



Open Gifts January 2010

Christmas morning. The family's tradition was to open one gift each on Christmas Eve. Then after the children were all asleep, Mom and Dad would stay up to wrap the presents and carefully place them under the tree. They were evenly distributed and intermingled so everyone shared the experience equally.

It would have been hard to measure whose anticipation was greater—the children's, imagining what would be revealed when the paper came off, or the parents as they lovingly wrapped each gift with a child's heart in mind. The tired, thankful parents looked in on the sleeping kids, bent down and gave each one a kiss on the cheek or forehead, then went to bed themselves; quickly drifting off, hearing already the happy sounds that would awaken them in too few hours.

It was always the youngest who woke his sisters, almost dragging them from bed to go down stairs and behold the glory. Once, when they had set the alarm and hidden to watch, Mom and Dad had been filled with emotion as they saw their children stand in awe at the spectacle on display before approaching the gifts.

They were an orderly bunch, for the most part. Each child had a special gift, set apart from the others, they were permitted to open and enjoy as soon as they got up. Later, when the whole family was gathered, they would find and open one at a time; taking turns as they worked their way through the pile. This established the fun of seeing others discover something given specifically to them, and they learned to enter into each other's joy. Christmas was a time to both give and receive, and not a time for selfishness.

This morning as the exhausted parents stirred in their bed, they realized the house was unusually quiet. No sounds of their kids excitedly talking as they showed each other the marvels of the special gift that had been left for them. Slipping from bed and into their robes they walked into the hallway and softly descended the stairs. To their bewilderment, no one was in the living room. They stood for a moment, looking to each other and then around the room, listening for any evidence the children were somewhere else in the house.

Then they saw it. Mom first, then Dad. As they slowly stepped forward it was evident that every present under the tree had been unwrapped and very poorly rewrapped. This was obviously not the work of an intruder, and only one realistic suspect came to mind. The girls would never have done this. And yet, in the midst of the crime was clear evidence of a good heart, gone only slightly astray. For though everyone's presents had been opened, they had also been wrapped up again with as much tender care as a five year old could muster.

The anticipation, the expectation had apparently just been too much. But it was also obvious that the utmost of honor and respect for the rest of the family had been at work, not wanting the others to miss out on the delight found in unwrapping their own gifts.

Christmas is about giving and receiving gifts. It is about the excited anticipation of opening what was specially chosen just for us, and for the thrill of seeing the people we love opening their gifts, too. Wouldn't it be sad if the happy expectation of gifts not yet revealed didn't compel us to open them? What a shame it would be for loving gifts to be left neglected and unused.

God has given us more gifts than we've had time to open yet. Don't miss any. Get busy unwrapping, and discover the joy of using them. He meant it to be that way. Many are wrapped up in His Word, waiting to be revealed and used for the benefit of all.

For Christ's sake, Pastor Kurt



The Dream February 2010

The thing about most dreams is that you don't know you're dreaming, and they're so real.

She was looking around the room, taking it all in. It wasn't anyplace she knew, but it was familiar, like she had probably been here before. It was warm and welcoming. Thick carpet was soft under her feet. Looking down she realized she had no shoes on, and wiggled her toes. It felt good.

She noticed a huge pile of presents; all wrapped ... wrapped very nicely, like things purchased in an expensive department store and picked up in Customer Service, more perfectly wrapped than you could do at home.

Suddenly a zoom lens filled her vision with the paper and ribbon. Whatever was inside these boxes didn't come from Target. Yet it was obvious these packages were meant to be opened. It was as if the contents were calling out, "Open Me! Take Me Out, please."

What was that sound? People ... lots of them ... coming closer. The voices gradually grew louder and louder, then BANG! The doors burst open like the cork from a champagne bottle. People were gushing into the room, filling it with joyful, exuberant life. And there she was, like Ebenezer Scrooge in the midst of people who could not see or hear her.

Then they were all suddenly silent, at once, like frogs around a pond on a warm summer evening. They were looking at the presents. Pretty soon a few of them began to go over and take one from the pile, walk to where they had space to sit down, and open it. Some smiled, some cried, some looked astonished and others laughed. She felt very good. Their joy made her happy.

Now some of them were going back to get another gift ... 2, even 3 more, and others hadn't gotten their first one yet. But everyone seemed happy. No one was worried, even

though there were no tags. How did they know which ones were theirs?

She was alone again. Not in the same room, but some presents were there. A sadness came over her. Something was wrong. These belonged to someone. Had the people left them behind? Looking around with a growing urgency she desperately wanted to find the people who should have these gifts. What if she couldn't find them? What would happen to the presents? Would they go to waste? Would the people's lives suffer needless loss, or sorrow or worse? This had to be made right and she would have no rest until it was.

In near panic she raced for the door ... but couldn't find one. The room was expanding faster than she could get to the walls where a door might be. Desperation had her on the verge of collapsing into a sobbing heap when ... she felt the blankets, turned and saw the night light in the bathroom. She was awake.

She breathed a sigh of relief as her heart began to calm, her pulse slowed toward normal. As the tension shrank back she realized she was in her own bed, in her own home. It had been a dream, but so real it had shaken her to the core.

Then she heard the unmistakable voice, deep in her heart... "The gifts are real, and they are yours."

What about you? Have you received your gifts? Have you opened or used them? You really should. God intended them specifically for you.

For Christ's sake, Pastor Kurt



Real Life
March 2010

Revell and I were having lunch with our daughter, Laura, recently to celebrate a significant event in our past. We've enjoyed this celebration for many years. It's become an annual tradition. Since Laura's children are both teenagers now, we get to share most of what it takes to be parents.

During lunch I asked her to recall some of her favorite memories of growing up in our family, and thought of a few uncommon occasions that might be on her list. She smiled while scanning the catalogue in her mind, and as she began to tell her story I found myself both pleased and surprised.

First she told us about a time when she was 12 years old. As it turns out, everyday family life was a little dull from her perspective at that time. She told us things would be more enjoyable if we had a Monopoly game, and played it regularly. We got the game, and played it often. But looking back, part of what meant the most was that she had input. What was important to her was important to us because it was important to her.

Maybe it would be helpful to mention that she had lived with us less than a year at the time. We are an adopted family. We are so thankful to have each other, and our daughter acknowledges how pleased she is with the progress she's made with us over the years. She was pretty good at being a kid, but Revell and I had a lot to learn about being parents.

The next thing she talked about was a humorous – to us at least – set of nicknames we took for each other. It had to do with our spending habits. It may have sounded like silly nonsense to an uninitiated listener, but we found much pleasure in using them when appropriate. The whole shared identity was filled out when our son, Jason joined the family. The improvised names have long been left behind, but to this day we can all get a good laugh when remembering how we came up with them and what gave them meaning. I think they were testimony that we belonged to each other in something that was ours alone. It identified us as a family.

A couple of months ago I was impressed to read the book of Ecclesiastes for the first time in a long time. There were certainly some spectacular things to recall in that writer's life. Yet what he seems to value most, looking back over his life, are the everyday things ... the simple, uncomplicated things. Love, honor and enjoy God. Enjoy your family and friends. Enjoy your work. Enjoy your food. Enjoy the enjoyable and don't allow yourself to be robbed of it because of unpleasant things in life you cannot avoid or control. And as you enjoy enjoying them, don't forget them.

Try to not let life be a series of events, but rather, an ongoing flow of real life with real people as it unfolds from day to day. Luke 12:22-34

For Christ's sake, Pastor Kurt