St Barnabas Cray

Giving Ourselves: A Gift That Keeps Giving

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - Every Person, a Gift

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: 'When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.' (Ephesians 4:7-8 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There is something quietly revolutionary about the biblical claim that every person seated in a room — every person reading these words right now — carries a gift. Not a general, vague sense of potential, but a specific, God-given endowment placed within you by the Creator of the universe. This is not self-help positivity. This is theological reality rooted in the character of a generous God.

When Paul writes to the Ephesians about gifts given by Christ, he is drawing on the imagery of a conquering king returning in triumph and distributing spoils to his people. The ascended Christ, victorious over sin and death, pours out grace-gifts upon his church. Every member. No exceptions. The question is never whether you have received a gift — the question is whether you have recognised it, and what you are doing with it.

The sermon reminds us that Bezalel and Oholiab in Exodus were filled with the Spirit of God specifically for craftsmanship — for building, designing, and creating. Their gifts were not spiritual in the narrow sense we sometimes imagine. They were practical, artistic, technical. And yet the Spirit of God was the source. This should expand our understanding of what a God-given gift looks like. It may be the gift of listening well. It may be the gift of organisation, of teaching, of encouragement, of practical wisdom in the workplace. It may be the gift of simply showing up consistently when others do not.

Too many of us spend years waiting to discover some grand, dramatic calling whilst overlooking the quiet gifts already at work in our daily lives. God is not withholding from you. He has already given. The invitation today is to open your eyes to what has already been placed within you — and to begin to hold it with gratitude rather than dismissiveness.

You are not an accident. You are not a spare part in the body of Christ. You are a gift — and you carry gifts. That is where this week begins.

Reflection Question

When you honestly consider your life — your natural abilities, your learned skills, the things that come most naturally to you — what gifts do you sense God has placed within you, and have you ever truly offered them back to him?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Every single person sat here has a gift. Every single person who is seated here, there is something that you're particularly very good at — and you might have discovered it. For some, you may not have discovered it."

Today's Application

Begin this Monday with a deliberate act of spiritual inventory. Find a quiet moment — perhaps with a cup of tea before the day's demands crowd in — and write down three to five things you are genuinely good at or that others have affirmed in you. Do not dismiss them as ordinary. Ask yourself honestly: have I ever offered these to God in prayer, saying, 'Lord, these are yours — use them'?

If you are part of a local church, consider one practical area where your gift could serve others this week. It does not need to be a grand gesture. It might be sending an encouraging message to someone, offering to help with a task, or simply bringing your full attention and skill to your work today as an act of worship. Commit to one concrete step.

If you have never consciously acknowledged that God has gifted you, take a moment today to pray a simple prayer of offering: 'Lord, what I have is yours. Show me how to use it for your glory and for the good of others.'

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a generous God who gives gifts to your people. Forgive me for the times I have dismissed or overlooked what you have placed within me. Open my eyes today to see what you have already given. Help me to receive it with gratitude and to hold it with open hands, ready to offer it back to you and to the people around me. May this week be one in which I begin to understand more fully that I am not here by accident — I am here because you have a purpose for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Resting in the Knowledge That You Are Given

Evening Reflection

As this Monday draws to a close, take a moment to sit quietly with the truth you explored this morning: you are a gift, and you carry gifts. How did that truth land as you moved through your day? Did you notice moments where your particular abilities or instincts were at work — in a conversation, in a task, in the way you responded to someone who needed you?

Sometimes the most significant spiritual discoveries are not dramatic revelations but quiet recognitions — a moment where we see, perhaps for the first time, that what we do naturally is actually what God has specifically placed within us. That realisation can be deeply humbling and deeply freeing at the same time.

The enemy of our souls would have us believe we are ordinary, unremarkable, and without much to offer. But the Word of God says otherwise. Christ ascended and gave gifts to his people. That includes you. Tonight, let that sink in. You do not need to strive to become someone worthy of God's use. You are already equipped. The journey ahead is one of discovery, surrender, and offering.

Evening Reflection

As you look back over today, where did you notice your gifts at work — and did you recognise God's hand in that?

Evening Prayer

Lord, as I rest tonight, I thank you that you have not left me empty-handed. You are a giving God, and I am the recipient of your grace. Help me to sleep in the peace of knowing I am known, loved, and equipped by you. Tomorrow, may I carry that truth a little more confidently. Amen.

Tuesday - Dependence Over Independence: The Counter-Cultural Call of Christ

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Matthew 11:28-29 NIV)

Devotional Thought

One of the most subversive things Jesus ever said was also one of the simplest: 'Come to me.' In a world that prizes self-sufficiency, independence, and the capacity to manage one's own life without needing anyone else, this invitation cuts against the grain of everything we have been conditioned to pursue.

The sermon draws a sharp and important contrast: the world teaches independence, but Christ teaches dependence. This is not a call to passivity or helplessness. It is a call to the deepest and most honest form of living — acknowledging that we were made for relationship with God, and that apart from him, our best efforts are ultimately insufficient.

We live in a culture that celebrates the self-made person. From childhood, maturity is measured by how little you need others. The sermon notes this with gentle irony: 'In the world, we are taught that the more matured we become, the more independent we are.' But in the kingdom of God, the opposite is true. Maturity in Christ is not growing away from him — it is growing deeper into him. The more mature a believer becomes, the more they recognise how utterly dependent they are on the grace, wisdom, and strength of Jesus.

This has profound implications for how we approach our daily lives. When we face a difficult conversation at work, do we rush in with our own cleverness, or do we first ask for wisdom from above? When we are burdened by anxiety, do we manage it alone, or do we bring it — as Paul urges in Philippians — to God in prayer and supplication? When we are tempted to give up on someone, do we rely on our own reserves of patience, or do we draw from the inexhaustible wellspring of Christ's love?

Dependence on Christ is not weakness. It is the wisest and most courageous posture a human being can adopt. It is the posture of someone who has tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and who has decided to keep returning to that source again and again.

Reflection Question

In which areas of your life are you most tempted to rely on your own strength rather than on Christ — and what would it look like, practically, to bring those areas to him today?

From Sunday's Sermon

"The world teaches independence. Christ teaches dependence. Christ said, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest.' Christ calls us to himself. As a church, he calls us to himself."

Today's Application

Choose one area of your life today where you have been operating primarily in your own strength — a relationship under strain, a challenge at work, a worry you have been carrying quietly, or a decision you have been trying to figure out alone. Write it down.

Now, before you do anything else with it, bring it to God in prayer. Be specific. Tell him what it is, how it makes you feel, and what you are afraid of. Then ask him — genuinely, with expectation — for his wisdom, his peace, and his direction. This is not a passive exercise. It is an act of faith that says: 'Lord, I cannot do this well without you.'

Throughout the day, when you feel the pull to take back control, pause and pray a simple breath prayer: 'Lord, I need you.' Let that become your rhythm today — not as a sign of weakness, but as an expression of the deepest kind of spiritual maturity.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, I confess that I too easily reach for my own resources before I reach for you. Forgive me for the pride that masquerades as capability. Today I want to practise the kind of dependence that you call me to — not because I have nothing to offer, but because I know that what I offer is most fruitful when it flows through your grace. Teach me to come to you first, to rest in you always, and to find in you the strength I cannot manufacture on my own. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Rest That Comes from Letting Go

Evening Reflection

This morning you were invited to practise dependence on Christ rather than relying solely on your own strength. As Tuesday evening settles around you, how did that go? Perhaps there were moments when you remembered to pause and pray. Perhaps there were moments when you forgot entirely and ploughed ahead alone — only to feel the familiar weight of self-sufficiency pressing down on you.

Either way, this is grace: even in our forgetting, God does not abandon us. His invitation to 'come' is not a one-time offer. It is renewed every morning, every afternoon, every evening. The door is always open. The arms are always wide.

There is a particular kind of rest that comes not from finishing everything on your to-do list, but from genuinely releasing your burdens to God. It is the rest Jesus promises — not the rest of exhaustion, but the rest of surrender. Tonight, before you sleep, practise that surrender. Name what you are carrying. Lay it down. Let him hold it through the night.

Evening Reflection

What burden did you carry today that you could, even now, lay at the feet of Jesus before you sleep?

Evening Prayer

Father, I bring you the weight of this day — the moments I tried to manage alone, the worries I held too tightly, the decisions I found overwhelming. I lay them at your feet tonight. You are able to carry what I cannot. Give me the rest that only comes from trusting you. Amen.

Wednesday - You Cannot Give What You Do Not Have: Receiving Before Giving

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:16 ESV)

Devotional Thought

There is a simple but profound logic at the heart of the Christian life of giving: you cannot give what you do not have. The sermon makes this point with disarming directness: 'If I want to give you this Bible, I need to have the Bible in my hand to be able to give it to you.' It sounds obvious. And yet, how often do we attempt to give from emptiness?

We try to offer counsel when we have not spent time in God's Word. We try to love difficult people when we have not allowed ourselves to be loved by God. We try to serve others when we are running on empty, spiritually depleted, and emotionally exhausted. The result is what the sermon aptly describes as 'the blind leading the blind' — and we wonder why our efforts feel hollow, why our service feels like duty rather than delight, why our words of encouragement ring flat even to our own ears.

The remedy is not to try harder. The remedy is to receive more deeply. John's Gospel opens with a staggering claim: from the fullness of Christ, we have all received grace upon grace. The Greek word here suggests wave upon wave — one grace following another, like the tide that never stops coming in. God is not stingy. He is not rationing his grace. He is pouring it out lavishly, abundantly, relentlessly upon all who come to him.

But we must come. We must position ourselves to receive. The Holy Spirit, the sermon reminds us, is not confined to the walls of a church building. He follows us into the workplace, into our homes, into our relationships. He is the one who gives wisdom, who teaches us to love, who equips us for every good work. But we must be attentive to his presence. We must cultivate the inner life that makes receiving possible.

When we are full of Christ — when we have spent time in his Word, in prayer, in worship, in honest community — then giving becomes natural. It overflows. We do not give because we have been told to. We give because we cannot help it. We give because we have received.

Reflection Question

Honestly, how full are you spiritually right now — and what practices help you remain in a posture of receiving from God rather than giving from emptiness?

From Sunday's Sermon

"You cannot give what you do not have. Many a times we try to give people what we don't have. We try to solve their problems. We try to give them counsel. We try to help them. We try to lead them. It's like the blind leading the blind. Christ is saying — His Spirit in us gives wisdom, gives understanding."

Today's Application

Today, before you attempt to give anything to anyone — advice, help, encouragement, service — take ten deliberate minutes to receive from God. This is not a religious exercise. It is a practical act of spiritual replenishment.

Open your Bible to a psalm — perhaps Psalm 23, Psalm 46, or Psalm 103. Read it slowly. Read it again. Let the words land. Then sit quietly for a few minutes and simply ask the Holy Spirit to fill you afresh. You might pray: 'Lord, I want to give well today. Fill me with what I need so that what flows out of me comes from you.'

Then, as you move through your day, notice the difference. When you speak to someone who is struggling, speak from what you have received. When you serve, serve from a place of fullness. When you encourage, let it come from the truth God has spoken into your own heart. Giving from fullness is not only more effective — it is more sustainable, more joyful, and more glorifying to God.

Morning Prayer

Lord, I confess that I often try to give from a place of emptiness, and then wonder why I feel depleted and ineffective. Today, I choose to come to you first — to receive before I give, to be filled before I pour out. Fill me with your Spirit. Let your Word dwell in me richly. And as I go through this Wednesday, may what flows from me be a genuine overflow of what you have placed within me. For your glory and the good of others. Amen.

Evening Devotion

Noticing Where Grace Flowed

Evening Reflection

This morning's invitation was to receive before you give — to come to God first and allow his fullness to be the source of what you offer to others. As Wednesday evening arrives, it is worth pausing to trace where that happened today.

Were there moments when you spoke and felt that what came out was wiser, kinder, or more patient than you expected? Were there moments when you served and felt something like joy rather than duty? These are the fingerprints of grace — the evidence that the Holy Spirit was at work in and through you, giving through you what you had first received from him.

And if today felt mostly like running on empty — if you gave from depletion and felt it — then let that be instructive rather than discouraging. The pattern of 'receive, then give' is not mastered in a day. It is the rhythm of a lifetime. Tonight, receive again. Come to the Lord not with a performance to report, but with an open heart to be refilled.

Evening Reflection

Where did you sense God's grace flowing through you today — and where did you most need to return to the source?

Evening Prayer

Gracious Father, thank you for every moment today where your grace flowed through me to others. Where I gave from emptiness, forgive me and refill me now. I come to you tonight not as someone who has it all together, but as someone who needs you — and is grateful that you are always here to give. Amen.

Thursday - Building Each Other Up: The Purpose of the Church

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We live in an age that is deeply ambivalent about institutions — including the church. Many people today describe themselves as spiritual but not religious, as followers of Jesus who have little interest in organised Christian community. And whilst there are understandable reasons for this disillusionment, the New Testament will not allow us to settle for a Christianity that is purely private and individualistic.

The church, as the sermon powerfully reminds us, is not a building. It is not a denomination. It is a body — a living, breathing, interconnected community of people who are being built up together into maturity in Christ. And the gifts that Christ gives — to apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers — are not given for those individuals to shine. They are given for one purpose: to equip the saints for works of service, so that the whole body grows.

This changes everything about how we think about church participation. When we show up — whether physically on a Sunday or in the daily rhythms of Christian community — we are not consumers attending a service. We are members of a body, each bringing something that the others need. When you are absent, something is missing. When you are present and engaged, something is added that only you can add.

The sermon speaks movingly about how encouraging others actually strengthens us in return — how the act of giving ourselves to the community is not a drain on our resources but a means of our own growth. This is the paradox of the kingdom: we grow by giving, we mature by serving, we become stronger by building others up.

Maturity in Christ, the sermon reminds us, is not independence. It is the capacity to be fully present in community — to bear one another's burdens, to speak truth in love, to use your gifts not for personal advancement but for the perfecting of those around you. That is the calling of the church. And it is the calling of every member within it.

Reflection Question

In what ways are you genuinely contributing to the growth and health of your church community — and are there gifts or capacities you have been withholding that others around you might need?

From Sunday's Sermon

"The church of Christ is for one purpose and that is to build each other up — to the perfecting of the saints, to making us perfect, to making us mature in Christ. We're making each other stronger and we ourselves are getting stronger."

Today's Application

Today, take a specific and intentional step towards building someone else up. This is not a vague encouragement to 'be nice.' It is a deliberate act of using your gift in service of another person's growth.

Think of someone in your church or Christian community who is struggling, who is newer in faith, or who you sense needs encouragement. Reach out to them today — not with a generic message, but with something specific. Affirm something you have genuinely noticed about them. Share a scripture that has been meaningful to you. Offer to pray with them, even briefly over a message or a phone call.

If you have been on the fringes of your church community — attending occasionally but not really connected — consider this Thursday a moment of decision. What would it look like to take one step deeper into community? Could you join a small group, volunteer for a practical need, or simply make yourself more available to the people around you? The body needs you. And you need the body.

Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of the church — imperfect, beautiful, and yours. Forgive me for the times I have treated it as something to receive from rather than something to contribute to. Today, I want to bring what I have to the community you have placed me in. Show me who needs what I carry. Give me the courage and the love to offer it freely. Build your church through ordinary people like me, for your glory. Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Body at Work

Evening Reflection

As Thursday evening arrives, reflect on the theme that has carried you through today: the church as a body, and your place within it. Did you take a step towards someone today? Did you offer something of yourself — your time, your words, your presence — to another member of the community?

Even if your day was largely solitary, you can reflect on the broader question of belonging. The church is not just what happens on a Sunday. It is the web of relationships, the daily acts of care, the prayers offered for one another throughout the week. Every time you pray for a fellow believer, you are functioning as part of the body. Every time you choose to encourage rather than criticise, to build up rather than tear down, you are doing the work of the church.

The sermon reminds us that when we encourage others, we ourselves are strengthened. Tonight, notice whether that has been true in your experience today. Where did giving to others actually give something back to you?

Evening Reflection

How did you function as part of the body of Christ today — and where did you experience the truth that giving to others also builds you up?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for placing me in a community of faith. Thank you for the people who have built me up, and for the opportunities I have had today to do the same for others. Knit us together in love. Make us more like Christ — individually and together. Amen.

Friday - Taste and See: The Invitation That Changes Everything

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Psalm 34:8 NIV)

Devotional Thought

We come to the end of this week's devotional journey with the most fundamental and urgent theme of all: the invitation. At the heart of the sermon — woven through every illustration, every theological point, every pastoral aside — is a simple, urgent, beautiful call: come. Come and taste. Come and see. Come and try.

The sermon captures this with a charming personal detail: a wristband made by the preacher's daughter, bearing the words 'Try Jesus.' It is, as the sermon notes, 'one of the biggest invitations that has ever been given to man.' And it echoes the ancient words of Psalm 34: taste and see that the Lord is good. Not 'believe an intellectual proposition about God.' Not 'comply with a religious system.' But taste — experience, encounter, know for yourself — that the Lord is good.

This invitation is for everyone. For the person who has followed Jesus for decades and needs to rediscover the freshness of his presence. For the person who is curious but cautious, who has heard about Jesus but never truly encountered him. For the person who has walked away and wonders whether the door is still open. The answer, always, is yes. The door is always open. The invitation is always current.

The sermon testifies to this with warmth and conviction: 'Jesus is real. If you really, really seek him, the Bible says you will find him. You will find him, and you will know that he is real. He cares for you. He loves you. The kind of love that no other person can give, he gives it to you.'

As you close this week, the question is not merely whether you have read these devotionals, reflected on these themes, or engaged with these prayers. The question is whether you have tasted. Whether you have come. Whether you have allowed the goodness of God to be not just a theological conviction but a lived, felt, known reality in your daily experience. That is where the Christian life truly begins — and it is where it is renewed, again and again, every single day.

Reflection Question

When did you last genuinely 'taste and see' the goodness of God — and what would it mean for you to seek that fresh encounter with him today?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Jesus is real. If you really, really seek him, the Bible says you will find him. You will find him, and you will know that he is real. He cares for you. He loves you. The kind of love that no other person can give, he gives it to you. And he says, come, come to me. I love you. Come to me. I want you."

Today's Application

As you move into this Friday, make a deliberate choice to seek a fresh encounter with God — not just to complete a devotional, but to actually taste his goodness in a tangible way.

Set aside twenty minutes today for unhurried prayer and Scripture. Not a rushed quiet time squeezed between obligations, but a genuine pause. Read Psalm 34 in full. Let the words wash over you. Then sit in silence and invite the Holy Spirit to make the goodness of God real to you in this moment.

As you go through the rest of your day, carry this posture of openness. Notice where God is at work — in a conversation, in a moment of unexpected peace, in the beauty of creation, in the kindness of a stranger. These are all invitations to taste and see.

And if there is someone in your life who has not yet encountered the living Christ, pray for them specifically today. Ask God to open a door for you to share, simply and honestly, what you have tasted. You do not need a theological degree. You need only your own story — and the confidence that the same God who met you is ready to meet them.

Morning Prayer

Lord, I come to you this Friday not with a list of achievements or a report of how well I have done this week. I come simply, as I am, to taste and see your goodness once more. Renew my sense of wonder at who you are. Let your love be not just a doctrine I affirm but a reality I live inside. And as I go into the weekend, may I carry the fragrance of someone who has been with you — someone who has tasted, and found you good. For the sake of your name and the good of all around me. Amen.

Evening Devotion

A Life That Keeps Giving

Evening Reflection

As this week draws to a close, take a few moments to look back across the ground you have covered. On Monday, you were reminded that you are a gift, and that you carry gifts. On Tuesday, you were invited into the counter-cultural posture of dependence on Christ. On Wednesday, you explored the essential rhythm of receiving before giving. On Thursday, you considered your place in the body of Christ and your responsibility to build others up. And today, you were brought back to the most fundamental invitation of all: come, taste, and see.

These are not five separate ideas. They are one flowing reality. When we know we are gifted, we live with purpose. When we depend on Christ, we live with peace. When we receive from him, we have something genuine to give. When we give ourselves to the community, we grow together. And when we keep returning to the source — tasting his goodness again and again — the whole cycle is sustained.

The sermon calls this 'a gift that keeps giving.' That is what your life in Christ is meant to be — not a one-time transaction, but a continuous, flowing, ever-deepening experience of receiving and giving, of being loved and loving, of being built up and building others. That is the church. That is the Christian life. And it is, as the sermon says with infectious joy, 'so, so exciting. You haven't seen anything yet.'

Evening Reflection

As you look back across this week, what has God been saying to you most clearly — and what one thing will you carry forward into the days ahead?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for this week — for the truths you have spoken, the grace you have given, and the ways you have been present even when I did not notice. I am yours. What I have is yours. Use me, fill me, and send me — as a gift that keeps giving, for your glory and the good of the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.