

Coals for Christmas

December 22, 2019

Welcome to where we're learning to re-gift forgiveness!

What's the last gift you re-gifted? Ever get caught re-gifting?

We re-gift what we *don't want*, which makes it highly likely the receiver will feel the same.



Years ago, Shar and I got a crystal salad bowl. Didn't like it. Didn't want to hurt feelings by asking for a receipt. So, we re-gifted it at a wedding. Two weeks later the bride sees us and says, *"I love the salad bowl! But I got two of 'em; so I'll need the receipt."* Now *that's* how you get a receipt without hurting feelings! *Brilliant.*



Ever re-gift one of your greatest treasures? This is rare and highly esteemed. **We call them heirlooms.** And **we call it willing.** And we're usually *unwilling* to do it till death do us part! But, just know ...

It's what we bestow that becomes our legacy.

And so, **are you bestowing what you cherish most?** Like mercy, forgiveness, redemption, and good will to mankind? Or, **are you only re-gifting what you *don't want for yourself?*** Like animosity, hostility, rivalry, and ill-will to the unkind?



A few Sundays back, we talked about showing mercy, not as our graciousness to offenders; but, as our gratefulness to God.

Question was: **Am I grateful enough to Him to forgive them?**



Well, we're about to get a Christmas opportunity to put that to the test. Ever notice the hostilities at holiday gatherings?

Our deepest offenses come from those closest.



That's how God designed it. **Siblings and spouses are sacred sandpaper, as are parents, friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc.**

Ever been triggered when someone does something that reminds you of something that *someone else* did? And the hostility volcano blows! And you're just like: *"You are just like ...!"*

Overreactions indicate old resentments. You know what they say: **If it's hysterical it's likely historical.** So don't let the ghosts of resentments past destroy a present relationship.

Think: when they're not making me happy, they're making me holy.



But, **we can't re-gift what we don't fully own; and we don't truly own what we won't own up to and don't truly appreciate.**

Like the \$6,000,000,000 man who chokes his \$10,000 friend, in Jesus' parable of the unmerciful servant:

Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt. **The servant fell on his knees** before him. '**Be patient with me,**' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' **The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt** and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded. **His fellow servant fell to his knees** and begged him, '**Be patient with me,** and I will pay you back.' But he refused. Instead, **he went off and had the man thrown into prison** until he could pay the debt. When the other servants saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. '**You wicked servant,**' he said, '**I canceled all that debt of yours** because you begged me to. **Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?**' In anger **his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured,** until he should pay back all he owed. **This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother from your heart.**" – Matthew 18:21-35 NIV

The king says: "*You had everything. All you had to do is what I did for you. How's that so hard?*" Because, **we have a hard time receiving grace** from the King. **Pride says I don't need it** while **shame says I don't deserve it.** Either way, **un-appreciation of it makes me unforgiving.**

I'm empowered to re-gift forgiveness only if and when I see it as *gratitude* for the greatest gracious gift ever bestowed on *me*. You've probably heard the expression: **hurt people hurt people.** So what do you suppose forgiven people do? They hurt people *too!* Point is, **forgiveness isn't natural.** It's *supernatural.* And it's counterintuitive.



We re-gift what we *don't want* ... *unless* we deliberately, willingly bestow, with the help of the Holy Spirit, *what we cherish.*

But, let's be clear about what this gift may not contain.

The gift of forgiveness is *not necessarily* ...

- 1) **Forgetting the offense.** God has that ability; *we don't!* So, we must learn that **it's okay to live *with painful memories*** of those things that sand us, shape us, and make us who we are.
- 2) **Dismissing the offense,** by passing it off as "no big deal."

- 3) **Condoning the offense**, by justifying or rationalizing it.
- 4) **Resolving the offense**. Unless it's met with repentance from the offender, restoration isn't gonna happen ... *yet*.
- 5) **Pardoning the offense**, by releasing the offender from any legal or moral consequences for their inappropriate actions.

So, what's left?! **The gift that we're asked to re-gift is ...**

- 1) First and foremost, an **expression of gratitude to God**, which is the very thing that verifies our gratefulness as genuine.
- 2) It's an **act of surrender** of a desire to *repay* rather than *re-gift*.
- 3) It's a **decision to change my perspective** and start to *see* my enemies as being needy, complex, weak, and fallible ... *like me!*

Forgiveness comes by willing, not feeling. And, it's a final step in owning our own; because, it was *designed* to be re-given. **To fully receive our own, we got'a re-gift what we got.**



If we hold a grudge, we have only a grudge to give. Although, ***we don't actually hold the grudge; the grudge holds us.*** And *robs* us.

It robs us of joy that comes from peace that comes from feeling fully forgiven and loved. And ***it not only robs us, it imprisons us!***

Just like the \$6,000,000,000 man in the parable. So, ***to release our resentments we got'a make a break, and free ourselves ... from finger pointing, score keeping, and overreacting.***



Now, Paul gives us a warning *and* the reason behind the warning.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, [Letting us take our own revenge would be like giving a *chainsaw* to a *child* for Christmas. We know just enough to dismember ourselves and maim those around us] for it is written: "It is *mine* to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. – Romans 12:19 NIV

This guarantee empowers us to break out of bitterness, because we can trust Jesus to perfectly repay His way. Because, we hold a grudge to punish those who've hurt us.

Therefore: ***if I hold a grudge I doubt the Judge!***

Our struggle to un-grudge and re-gift is a battle with unbelief. Paul goes on ...

On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. [This kind of kindness is a gift we give to our self, our Lord, and our foe. To us it's a gift of freedom. To the Lord it's a gift of devotion. And to them it's a gift of *hot coals on their head!*] In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." – Romans 12:20 NIV

In Isaiah, (6:5-6) burning coals are used to symbolize purifying lips from speaking un-righteously.



And similarly, David writes ...

Let the heads of those who surround me be covered with the trouble their lips have caused. Let burning coals fall upon them; **[which symbolize the consequences of a sinful mouth]** – Psalm 140:9-10a NIV

Why *join* 'em? Work *with* the Lord so He can work *in* them.

My goal is retaliation; His goal is restoration. “*But I don’t want restoration!*” Well then, you need some hot coals on *your* head. *Your choice.*

I have a visual *and flavorful* aid for you. A piece of coal. Chocolate coal. Next time you’re feelin’ like heap’n somethin’ on someone’s head, do this instead: **take your lumps** and **swallow your pride** and **offer food of life and living water through your example of Christ.**

When you get what’s going on, it’s pretty sweet.



Now, **some hotheads are sensitive**, and respond quickly.

But, **some hotheads are stubborn**, and take the heat for a while. They may justify their actions and doubt your sincerity; **but, each re-gifting will turn up the heat until their convicted.**

And, **some hotheads are seared!** And they’re *never* comin’ around.

Don’t allow their hostility to overcome and become your hostility.

Here’s our final warning *and* encouragement from Paul:

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. – Romans 12:21 NIV

Do what *only you* can do: **allow the Lord to triumph over your hostility**; and **don’t blame theirs for causing yours.** That’s a lame excuse made by children mishandling chainsaws!

When hotheads come stalking you this Christmas, just remember that you have the perfect ‘stalking stuffer’ and hostility snuffer: *coal!* **Spirit satiating, soul-quenching, coal.**



Which is only delivered by re-gifting your forgiveness ... which *may* require a hothead huddle with Jesus, praying to Him while reminding yourself: **“I’m imitating You; not them.”**

It’s Christmas! **Let’s do unto them as He’s done unto us.**

Let’s receive and re-give the one gift that truly keeps on giving!