

## Unearned Gifts (A Look at Grace)

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*Psalm 84:11*

*For the LORD God is a sun and shield; The LORD gives grace and glory;  
no good thing does He withhold from those who walk uprightly.*

At first glance these words seem to suggest that unless we walk uprightly God won't send good things our way. Is God setting out conditions? If this, then that ... *If you walk uprightly, then I won't withhold being good to you.* Is that what's going on? Does God hold back His gifts until we finally measure up? Do we have to earn God's gifts? Or is the psalmist making a different point?

I'm not dismissing the importance of our actions, for what we do is crucially important. But this verse (indeed the whole psalm) isn't emphasizing what *we* do; it's emphasizing what *God* does. The first half of the verse tells us God graciously gives to us; the second half of the verse makes exactly the same point. God isn't pointing to our performance; He's pointing to His grace, His habit of giving unearned gifts.

### **The Performance Myth**

We think God gives to us *because* we're good – that gifts must be earned, that a quality performance gets a quality gift. Tit for tat. Equity. Fairness. The Performance Myth.

People respond in different ways to this myth. Some of us believe that God thinks gifts must be deserved. We understandably respond by trying to be "good enough" to earn His favors. (It worked with our moms and dads, even better with our grandmas and great aunts.) Yet at some level we know we'll never measure up to God's standard. He wants perfection, and we can't pull off perfection. We know that, but still we strive (and fail) and strive (and fail again). It's exhausting and discouraging. Convinced that *God* won't be good to us (because *we* haven't been good enough) we set about providing for ourselves.

Others of us, perhaps the more introspective, understand (at least abstractly) that God won't withhold good, but we just can't bring ourselves to *receive* His gifts. We feel guilty about receiving favors, not just from God but from people as well. You've undoubtedly watched someone squirm when given an extravagant gift. They mutter *Oh, you shouldn't have...* or some other disclaimer. We'd think them arrogant if acted as if they deserved it. *Who do they think they are?* Gifts, we're convinced, should always match the quality of a person's performance.

We think the same way about God's gifts. They're so extravagant, so ... *undeserved*. His gifts make us uncomfortable. And that's the problem with grace: because grace is not only unearned, it's free. God repeatedly gives us gifts we don't deserve and can't earn – salvation for example. (Nobody can perform their way into heaven.) It's almost as if we mutter to God *Oh, you shouldn't have...*, push away His goodness to us, and set about providing goodness for ourselves. That's a terrible mistake. And a sin.

### **From Doubt to Trust**

When I sin I do so because I think it will get me something that God won't provide. You do the same. We've all been duped by the lie Satan first fed to Adam and Eve: *God is holding out on you. If you depend on Him He won't come through. You'll miss out. You'd better provide for yourself.* Each word from Satan's mouth urges us to doubt that God will satisfy us.

But our fear of being deprived is unfounded. God never withholds good. Never. Look again at the psalmist's words: *no good thing does [God] withhold*. God promise lets us live without fear of deprivation.

God doesn't give because we're good and He doesn't withhold because we're bad. He just gives. That's what He's like. He exudes grace. And we are to simply drink it in. Grace can't be earned; it's free for the taking. That's God's point.

**- God doesn't give because we're good or withhold because we're bad. He just gives. -**

God's promise calms my fears and relaxes my heart. It reassures me. God is, and always has been, a dependable giver of undeserved, unearned gifts. He exudes grace. And we can rest – not on our laurels but on His character. God, in all His actions, is always being good to us. He even meets our failures with His grace.

### **Three Questions and Two Suggestions**

- Can you think of a time when another person has gifted you when you haven't deserved it? How did you respond?
- How easy is it for you to give to someone who isn't "worthy" of your gift?
- Do you suspect you have to perform before God will be good to you?
- Do you see God as a dependable,, consistent giver of good things?
- Ask the Lord to reveal to you an area where you think sin is necessary because righteousness would deprive you. (For example, do you think you'll lose out if you *don't* lose your temper?) Are you willing to ask God to change your mind?
- Ask the Lord to teach you to see, delight in, and accept His gifts.

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