

## The Gift of the Spirit

Just over a year ago, news reports said that there is over 35,000,000 unspent dollars on gift cards in Canada. Often, when we don't know what to give to a friend as a gift, we give them a gift card. Quite often that gift card is thrown into a drawer, and it is forgotten. Different companies have different rules for what happens to that unspent money. Some have enacted fees when the card becomes inactive, thus making it possible for the business to take the money from the consumer. Other companies don't ever take the money as their own, but because the card has been forgotten or lost, the money is never claimed. To not spend the money given to us on gift cards is to not tap into a precious resource.

I am not always very good at spending the money given to me on a gift card. In fact, we have quite a few gift cards that have some money left on them, but, at the moment, I am not sure where they are. They are among our possessions somewhere, but they are inaccessible. Some of them we have had for several years. Why don't we spend that money? Mostly it is because we are not deliberate enough about using the gifts given to us. It's not that we are ungrateful; it's just that we don't make plans to use a gift card from a particular restaurant or we forget the gift card at home when we do go out. It can be said that we are not tapping into the resources that were given to us.

I think it would be fair to say that we don't always use the gifts given to us. Many of us probably have gifts that we received at our weddings which we have never used. Others have received Christmas and birthday gifts that we rarely take out of the closet. If enough time passes, we might find ourselves dropping those gifts off at the thrift store with the hope that someone else may be able to use them. Sometimes, of course, the gifts that we receive might not be entirely useful to us, and we don't use them because we don't need them.

In the Bible, gift giving is mentioned many times. Sometimes gifts are given to earn favour with another. For example, one king might send gifts to another king so that the recipient will form an alliance with the giver. Other times, gifts are given as a way of expressing gratitude to the recipient for something that was done. But the most common kind of gift given in the Bible is the gift that a stronger person gives to someone who is weaker so that the recipient can be elevated from his weakness. This is the kind of gift that is most often associated with God's treatment of us.

The Greek word that is used for gift in the New Testament finds its root in the word for "joy." It also gives rise to the word that is translated as "grace." Thus, grace is a gift given by a stronger party (God) to a weaker party (us) so that we can be elevated from our need and weakness, which results in joy and a sense of wellbeing. Our salvation in Jesus Christ, for example, is God's gift to us which elevates us from our inability to save ourselves and which results in joy and assurance that we have nothing to fear now and for the future. Included in that gift of God is the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This is God's greatest gift for us in the present, for it is the Holy Spirit who enables us both to have faith and to live our faith.

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We are encouraged by Paul to live by the Spirit, but I do wonder if we do that as much as we could. Do we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us to his full power? I suspect not. It would seem that in many cases, the Holy Spirit is kept on the shelf, and we do not seek his power nearly as much as is possible. I suspect that there could be at least two reasons for this: first, we live in a time and place where we are taught to be self-sufficient, and to some extent we believe we can. Of course, just as we are unable to save ourselves, so we are unable to live to our full capacity as followers of Jesus Christ unless we rely on the Holy Spirit. So, because we live in a culture where self-sufficiency is the highest good, we do not rely on the Spirit to work in and through us.

The second reason we may not receive God's gift of the Spirit fully is that we are not deliberate in seeking the Spirit's help. To put it in other terms, we leave the gift card at home. The Holy Spirit rarely crosses our minds as we go about our daily lives so that when we find ourselves feeling incapable, we do not rely on his presence. To use gift cards, we have to be deliberate, planning to eat in the restaurant or shopping at the store where we can use them. In the same way, when we begin our day, perhaps it would be helpful for us to consider what is on the schedule and ask the question, "How can the Holy Spirit, God's gift to me, help me with whatever it is that I am doing?" Not only will this question teach us to receive God's gift, but it will also choose us to be deliberate about what we are doing. If we find ourselves doing something where the Spirit cannot work in us, there is a good chance we should not be doing it.

Or there may be a third reason: perhaps we are afraid that if we rely on the Spirit too much, he may lead us in directions we would not normally go, and that can be a little intimidating. Yet, if the Spirit leads, we must not forget, he will also equip, and when he equips, those things that we face may not be quite so intimidating, for the Spirit is powerful.

There may be thirty five million dollars that is left unused on gift cards in Canada, and there are billions more around the world, and it may well be that while the Holy Spirit has made himself available to us, we do not rely on him as we should. God's gifts are meant to elevate us in our weakness and, as they do, give us joy and wellbeing. God is gracious to us, and all we need do is receive that grace.

*Pastor Gary*