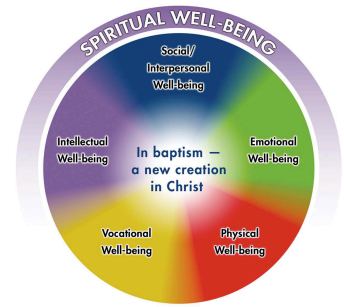


Receiving Gifts

From the Bethany Lutheran Church Health and Wellness Cabinet

“There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. – (1 Corinthians 12:4-6)



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Does getting a gift make you happy? Often it does. Of course, there are the “gifts” we get that are not so happy – a personally selected sweater from Aunt Rachel that may not quite fit our own sense of style, and the stories about duplicate wedding gifts (what are we going to do with six toasters?) were legend in the days before online gift registries. I think it is safe to say that if we get what we want, we believe that is a fine gift.

But what about those times that we get a gift, and it comes from an unexpected or even unwanted source? The scripture above is actually referring to spiritual gifts, but if you permit me another interpretation, it explains that gifts are not always what we think they are. Recently, our family lost a loved one, David, who joined the saints who have gone before. Finding a gift in a circumstance like that seems pretty unlikely, but when we sorted out our feelings of grief and loss we found that, indeed, the Lord had provided gifts to us.

While we were going through the process of creating a ceremony that celebrated David’s life, we found that there were memories of him that gave us immense comfort and pleasure in sharing with others. Now, mind you, David was no saint in life. As with any of us who are human, mixed in with the wonderful efforts in which he engaged to make life better for those around him, were the times when some of his all too human characteristics such as occasional impatience and high expectations were sometimes hard to understand or accept. Yet during that intense week we heard from many others, and felt ourselves, that he had left a legacy of well-earned respect, connection with others, and strength of character.

Maturity gives us the perspective that others gain happiness from giving us a gift. So we send Aunt Rachel a thank you card, and learn to graciously accept the care that was reflected in the gifting. Even if the gift was not our choice. There is plenty of evidence in scripture that God is pleased to give us gifts also. For example, in James (James 1:4-5) it says, “Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

God is good. If we open ourselves to the unexpected gifts he creates that enlighten us, inspire us, and enrich us, despite our own wishes, we may be blessed. Part of being a healthy person is finding capacity for understanding, forgiveness, and acceptance. It takes the burden of judgment from us and replaces it with peace. And for our family the gifts we were given left us with a feeling that we had been part of a life well lived and important to many, many others beside ourselves.

The trick, I believe, is recognizing when we are being given a gift, one that perhaps we do not even think we want. My wonderfully spiritual spouse found a gift in the final time that she spent with her father that she shared with others at his memorial service. As she wrote in his eulogy, “We do not always know when we will lose the opportunity to let those whom we love know it. You may be a person who does this already. But if you may have missed the opportunity to express this to someone in your

life, please consider the example of this man whom we loved and who found the grace to let us know at the end how much he cherished us.”

What a wonderful gift that was. – Peace and health, Jack Lindsey.

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