

Happy New Year! The New Year has begun, this is the time of refreshment and renewal. No matter how many bad things may have come your way in the last year that is now history. 2016 is here—fresh, clean, and full of promise.

I usually do a “deep” house cleaning in the transition from the last year to the new year while the “Merry Christmas and Happy New Year” greeting is still in the air. It is my year-ending and year-beginning ritual. This ritual includes dealing with the gifts I received.

In the book “The 5 Love Languages” Gary Chapman outlines five ways to express and experience love: receiving gifts, quality of time, words of affirmation, acts of service, and physical touch. He begins by telling us, “Almost everything ever written on the subject of love indicates that at the heart of love is the spirit of giving. All five love languages challenge us to give to [others], but for some, receiving gifts, visual symbols of love, speaks the loudest.”

A gift is something you can hold in your hand and say, ‘Look, he was thinking of me,’ or, ‘She remembered me.’ You must be thinking of someone to give him a gift. The gift itself is a symbol of that thought. The cost does not matter. What is important is that you thought of him. And it is not the thought implanted only in the mind that counts, but the thought expressed in actually securing the gift and giving it as the expression of love.

In the gospel of John, we learn that from God we receive the Law, the Ten Commandments, through Moses. Through Jesus Christ, we receive grace and truth. And through God himself we receive the Christ—God’s presence with us as a person.

The writer of the letter to the Ephesians begins by listing God’s gifts to us. His list is filled with abstract theological terms which mean little to us as they are read. In our regular terms, these are the gifts:

- First, God chose us before the creation of the world. This means that God’s love for us is so great that it stretches back to even before the creation of the world. Such love gives us both security and a sense of identity as a member of God’s people.
- The second gift is that God gives us forgiveness.

- Finally, God promises that one day the whole world will be brought together in peace in accordance with God's will.

These gifts are with us always, not just in the past or in the future, but at this moment called "the Present." The Present, a daily gift from God, is given to us. Of course we know that time is a human invention. God doesn't wear a wristwatch, or use a calendar. The Bible says, "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day" (2 Peter 3:8). God deals with eternity and therefore time is not an important factor with Him.

But time is important to us because we live in a limited time frame. We begin with infancy, then go on to adolescence, adulthood, middle age, old age, and to everything that follows. We measure life in segments of time.

I ran across some interesting statistics a few years ago. It says this...If we live to be 75, most of us here will have spent 3 solid years acquiring an education—grade school, high school, and college. We'll have spent 7 years eating, 24 hours a day, some less and some more, obviously. We'll have spent 14 years, day and night, working. We'll have spent 5 years riding in automobiles or airplanes, 5 years talking with each other, and 1 year sick or recovering from sickness.

And get this, we'll have spent 24 years of our life sleeping, 3 years reading books, magazines and newspapers, and 12 years amusing ourselves watching TV, going to the movies, fishing, so on. That totals up to 75 years & that is what the researchers say, on the average, most of us will have done with our lives.

As I looked at these statistics I began thinking. Let's suppose that you spent every Sunday of your life for an hour, for 75 years, through infancy, childhood, adulthood, old age, in church worshiping. Now if you did that, how much time would you have spent worshiping God? The answer is less than 5 1/2 months. But let's double that, because you've always attended Sunday school. You've never missed Sunday school in all your life. That makes it 11 months of your life.

Think about that 5 years in an automobile & just 11 months in church and Sunday school! Twelve years amusing ourselves in front of a TV....and just 11 months in church and Sunday school. And that is just if you always attended Sunday school and church....never missed! That tells us a little bit about the brevity of time, and it also tells us something about our priorities in life.

Time is like a valuable gift in a very precious and delicate vessel. It might break at any moment and we might lose it all. So we have this moment—"The Present." We don't know anything about the future and we cannot undo the life we lived in the past, but we have this moment—the present from God! What will you do with this daily gift from God this New Year?

Some suggestions come to mind. Maybe spending time each day in prayer and a devotional? Participating in a small group? Engaging in service to others? Teaching Sunday school? Serving in ministry on committees or task forces? Maybe visiting the sick? The opportunities are many. The choice is yours.

May you all experience the joy and hope of unwrapping a gift from God daily this year by making a right choice? Amen.