38-39)

God send Jesus as a wonderful gift. Jesus came to prepare Gods children so they could receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus sent after returning to heaven.

As on Christmas morning, it is one thing to understand that there is a gift with your name on it and a totally different thing to receive that gift and open it. It is entirely possible to have received the gift of salvation and have missed another gift from the Father through Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit!

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."

So Paul asked, "Then what baptism did you receive?" "John's baptism," they replied.

Paul said, "John's baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. There were about twelve men in all.

Acts 19:1-7

Also: see Acts 8:4-25 (vs.14-17)

Just as God offers the amazing gift of salvation through his Son to every person in the whole world, only



those who actually receive the gift obtain the benefits of forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life that God has freely given. It is one thing to have a gift tagged with your name on it and another thing to take ownership of that gift.

God's gift of salvation through Jesus Christ is a gift offered to every person in the world. But the gift of the Holy Spirit that Jesus offers is only tagged with the names of those whom have received the first gift of God. It is a gift designated for 'those who believe'.

But wait - there's more!

The gift of the person of the Holy Spirit equips believers with everything they need to live the life that God has designed for each person during their life here on earth. He takes up residence in his new 'temple*' (hearts that have been washed with Jesus blood) to supernaturally empower God's children with their Fathers very nature of Love, Joy Peace, etc.**.

He also guides us into an intimate relationship with our Father God while empowering us in overcoming our bend towards unholiness. Paul said it like this to some believers...

...If you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live, because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.

For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship (adoption). And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.

Now if we are children, then we are heirs - heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in sufferings in order that we may share in his glory. Romans 8:12-17

What a wonderful gift the Holy Spirit is and how much we need Him! Jesus wants believers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to some other people who were also children of God...

...If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Luke 11:13



But guess what? Yep, there's still more!

The Holy Spirit comes offering a great assortment of gifts too! Christians sometimes get confused between the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. But actually, 'spiritual gifts' are given by the Holy Spirit after a believer has received the gift of the 'Person' of Holy Spirit. Paul said...

Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant. 1 Corinthians 12:1

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.

To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom, to another the message of knowledge by the means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to others miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues.

All these are the work of one and the same spirit, and he gives to each one, just as he determines. 1 Corinthians 12:4-12

Gifts from above! Good and perfect gifts! Coming down from the father of the heavenly lights! (James 1:17)

The gifts I've mentioned here are just a few of the vast assortment that God has tagged with our name on.

Why so many gifts? Because he loves the world. He loves you and me. And, because he loves his church. These gifts are not designed so that we can just hoard them to ourselves like a selfish child on Christmas day. The purpose is so that we can effectively demonstrate God's love to others in the same way that He is demonstrating it to us.

God gives us gifts so that we also are equipped to give good gifts!

Now the question is... am I picking and choosing which gifts from God I'm willing to receive? Are we testing each package, shaking it, smelling it, and squeezing it, to determine if it is going to be one I want to open or not?

How well I remember as a child how I would check out the gifts with my name on them on the days leading up to Christmas. Some of the gifts I could pretty much guess were things I didn't really care about or even want; things like socks! Yet for some strange reason socks would always be given to me. Why? No doubt because someone much wiser than myself knew how much I needed them.

Let's not hesitate to receive what our loving Father has chosen to give us. The gifts he has chosen are good gifts. He wants us to receive them, not just acknowledge that our name is on the tag. He longs to see our excitement as we discover his love and goodness represented in each gift knowing that, in the long run, it will draw us closer to him.

God's purpose is that his gifts in us express his love to others - out of the overflow of a personal, intimate love we have with our Father (anything less is a counterfeit! Matt. 7:22-23)

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?

But eagerly desire the greater gifts.

And now I will show you the most excellent way.

If I speak with tongues of men and of angels, but do not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.

If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing... 1 Corinthians 12:29 - 13:3

Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.* 1 Corinthians 13:1



*1 Corinthians 3:16

**Galatians 5:22-23

* Prophecy; a message from God that a prophet brings to the people Acts 1:17-21, 2 Peter 1:19-2:1, Acts 21:7-11, Rev. 19:10b

China and Vietnam

November 14-28, 2009 Trip Report



Hong Kong and China

The Bible Courier ministry

I'm just so excited about what God has done during this recent trip!

In Hong Kong our team of 11 worked along side an additional four short-term couriers and a number of long-term team leaders. In spite of about half our team dealing with flu and bronchitis, these valiant soldiers worked with a heart that resulted in an astonishing number of Bibles crossing the border.

In just five days of hard and steady work 7.78 tons of Bibles were hauled into China! That represents:

17,536 Bibles (319 boxes) in just 5 days!

Two days after arriving back home I received this note from the Bible Courier office...

Please let the team know that on average 7.06 metric tonnes (7.78 US tons) moved in one month is a good month. It is so incredibly God that so much was safely moved in just a weeks time. I hope this is of encouragement to you and the rest of the team.

Last year we were excited when we saw 1 ton of Bibles being hauled into China in one week!

Does this tell us anything about God's desire to get His Word to the Chinese Christians?

God loves the people of China! Millions of Chinese are devout believers, yet for many of these millions,

Bibles remain beyond their reach. Isolated, impoverished, hounded by authorities, millions of Christians continue to pray and wait for a Bible. God is using Christians from outside of China to help be the answer to their prayers. It is our honor and privilege to be small part of that answer.

According to the most conservative estimate that I know of, every Bible that reaches one of these Chinese Christians results in an additional 5 new people coming to faith in Jesus Christ as that Bible gets passed from one person to the next.

1 Bible = 5 new believers!
(The Bible League)

If I were to approach this from a businessman's perspective, I would have to think that this would be a pretty good investment. Even if only one Bible results in just one other person entering God's family, the investment still seems pretty good to me. Add to it that what is being invested in is of eternal value... well, I'll let you do the math!

We have been blessed to have Cassie travel with us on a Go Forth Ministry Bible Courier team several times over the past years. Her previous trip two years ago was pretty frustrating though, to say the least. Imagine getting stopped by the Customs Officials, having all your Bibles confiscated, and then having to haul them back to Hong Kong only to try again and repeat the process - four times in a row! Yet Cassie is a very determined person and gave it another attempt by signing up for our November trip this year.

The results were a complete contrast to the former trip. Every trip across the border that she made was a success! Yet, there was one trip, her final trip, that God used to remind her who is in charge of China's Customs. This is how Cassie tells it...

"Hello Missy" These are the dreaded words you don't want to hear at the luggage scanner on China's border with a suitcase full of Chinese Bibles. Several years ago I had been on another courier trip with Daisy and Wendell and on only two of the many attempted trips across the border I didn't hear those dreaded words.



But this trip was different! God and I were 8 for 8 and this was the last trip of the last day.

Standing in the line at customs I prayed, "Lord, You know I'm having a hard time hearing You, so....please keep me in line as long as You want. When I get through I'll put my passport away and head for the scanner." (Sometimes this is as good as it gets.)

As I left customs, all of a sudden a crowd of people came from no where. Great! I drug my suitcase onto the

scanner. I'm home free!

Then the dreaded words. "Hello Missy. Open your suitcase. Do you have Bible? Give me your passport. Wait here."

"OK Lord, you don't want me to be prideful. It's OK, it was a great run", I prayed as I handed the officer my passport.

The officer returned a few minutes later with my passport. "Too many Bible," he said in his broken English. "Next time only 1 or 2. You can go".

During the week I had paraphrased a verse from 1 Kings 20. It goes like this...

"That you may know that I am the LORD of the mountains, the valleys - and the scanner".

Vietnam

Friendship Evangelism

Ministry to Abused / homeless Children

Meeting with House Church Leaders

We have found that there are some good ministry opportunities for our teams in Vietnam. We have been developing this over the past few trips there with teams. Our first day in Vietnam was spent with a group of university students on a day trip to the Mekong Delta. Our goal was to build one-on-one friendships with these students through which our faith could be quietly demonstrated and communicated.

These friendships rapidly developed and many on the team now continue their friendships through email and face book.



Cross Cultural friendships quickly develop on the trip to the Mekong Delta

A day was spent with about 40 young kids who are either homeless, rescued from domestic violence, or whose parents are in prison. They have been embraced by a lady who moved from the USA to Vietnam a few years ago, rented 11 apartments, staffed them with Vietnamese Christians and currently cares for about 140 of these kids, all on just a minimal amount of support that she receives from a few churches.

A day at a water park is a rare treat for these kids - and a great time to heap on them some much needed love.



Vietnamese kids with a Bible story coloring book after a day of swimming

After soaking in a lot of water and sun, we gathered the kids together and shared some Bible stories with them as they colored pictures.

One day was spent with about 50 new house church leaders. For some, this was the first time that they had ever had opportunity to meet with such a large group of fellow leaders. It was the highlight of the trip for me!

Several of the leaders shared their testimonies with us of how they came to know Jesus. I find that just the fact that someone from outside Vietnam cares to meet with them and hear their stories is a huge encouragement to them.

Later I taught from the Word for several hours. They are starving for these kinds of training sessions where they are challenged, taken deeper into God's Word and deeper into their relationship with God.

Wow! So another year has slipped away! And what an amazing year it has been.

The Church in Vietnam has taken giant strides forward this year. The church in China likewise has continued to grow at an astonishing rate. It is such a privilege to be a small part in this move of God that is sweeping through Asia and beyond.

Thank you so much for all you do through prayers, support, and by going. Your investment in God's Kingdom is turning an incredible profit. One day we will all see it from God's perspective!

Blessings!

...and have a great Christmas!

Wendell & Daisy Martin

