

“Gift...But Not A Gift”

Presentation Handout

A Gift That’s Not A Gift

- Someone may have a gift card in their possession, but it really doesn’t benefit them unless they use it, spend it.
- 51% of Americans have unused gift cards in their possession totaling 15.3 billion dollars (2021 statistic).
- This phenomenon illustrates the experience of many in relationship to the gospel:
 - People may know the facts about God and the gospel,
 - May even know their need,
 - Realize the Gospel’s benefits,
 - Talk about the gospel, have been exposed to it, even learned about it at church, school, etc.
 - But, not personally benefit from it, making it their own—letting it produce forgiveness, joy, peace, or salvation in their lives personally.
- So, how does one go from the facts of the gospel (head-knowledge) to benefiting from it personally making it one’s own—going from knowing about God and the gospel to experiencing God and the gospel?
- **Simply by faith!** Yes, it is that “simple.” But, here's the confusing part—what is faith and how do I exercise it?

Gospel—Objective & Subjective Components

- **Objective:** This is what God did in and through Jesus without our help, despite us. It’s a historical fact, like credible news that has happened whether we believe it or not.
- **Subjective:** This is our response to what God has already done in and through Christ. We accept it, receive it by faith, making it our own, allowing it to transform us.

Objective Gospel Blessings

- Blessed already by God in Christ {*Ephesians 1:3*}
- In heavenly places {*Ephesians 1:3; 2:4-6*}
- You’re special, valued, and wanted {*Ephesians 1:4-5*}
- You’re redeemed {*Ephesians 1:7*}
- God is glorified and honored {*Ephesians 1:6; 2:7*}

Subjective Gospel—Experiencing the Gospel by Faith {Ephesians 2:8-9}

- Paul is not complicated in his explanation: ...by grace through faith, not of works, it's a gift from God—"the just shall live by faith." {Romans 1:17}.
- Just so we don't misunderstand Paul's simple, clearness (at least this time): we don't earn salvation by what we do. Yes, when we receive it something begins to change in our lives. That will be under our "Living" mile-marker in the future. Salvation is a gift given by God's grace to us, purchased or worked out in the life of Jesus. And we receive it (not earn it) through faith.

TAKE-AWAY: It's like an employer informing you that your paycheck is their weekly or bi-weekly gift to you. Wait! A paycheck is not a gift. It's earned!! You worked hard for it. It's what you deserve for the hours you worked. This is how some view salvation, like a paycheck earned. But, thankfully, it not!! It's a gift...by *grace through faith!*

- To help us understand biblical faith, we'll open up the pages of Abram/Abraham's life in *Genesis 15-17*.

Biblical Faith Lived – Abraham's Life {Genesis 15-17}

- Faith lives in close relationship with God {Genesis 15:1-2}
 - As we open up the pages of Abram/Abraham's story in *Genesis 15*, we find God coming to him, promising Abram He will be his protection and help. And out of this promise comes a very serious, honest conversation with God.
 - Close, growing, real relationships deal with "stuff," even if it requires hard conversations. Abram tells God: I have not seen the fulfillment of your covenant promise of a son and ancestors to bless the earth on Your behalf {Genesis 12}.
 - From Abram's limited, human perspective, he's wondering if God maybe forgot, couldn't get around to it, or needed his help. He felt let down, maybe even abandoned a little.
 - And..., not in a demanding, "in-your-face-way," Abram lays out the situation and how he feels about it. This is real relationship-connection, much like the Psalms. Amazingly, God seems to encourage it. He doesn't "shut up or shut down" Abram!
 - God actually initiated the conversation. He did so in *Genesis 12* and now here again in *Genesis 15*. "The word of the Lord" language is used many times in the Bible to indicate God's direct communication with His prophets. This is a close, intimate relationship between God and Abram.
 - That's because true faith lives in a close relationship with God! It's real, living, close, "raw,"—a honest experience, a daily interaction, connection with God that is more than biblical/theological facts about God.
 - Unless we personally have this type of faith-walk we will not personally experience God's salvation in our lives! It will just be "head-knowledge" without the personal heart experience. Unfortunately, this "head-knowledge" experience is what the religious leaders had in Jesus' day...and they crucified Him as a result.
 - In this honest, heart-to-heart conversation between God & Abram, something amazing happens—Abram trusts God as his ultimate help!

- **Faith trusts God as one’s ultimate help** {*Genesis 15:4-5*}
 - As Abram wonders, God promises, re-promises. As a result, Abram sees God as enough—his “reward” {*v. 1*}, the One who will meet all of his needs, even providing a son to fulfill His (God’s) covenant promise to Abram.
 - This kind of faith experience can be scary! It was a risk for Abram to trust God. What if God failed him? Didn’t it look like God had done this already? Unless Abram had a relationship with God, trust would not have happened. We generally don’t trust strangers.
 - Yet, God wasn’t a stranger to Abram. He had seen His faithfulness in the past as God had provided for him as he sojourned, leaving family, friends, and the home country {*Genesis 12 & 20*}, or trying to help out God through Ismael, instead of waiting for Isaac—God’s promise {*Genesis 16*}.
 - To trust God as his ultimate help, Abram had to take God at His Word.
- **Faith takes God at His Word** {*Genesis 15:6*}
 - As God promised, re-promised Abram He would provide the covenant son for him, nothing really seemed to change. Sarai/Sarah didn’t become pregnant. The planets didn’t align in some special way. Life apparently stayed the same.
 - The only thing that really changed was God made another remarkable, unbelievable promise—not just one son, but a whole lot of descendants!
 - And Abram believed (“faith-ed”) God—took Him at His word—and God reckoned, recognized it as righteousness. The unthinkable happened—a sinful, frail, unbelieving-at-times human being **believed** God against all apparent odds of the current situation. Faith is demonstrated in moments of crises!
 - No wonder other Bible writers, particularly the Apostle Paul, were impressed to refer to this verse to describe true faith in receiving God’s salvation.
 - *Romans 4:1-5* ~ Abram/Abraham believed God when it seemed impossible, and nothing had apparently changed with his situation. This is what made Abram’s response faith and why his faith was accounted, reckoned, recognized as righteousness!
 - *Romans 4:9-12* ~ Our works do not earn God’s favor, nor do they make God love, care, or save us. Neither do they make us better than others. Genuine works reveal, reflect, real, true faith, which trusts God to obey.
 - *Romans 4:13-14, 16* ~ Since we don’t earn God’s love, care, or favor...then His salvation is a **gift** of grace, not our self-boastful works!
 - *Galatians 3:1-3, 5-9, 13-14* ~ Again, true faith is trust in God outside of us, to save ourselves, change ourselves, obey ourselves, etc. This “other-ness” is a sign of true faith. We **can’t** save ourselves, period!
 - When Abram truly believed (“faith-ed”) God, he actually obeyed God.
- **Faith obeys God in His power** {*Genesis 17:1-7, 10-11, 26*}
 - Circumcision was a sign of obedience through or by faith, not a means of obedience.
 - Abram, Ishmael, along with all the other males in Abram’s household were circumcised in the flesh of their foreskin. The location of circumcision is important because it was a consistent reminder to Abram & Sarai’s of their futile attempt to help out God by trying to fulfill His divine covenant promise in their own human strength and ingenuity through Hagar & Ishmael {*Genesis 16*}.

- In *Genesis 22* Abraham trusts and obeys God this time, taking Him (God) at His word, even if it meant God would have to resurrect Isaac from the dead {*Hebrews 11:17-19*}. Abraham trusted God in heart-obedience to work out the apparent dichotomy between God’s promise of Isaac being the promised covenant child and God’s invitation-command to sacrifice him as an offering.
- This theme of true faith working, or obeying is picked up by other Bible writers:
 - *Romans 4:17-22* ~ It takes two for a baby, whether asexual or sexual reproduction. **No** immaculate conception here. You get the point. Instead, Abraham & Sarah trusted God, stepping out in heart obedience on God’s word of promise as though it had already happened.
 - *James 2:14-24* ~ Though works don’t earn us God’s love, care, or salvation; they can reveal one’s heart appreciation and true faith because faith works or obeys as it is motivated by God’s love {*Galatians 5:6*}.
- Mary Magdalene washed Jesus’ feet with her hair, tears, and costly spikenard worth one year’s salary. Why? Because God’s love through Jesus captured her heart and nothing was too much for her Lord! When she was doing this act of love, Jesus said, “Your faith has saved you. Go in peace!” {*Luke 7:50*}
- This is saving faith—the faith Abraham & Sarah had, the faith John & Paul had, and the same faith we may have too!

Biblical Descriptions of Faith

- True faith
 - How people can live committed to God—not in pride and self-sufficiency {*Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 2:20; Hebrews 10:38*}
 - Gives God permission to work on one’s behalf in the way He (God) chooses {*Matthew 9:1-3, 20-22, 27-29; 15:21-28; 21:20-22; Mark 2:1-5; 5:25-34; 10:46-52; 11:20-24; Luke 5:17-20; 8:43-48; 17:11-19; 18:35-43; Acts 3:11, 13, 16; 14:8-10*}
 - Believes God, taking Him at His word because His word is active and accomplishes what He wills {*Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-9; Isaiah 55:10-11*}
 - Appreciates God’s love, leading one to “sacrifice” all for Him no matter the “cost” {*Luke 7:40-50*}
 - Gives the Holy Spirit permission to cleanse one’s heart {*Acts 15:8-9*}
 - Sanctifies or sets apart an individual in Jesus {*Acts 26:15, 17-18*}
 - How one is justified or saved through Jesus, not by human works or good deeds; the only way one obtains God’s righteousness {*Romans 3:21-23 (vv. 23-30); 4:5, 9-16, 20-22, 30; 10:1-13; Galatians 2:16; 3:1-3, 5-12; 5:5; Ephesians 2:8-9; 3:17; Philippians 3:8-10; 1 Peter 1:9*}
 - Leads to heart obedience and faithfulness to God through His power, not by our own works to impress God or earn His favor {*Romans 3:31; 4:18-22; 2 Corinthians 1:24; 5:7; Hebrews 11:4-40; James 2:14-26*}
 - Produces peace in one’s life, accesses God’s grace to empower us to live for him, and produces faithfulness in trials {*Romans 5:1-5; Ephesians 3:12*}
 - Produced through the hearing or studying of God’s Word, the Bible {*Romans 10:17*}
 - Believes God is close to save, nor tries to get God to notice oneself {*Romans 10:6-8*}
 - A gift God gives to everyone {*Romans 12:3*}

- A spiritual gift given by the Holy Spirit {*1 Corinthians 12:7-9*}
- Empty and useless without God's love motivating it {*1 Corinthians 13:1-2; Galatians 5:6; Ephesians 6:23*}
- Grows, matures, learns, lives, etc. in God's power through one's choice {*2 Corinthians 8:7; 10:15; 13:5; Galatians 2:20; 3:1-3; Ephesians 6:10-11, 16; Philippians 1:25; Colossians 1:21-23; 2:5-7, 11-13; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-10; 5:4-10; 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4, 11-12; 1 Timothy 1:4-5, 14, 18-19; 4:6, 12; 6:11-12; 2 Timothy 1:13-14; 2:22-25; 3:10-17; 4:7; Titus 2:1-2; Philemon 5-6; Hebrews 6:11-12; 2 Peter 1:5-11; 1 John 5:4*}
- Little faith
 - Can lead one to worry about what he/she has or having enough because their focus is on material possessions to satisfy or give contentment {*Matthew 6:28-30, 32-34*}
 - Can lead one to worry, doubt, or panic about what will happen to them, forgetting God promises to take care of them {*Matthew 8:23-27; 14:29-31; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25; 12:22-31*}
- No faith/unbelief
 - Leads to spiritual corruption, perversion, forsaking God, forgetting God, scorning God, replacing God with worship of other "gods" {*Deuteronomy 32:5-20*}
 - Rejects God's righteousness by trying to earn it through one's own "good" works or deeds {*Romans 9:30-33*}
 - Led Israel (and us too) to reject God and His new covenant salvation promises {*Romans 11:17-24; Hebrews 4:1-2*}
 - Leads individuals to do the opposite of God's character or will {*1 Timothy 4:1-3; 6:10*}

LIVING CHOICE: Will you accept/receive God's gift of salvation through faith in Him—trusting/“faithing” Him with your whole heart and mind?