

Faith Is a Gift

The potato peeler slips. I cut my pointer. Shoot. It's always something. This will bleed. I squeeze a paper towel tightly around my finger and stare at my hand.

I had been visiting with my son. His statement startled me: "But I can't believe that way anymore, Mom." He looks at me with tortured eyes. My heart weeps. I want to pour the gospel on him. I want to call him back. I had prayed he would hold onto his gift, the gift he was now rejecting. My son gave up his faith.

I squeeze my finger. The paper towel turns red. My finger bleeds together with my heart.

It happened slowly. I had watched my son and worried. I had been distressed. I had listened to sermons for him, wishing he could hear. How could I explain faith? How could I make him see? What words could I use? It ate at me; I couldn't rest. Now the devil had won.

I rub antibiotic ointment on my finger and put a bandage on it. It will heal. But will my heart heal? Soon God sent angels. Escorts who understood. One placed comforting arms around me. Gave tissues to wipe my tears. He showed me a reason for joy. He polished the gift. It sparkled again.

God revealed that I was trying to do His job, His business. It's not my words, my works or my faith that can bring my son back to His kingdom. Faith is God's gift and only He can give it.

I was reminded that I can only believe for myself. I have barely enough faith for me. I listen for my own soul and care for my own gift. I need to put my own sins away. I want to use the gospel, my power source, for my own life of faith. Endeavoring is the life of each believer.

Is caring for my gift my accomplishment? Confession is a gift that comes with the gift of faith. God knows where I am weakest. He gave this gift for the journey – for the travel, for the battle. I can confess my sins, and when I believe them forgiven the power of God helps me to battle against sin.

"How are you any more righteous than me?" my son asks later. I rub my scarred finger thoughtfully. "I certainly am not any better of a person than you," I answer. "But I do have righteousness of faith." He looks at me. And turns away.

The gift of living faith is not about rules. It is about freedom from sin. Deeds, doings and not doings are the fruits of this gift, and we are known by our fruits. Sometimes I don't understand instructions, but in humbleness I obey. My gift is too precious of a jewel to treat carelessly.

Later, months later, the tiny, thin white scar on my pointer finger reminds me of that sad day. I look at my finger and think: May God preserve me in faith. May God call my son back.

Heli Jurmu

A Loving and Unmerited Gift

I still remember the car, the road, the location, the destination and the topic of conversation with my friend. I asked: what is meant by God's grace? Surprising to me, since I thought he'd have the answer, he admitted that he had pondered the same thing. In the ensuing discussion we concluded that a satisfying answer is that God's grace is His gift to us. Especially the gift of faith.

A few years later at a congregational discussion during special services, I was listening and watching a slide show introduction by a visiting minister. The topic was similar, and as an illustration of grace he showed a slide containing a single picture of a large present, a box wrapped in shiny silver paper with a bright red bow. We discussed: do we treasure this gift? Did we earn it? How do we care for it?

Recently I was asked to teach at confirmation school and was assigned the lessons: *Faith, a Gift from God* and *Grace, Unmerited Love*. These lessons had many similarities. We studied together about those we have known who lived in faith and have, by God's grace through faith, reached heaven. God wanted to teach us, both camp workers and students, that through His Spirit He has given each of us this great gift of faith by which we are heaven acceptable. This gift is not earned, it is a free grace gift from the Heavenly Father. By God's grace we are able to believe our sins forgiven.

We recalled that "for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Eph. 2:8). And also, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world" (Tit. 2:11,12).

It is my prayer that God will continue to grant me grace to believe and travel by faith. May He show each confirmation student what a great gift we have received: living faith.

David Ojala

Living Faith, My Treasure

I grew up in a believing home and faith has been preserved to this day in my heart. I, however, cannot take any credit for this. Like any gift, we can't take for granted that we're given it, nor do we feel we have deserved it. And imagine what it would be like if a gift once received was taken away!

As a child, I had everything I needed. Mom was always there for me and my siblings. Dad worked long days and sometimes traveled for work, but he was his cheery, funny self when he came home. I was blessed with the gospel and got to go to sleep feeling like my head was on a fluffy clean conscience. I felt like I was wrapped in a warm blanket of love and safety.

Confirmation school was a wonderful time in my life. My faith became personal then, yet even so I was still naive regarding the value of the gift of faith. We had a wonderful group of 30 to 40 youth in our home congregation, with an age range of 12–40 at haps.

The devil too was on our trips and gatherings, but when things went in the wrong direction, we went to the basement of our RY, put the tables and benches in a circle, lit candles and discussed openly about what had broken the love. The gospel was preached, and the air was cleared. I had my battles, of course, but I never thought anything could take my faith away. I must have thought it was safely locked in my heart.

In young adulthood, I moved away from home to study. There was a quiet, blue-eyed young man from my home congregation in my mind, day and night. I wonder if I even remembered to say my prayers! I enjoyed my studies and new believing friends, and it felt like that new home congregation was my second home. A long courtship brought its battles, but God gave strength to discuss matters openly with others and correct them.

In this stage of life, away from home and approaching marriage, I finally understood that I was on my own now with personal faith. I was responsible for my doings and bad choices can have bad consequences. Some people in my circles gave up their faith and that raised red flags: be careful, put sin away!

As an adult and a mother raising children, the meaning of faith in my life and caring for this gift has become more evident. God has given trials, but so many more are the blessings. Nothing else can bring such joy as knowing we can trust in God and He will provide. When some of my siblings, friends and especially when our oldest son gave up living faith, I finally understood what it means when this gift is taken away. Why is it that we often do not give value to things in our life until we see or feel it can be lost?

May God lead me on the narrow path onward such that I never lose the gift of living faith! May He also allow my dear ones to receive this gift again! The greatest gift is to reach eternal rest owning this treasure.

Nina Vanska

Home and the Gospel

Why did God send us here to Michigan? I remember asking this question over and over in my mind, tears flowing down my cheeks. I was scrubbing cabinets in our new apartment, left filthy by previous renters. My husband Ken was at work, our three little ones were napping and the oldest was reading.

Life became very busy for our growing family. Not only did Ken spend many hours at his new job, we also decided to build our own home. Then together with all the guys in our new home congregation in Ishpeming, they built our church and our camp at Hasscib Lake.

In the few leftover moments we had, Ken and I enjoyed our time together as a couple and as a family. We went on a camping trip each summer the week before school, where we hiked, fished, looked at the night stars around the campfire, caught up on humorous little sayings from the toddlers and shared serious discussions of life.

As I reflect back on our life, I can humbly say that God has blessed us with a wonderful life as a believing family. We had six more children, have enjoyed the “best summers ever,” love the big lake and have lived here now for 42 years. Since I wasn’t an outdoorsy person in the winter, I prayed for patience to endure the long but beautiful snowy winters.

Faith and Forgiveness

We were given the beautiful gift of faith and the forgiveness of sins to teach and raise our children. For those moments when life became harried and we were tired and said words we didn’t mean to each other, we could preach the gospel to one another and believe our sins and faults forgiven in Jesus’ name and precious blood.

As our children grew up and left home to live their lives in different areas and fields of study and work, and to marry the special person God gave to share their lives with, doubts filled my heart. Did I show them enough love? Did I teach enough of the ABCs of faith? Will they remember to say their prayers and keep faith first in their hearts and strive to keep a good conscience? I had to pray and remind myself to trust in God.

God Cared for Us

Through all the stages, we have felt God’s love in our life. I remember when our young daughter was at her lowest during cancer treatments. She was lying in her hospital crib having difficulty breathing, trying to recover from a severe infection. She wiggled her fingers through the bars of her crib and quietly said, “Jesus’ name and blood, Jesus’ name and blood.” Daddy quickly went to her side and preached the gospel. Within a short time, she calmed down and the numbers on her monitors went into a normal range. Her nurse was amazed and asked us to explain what was meant by our daughter’s statement. We were comforted to feel God’s presence and witness the example of a child’s faith.

Another memory is from the time our son, his wife and their children were in a car accident. The children were okay, but their parents were flown to the nearest hospital with serious brain injuries. The medical staff shared later that they had noticed how both families showed so much love and cared for them deeply. They felt this was the reason their recovery went so well. We know that the most important

part was God's healing and His plan for them. We rejoiced over the love, prayers and support of our families, friends and believers far and near as we journeyed through the highs and lows of their recovery.

It Pays to Believe

We are thankful that God has preserved our faith and remained with us to this day. We pray that He will continue to carry us the rest of our journey home to heaven. It pays to believe, using the gospel each day when we stumble and fall. We want to live in obedience to God's instruction and His Word until we are called to our heavenly home.

Father, here we often stumble, here the world brings pain and grief.

Make our hearts content and humble, keep our souls from unbelief.

Carry us to be with Thee in the land of victory.

There, our hymn will be unceasing: Honor, glory, strength and blessing! (SHZ 381:6)

Verna Jacobson

Discussion Points:

1. How do we care for this greatest of gifts, living faith?
2. Share examples of how faith is revealed as a treasure in your life.
3. How can we show our neighbor glimpses of this treasure we own through grace?
4. How should we approach and treat family members or other dear ones who aren't believing anymore?