



Secrets to gifting like a pro â?? elevate your gifting and receiving game

By Bishop Sophie Relf-Christopher

After weeks of planning and organising, Christmas is almost here. You made it through pageant season, through months of tinsel in the supermarket, through all the crowded and noisy shops, and through online shopping baskets full of items of dubious quality.

Many of us have bought the gifts we intend to give at CHRIST-mas (yep- it is a good idea to pop into Church because Jesus really is integral to this feast), but we seldom reflect on the art of giving, which is more important.

When you are a child, Christmas is almost ALL about receiving. However, suspicious of childrenâ??s innate joy, we have, for many generations, not permitted them to receive gifts without party-pooper directions that include but are not limited to:

1. Open gifts in a certain order. Donâ??t open that one! Open this one!
2. Open the card first. Cards before a gift are a mild cruelty to a child.
3. Once a child has been guided to select the right present and read the card, they may be ready to tear the paper. Here, too, they must undertake their task with a mix of excited decorum and giddy surpriseâ??! and at that point the paper gives up its secret, they need to be visibly HAPPY, no

matter how strange the present!

As children, we are taught HOW to receive well, but we are given very little training on how to give well even as adults.

Not everyone wants to give well, as evidenced by the lists of often hilarious but mostly very naughty passive-aggressive gifts online: like a cookbook of exotic cuisine for your racist uncle, or the gift of a little megaphone to a small child whose parents you have a vendetta against. I assume we are above such brutality, so instead, here are 4 notes for giving and receiving well:

The real WHY

When we give out of LOVE, and when LOVE is the only motivation on the table, we DO give well. All we need to do (remembering we cannot possibly control how a gift is received for anyone other than our own children, even then, only under duress) is to give, remembering that the reason we give is love.

For Christians, we believe that we can love, because God loves us unconditionally. It is God's love that we take part in when we love our family and friends and even strangers. So the real reason we give is an expression of love. Focus on the real reason. Love, love, love.

Cut the strings before you give the gift

Prominent theologian, Miroslav Volf, has greatly influenced my thinking about the nature of gifts, and he wisely points out that we give well when we give without concern for the deservedness of the recipient.

We have all heard people weighing up if a friend, or family member really deserves a gift this year. Chleo did not thank me profusely enough for her birthday present, or David was rude at some point in the year, so I will withhold a gift.

That is not gifting in the way God gifts- that is commerce. That script says, "I will give you X if you thank me Y", or "I will give you X if you behave like this". Giving out of love places NO burdens on the recipient. It is not a commercial arrangement. If love, only love, is your real "why", then the intended recipient needs to do nothing to "deserve it". In that, as the gift giver, you are completely free and need not extract any special behaviour from the recipient. You are free to give or not.

Ditch the deal- placing conditions on a gift stops it being a gift

3rd Although it is deeply tempting, it is neither Christian nor healthy for us to place expectations on the recipient of a gift. "Here is your new bike" and if you leave it in the rain, I will take it back or give it away. "Here is a package for your children, but you'd better take grateful photographs of them unwrapping it and then explain to me how it will be used and cared for". This is not a Christian way to give because it does not mirror the gracious way God gives to us.

Volf offers astute insights into the nature of well-given-gifts, having closely observed how God graciously provides good things in our lives. God gives good gifts because God loves us. God is not in need of our adulation or our gratitude to be God. Rather, God is motivated by love. Mercifully, God gives us many good gifts without regard to our deservedness, and God does not place conditions on the gifts that fill our lives; instead, God gives us free will to respond well or to squander the chance, as

we see fit.

You shouldn't have! What to do when you don't have a gift in return

In a season that has sadly become synonymous with excessive consumption, one of the greatest Christ-mas horrors is the thought that somebody may give you a gift and you have nothing to give them in return. This can happen for a range of reasons: you are broke, you did not realise a gift was expected, or you were not expecting somebody to pop past. Whatever the reason, if someone has given you a gift, the gracious thing to do is to thank them, not worry about the exchange. You do not owe anyone anything, and in 99% of cases, people will not remember what you got them in return, only that you were glad to have received their gift. They are focused on being good givers and will remember that part more.

In Jesus's day, the exact same sort of social dances occurred, and they were no more edifying in antiquity. Jesus repeatedly rejected the kind of fake-hospitality paybacks that are more about exchange and one-upmanship than about gracious giving. He told us to give to people who could never repay us. To give out of love and without fanfare.

As a culture, we may have lost sight of the CHRIST in Christmas, but we can give and receive in godly ways that befit the real celebration. God chose to become a person like you, in a human family, with animals and messiness all around, without much money or power, with a lot of love for you and your people.

Every blessing in giving and receiving over Christmas.

The Lord be with You

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