

John 3:16

The Gift

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Some of my **favorite memories** from **Christmas** growing up are going to *Toys “R” Us* (may you rest in peace) and picking out a **Christmas gift** to buy my brother. One Christmas my brother Nathanael went into the store and bought his gift for me. Then I went into the store and picked out a gift for him. When we **unwrapped** our gifts on Christmas day we had each picked out the exact **same Lego set** for each other.

For some people you **love buying gifts**. It’s fun to give to others. You love to see their **face light up** with a smile. You love thinking and planning about what to get them. For others maybe gift-giving or gift-receiving causes **anxiety** and **worry**. When someone sends you a gift on the **outside** you look **happy** but on the inside you’re like, “**Agh! Why?** Now what am I going to get them?”

My **original plan** for this sermon was to preach out of **Proverbs** on gift-giving but the more I studied Proverbs the more I found it **didn’t** have a **whole lot to say** on gifting. It says **not to bribe a judge** while also **admitting** that gifts can sometimes **soothe anger** and **facilitate relationships** (Prov 17:8, 23; 18:16; 21:14). It **doesn’t look kindly** on those who **say** they’re going to give a gift and then **never do** (Prov 25:14). It seems to say that **gifts can complicate relationships** and if **misused do harm** (Prov 19:6; 28:21). So what’s the application? **Never** give a gift?! I don’t think so. More like, **don’t bribe your kids**, or your **spouse**, or your **parents**, or your **friends** or **whomever** this **Christmas**. Don’t try to **purchase** their **obedience** or **affection**. Rather, give **freely**. Give **genuinely**. Give out of **love** with **no strings attached**.

What does the **rest** of the **Bible** have to say? As I searched the Scriptures I fell on one verse that **reminded me** of what Christmas and gift-giving is **really all about**. Let’s read.

John 3:16 (NIV) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

This is probably the **most famous** verse in the **entire Bible**. It’s the first verse I can remember **memorizing**. It’s never really struck me before as being about **Christmas**. Hear that first line again, “For God so loved the world that he gave...” This verse is about the **most important gift** ever given but this verse is also about the **character** of the **giver himself**. The God of the Bible is a God who gives.

God gave.

If you were to crack open the **very first pages** of the Bible you would find a **God who is a giver**.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

God didn’t need us, but he **gave everything** to us. In Genesis one alone God gives us light and darkness, day and night, water, dry ground, vegetation, the stars, birds, and animals. He gives human beings life and then who does he give all this stuff to? You and me.

Genesis 1:26 (NIV) Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

God didn't have to give. He could have created a world **without color** or without **joy unless you believe in him**. God didn't do any of those things. He **freely created** this world so that we could enjoy it with him. It's like the **dawn of creation is Christmas day**. God is the **great giver** who gives to us **freely**.

How might you **reflect** the **great giver** this **Christmas**? How might you give **freely** with **no string attached**? How might you give out of your **creativity** and **love**, expecting nothing in return? That's the kind of God we believe in. **When** you and I give, we **reflect** just a little bit of his **goodness** and **character**.

God gave all these **wonderful** things to us—**perfect creation**—and **what** did we do with it? We **broke** it. Do you ever get a gift and then immediately break it? That's what we did. *God gave and we broke*.

The **rest of the story of the Bible** is a story of God giving and us breaking. He gives to a man **he names Abraham** and Abraham does his own thing. He gives to Abraham's **descendants** the **Israelite people** and they do their own thing. The gift God is giving is **himself**. God gives and the people **break the relationship**. **Gift. Broken. Gift. Broken. Gift. Broken.** *God gave and we broke*.

I want you to imagine that you're a **knitter**. Guys you love knitting too! It's not just the ladies. You've been spending weeks and weeks knitting a **beautiful sweater** for a **friend**. It has an **intricate pattern** and all their **favorite colors** and your friend is **big** and **tall** so you've been spending a **lot of time** knitting this sweater. It's Christmas and your friend **unwraps** the gift and says, "How lovely! Thank you." But you can tell there isn't really a **sparkle** in their **eyes**. But you figure they'll put it on for the **first snow** and then they'll realize how great it is. A few weeks go by and you go over to see your friend. As you're hanging out you notice a **Saver's box** in the corner. And you think, "My friend would never do that. Would they? They know how much time I spent on that sweater. Weeks and weeks, how I made it just for them." So what's the harm in looking? You make an excuse to get up and as you're passing by the box you casually glance in... and you see the sweater! Your friend is going to donate it your gift to Savers!

That's like what we did to God. *God gave and we broke*. God **gave creation** and we **ravage the planet**. God gave us **marriage** and we get **divorced**. God gives us **parenthood** and we neglect our **children**. God gave us **minds** and we'd rather be **entertained**. *God gives and we break*.

There's **more** than **one way** to break what God has given us. When we **worship** and **appreciate the gifts more than the giver it also breaks the gifts**. When we love our **marriage** more than God it breaks them, or our **children**, or our **minds**, or our **planet**, our whatever... The things we **idolize** and worship tend to be good things—**family, homes, jobs, education, toys**, and on and on—but if we love those things more than God we're committing the first sin Adam and Eve committed. We're **worshipping** the **gift** and **not the giver**. The gift **can't stand under** that **pressure**. It will break.

As we go into Christmas this year let's remember the God who gave. "For God so loved the world that he gave..." Let's appreciate the giver and the **relationship** we can have with him and not just his gifts. Let's worship him and not the things he gives us. God has been giving and giving of himself and John tells us that God gave us something even **more precious** than creation.

God gave his Son.

God has a **better gift in store**—the gift of his **Son, Christ Jesus**. **John 3:16a** says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son..." God gave **humanity**—God gave **us**—the best gift **imaginable**. And we as humanity received this gift with **open arms**. We **loved** this gift and **accepted him** as being from God. That's how the story should have gone, right?! But how did it **actually go**?

Jesus told a **parable** of a man who planted a **vineyard** (Matt 21:33-46; Mark 12:1-12; Luke 20:9-19). He put a lot of time and effort into the vineyard. He built a **wall**, dug a **winepress**, and built a **watchtower**. Then he

rented out the vineyard to some **tenants** and moved away. When it was time for **harvest** the owner sent his **servants** to collect some of the **fruit** but the tenants **beat** his servants and send them away. The owner sent **another servant** and another. They **struck** the first and **killed** the second. Then this happened:

Luke 20:13 (NIV) “Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my son, whom I love; perhaps they will respect him.’

Did we receive the Son?

Luke 20:14 (NIV) “But when the tenants saw him, they talked the matter over. ‘This is the heir,’ they said. ‘Let’s kill him, and the inheritance will be ours.’ 15 So they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

When Jesus told this parable he **spoke it against** the **teachers** of the **law** and the **chief priests**. They were the **religious leaders** who had the **opportunity to receive** the **gift** but **rejected it**. By doing so they **rejected** not only the gift but the **gift-giver**.¹ *God gave his Son and we broke him.*

I want to take a moment and talk about **disappointment**. Inevitably, we’re all going to feel disappointment at **some point** during the Holidays. For some of us it will be because we **didn’t receive** the thing we **wanted**. For others it will be because what we gave **isn’t well received**. Perhaps disappointment will come not in the shape of a gift but in a **relationship**—a relationship that is still on the **rocks** or is **no longer** due to **distance** or even **death**. When that **feeling** of **sadness** or **grief** washes over you **don’t push it away**. **Redirect** it. Pause and think for a moment of the great **sadness** and **grief** the Father must have felt when we **rejected his Son**. He **knew we would** but **sent** his Son anyways. *God gave his Son and we broke him.*

But John 3:16 tells us there’s **hope**. It tells us God gave his Son out of “**love**.” That means God didn’t send his Son to **condemn us** but to **rescue us**. *God gave his Son...*

God gave his Son for us.

God doesn’t want us to be **stuck forever** in this broken gift of a world. He wants to **restore the gift**.

John 3:16 (NIV) For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

What this is saying is that God gave us his Son so that if we believe in him we will **receive eternal life**. **What** is eternal life? Eternal life is **knowing** and **experiencing God himself**.

John 17:3 (NIV) Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

This **gift** doesn’t just **get us back** to a **perfect creation before** the **sin** and **brokenness**. This gift gets us **back to God himself**. Eternal life is **having a relationship** with the living God. We can have a relationship with God through believing in Christ Jesus. **How** is this **possible**? How did Jesus do this?

2 Corinthians 8:9 (NIV) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

The **Son of God** gave away the **wealth** of **heaven**. He made himself **nothing**. He took on **human flesh**. He **humbled** himself. He became **impoverished** and **poor**, not just **economically** poor, but **spiritually** poor as he **hung** on the **cross separated** from his **Father’s love**. He **died** (Phil 2:6-8). The Son of God didn’t just give **some away**. He gave it **all away**. He gave **his everything**. *God gave his Son for us and the Son gave his all for us and now the question is...*

What will you give?

What will you give to God? There are only **two options**—the first is **nothing**. If your answer is nothing, if you like life your way, if you prefer the gifts to the giver, although this may be **one option**, it **ends in heartbreak**. Giving God nothing leads to being **cast** out of the **vineyard**.

The **second option** is to give **yourself** to God. God wants to know you. God gave his son out of love for you. That means he wants to be in a **loving relationship** with you. I think there's a **temptation** in Christianity that **God wants something out of you**. God wants our **worship** and God wants our **work**. Those things are true. God does **deserve** our worship and he deserves our service to him, in whatever form of work he calls us too. But before he ever calls us to those things he calls us to **know him**, to **love him**... That's true worship. That's our first work. We give these things not because we **have to** but because we **get to**.

Part of **giving yourself** to God is **reflecting** him in all that you do; including **how you give gifts**. When we give this Christmas, **root** your gift-giving in **relationship**. What I'm saying is that **whatever you give** needs to be **motivated by love**, not by a **check list**, in a desire to **express care**. **If we are giving** out of love then we're **reflecting the gift-giver himself**. Let's root our gift-giving in something greater, **relationship**. *What will you give? Things? Or yourself?*

God gave his Son for us.

Pastor [Jonathan Romig](#) preached this message at Cornerstone Congregational Church. You can download a PDF copy of this sermon above, which includes endnotes and references, or share it through [Apple podcasts](#) or [Google Play Music](#). Read the [story of our church here](#).

¹ This passage does not give us an excuse for anti-semitism. We cannot use a few Jewish people's rejection of Jesus as an excuse to hate all Jewish people. In our sin we're all just as likely to reject Jesus. If you'd been there, you would have made the same decision to turn him away.