

SPIRITUAL GIFTS

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Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: So how many people have ever received a gift that you hardly used, or never used? Did anybody ever get a gift like that? You know, like a tie or a sweater that you didn't wear? Or a game that you didn't play? Or perfume or cologne that you didn't put on? Or a painting like "Dogs Playing Poker" that you didn't hang up? **[Congregation laughs]** Or Aunt Muriel's fruitcake that you never ate?

And how about this one? Have you ever received a gift and you weren't even quite sure what it was? **[Congregation laughs]** Like, "What is it?" "Oh; it's an electronic salad spinner." Or it's musical toilet paper rolls. Or it's a hula girl lamp. Or it's bacon-scented wrapping paper ... **[Congregation laughs]** Or something crazy like that! We've all gotten gifts that we have not used. Things that didn't fit our style; things we didn't need. Things we didn't like. Gifts we didn't use to the point that they end up on a shelf or in the garage or in the closet somewhere, not being used.

You know, I really like practical gifts, like simple, practical gifts. Growing up, I liked gifts like a hair brush or a belt, or flannel pajamas or a sweater. I think it's good that we use our gifts. It's a good way to show that we accept and receive and appreciate them. And I think it's a great way to honor the giver, as well.

So, you know, when I was first told the Christmas story when I was a child, and told about it, and heard that there were wise men who brought gifts from afar, I thought, "Wow! That's really cool!" And then I was told that the gifts for the baby were gold, frankincense and myrrh. And I thought, "Who would give gold, frankincense and myrrh to a baby?!" I didn't even know what frankincense and myrrh were! Gold – I knew what it was, but for a baby? It didn't make sense to me at all. And, for years, I couldn't understand why these "wise men" gave such impractical gifts. Until several years later, I came to the awareness that it is because they're men. **[Congregation laughs and applauds]**

They're busy; they're working hard. They're on the road; they're traveling from afar. They probably didn't have time to buy sensible gifts. They just grabbed whatever was closest. They were wise men, but not the best gift givers.

Somebody once asked, "What would it have been like if it had been three wise women, instead of three wise men?" And what would have happened is: they would have asked for directions; they would have arrived on time; they would have helped deliver the baby; cleaned up the place; made a casserole; and brought diapers and other practical gifts for the baby! That's what would have happened if it was women who were there! **[Congregation laughs and applauds]**

And so sometimes we get gifts that we just don't use. And they could be Christmas gifts, material gifts. But the most important gifts that we get that we don't always use are spiritual gifts: the gifts that God has given us. Sometimes we think these spiritual gifts -- because we can't see them -- that they are not as powerful. That they are not as valuable or important. But they truly are!

You know, these gifts given to the Christ child of gold, frankincense and myrrh are really symbolic of spiritual gifts that were given, not only to the Christ child, but to each and every one of us. Gifts that we don't always use. Gifts that we're not even aware of or acknowledge or even value.

And so this morning I want to look at the symbolic meaning of these three gifts -- these spiritual gifts that we've been given -- so that we can utilize them to have a fuller and richer experience of Christmas and of life.

So the first gift -- the gift of gold. You know, obviously gold represents riches and wealth and prosperity, and a sense of security at a certain point, knowing that our needs would be taken care of. There's a confidence about that.

Tell me, what would you feel like if, right at this moment, you had \$2 million in your bank account? How do you think you'd feel? Happy? Prosperous? Secure? You know, would you feel very supported and taken care of? And feeling very confident, having faith everything was going to be okay.

Well, Jesus felt that same unshakable level of faith and confidence that he would have his needs taken care of. And he didn't have \$2 million in the bank. He did not own one inch of land, which was the most valuable asset at the time. He did not have a job. He didn't have a house. He didn't have stuff stashed away. But he had the spiritual gift of gold, which is the consciousness and the awareness of the richness and abundance of God that was available to him at any time.

He had that mindset that lived and believed the words from the 23rd Psalm that said, *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."* That, regardless of the appearances of lack -- whether it was the loaves and fishes or anything else -- that he absolutely knew that he was not in want. That there was goodness and ideas and love and possibilities always available. There was abundance. And he knew this; he trusted this; and he absolutely believed that God was the Source, and God was with him always.

And so that same gift is available to us. The question is: are you using that gift? In whatever situation that appears to be lack, appears that you have no idea how it's going to work out ... Do you have a mindset of abundance, in knowing that there's enough? There's more than enough? And that everything you will need will be given to you in the right and perfect time?

Or is your mind dwelling in fear and lack and scarcity, which would be equivalent to putting that gift on a shelf? Or putting it in a drawer and hiding it. Are you utilizing and bringing forth this consciousness and mindset of abundance that you've been given into all the situations and areas of your life? To know there's more than enough? That, with God, all things are possible? That good things will happen? Solutions will come forth?

You know, Jesus said in Revelations 3, *"I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by the fire, that you may become rich, and white garments that you may clothe yourself."* And when it says to buy gold, it means to exchange a consciousness of lack for a consciousness of abundance. Exchange a mindset of scarcity for a mindset of prosperity. It is to stop dwelling in lack and limitation, and to grasp hold and affirm and call forth the truth of God's abundance.

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." Together: **[with congregation]** *"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."* Just take a deep breath.

"I am a prosperous child of God." Together: **[with congregation]** *"I am a prosperous child of God."* Deep breath.

"I live in God's abundance, and God's abundance lives in me." Together: **[with congregation]** *"I live in God's abundance, and God's abundance lives in me."* Deep breath.

So my question is: for this gift of gold, this gift of an awareness and the consciousness of abundance, are you willing to use that gift? And to bring it forth into all the areas of your life, even the ones that seem like there's lack and limitation and no answer? Because the truth is: God's abundance is always with us. It's whether we're using the mindset of that consciousness in all situations? Because it will change and transform our lives, and how we see life.

The second gift -- the gift of frankincense. Frankincense was incense. And it was known for its medicinal purposes and for its soothing properties. You know, frankincense was calming and restorative. It was clarifying. It had meditative effects to renew and uplift. It was actually used, in ancient times, for treating depression. It was burned at burial ceremonies and wedding ceremonies. And they believed that the smoke that came from it carried our prayers up to heaven.

And so frankincense, spiritually -- the spiritual gift of it -- is the gift of prayer. Prayer is more powerful than we realize. Prayer, like frankincense, has a soothing and calming effect. It has a relaxing, restorative energy about it. It helps clarify and uplift us. It opens our hearts. It brings level of peace and, inside, an understanding.

Prayer is the thing that brings us back to center. It helps us unify and align ourselves with the fullness and the goodness and the allness of God. I would say, without a doubt, prayer is the greatest spiritual gift that we have. But we don't always use it as consistently and effectively.

Sometimes we think that prayer is so passive, it's not going to help! Is that thing really going to make a difference if we pray? And we don't always use it. How many people believe that prayer is powerful, but know that you don't use it as much, and you don't turn to it as much as you could? Okay; about six of us. Great! **[Congregation laughs]**

And how many people ever thought that, *"I was so busy today that I didn't have time to pray."* Anybody ever thought that or had that? I love Deepak Chopra's response to that. He says, *"If you're too busy to pray once day, pray twice a day!"* **[Congregation laughs]** And what he's saying is: you always have time. The question is: Are you using the gift? Are you using that gift of prayer?

A rabbi and a soap maker were having a conversation. They're walking down the street, and the soap maker says to the rabbi, *"You know, I don't see the value of prayer. I don't think prayer works. There's prayer, but there's still wars and hatred and sadness ... so obviously prayer doesn't work."*

The rabbi says, *"Oh, I see."* And he says, *"Well, I guess soap doesn't work, either. Because we have soap, and there are a lot of dirty people. So I guess soap doesn't work!"* **[Congregation laughs]**

And the soap maker says, *"No, no, rabbi! No; no; no! Soap work! It does help people get clean! But they must use it regularly for it to be effective."*

And the rabbi said, *"Oh, yeah. It's the same way with prayer. It's got to be used regularly to be effective."*

I always point out the fact that Jesus prayed in the morning and mid-day and afternoon and evening and night. And I always ask: why do you think he prayed so frequently? Why do you think he prayed so consistently?

Number one, he was demonstrating for us what needs to be done and how to use prayer effectively. Because you can do it once in a while -- in moments of need, and stuff. But the way to get the power and the effectiveness and the value of the gift of prayer is to do it consistently. Do it frequently! Keep turning and connecting and centering with the very Source out of which everything is made possible. That energy of love and wisdom and creativity that made everything in this universe! That intelligence and that power and resources is in us! It is by tapping into us on a regular, consistent basis that we open ourselves to allow the flow of God's light and love and wisdom and inspiration and creativity to flow and come into our lives.

How consistently are you using the gift of prayer? It is a powerful resource and a powerful gift! No matter what's going on, I guarantee you: turning to prayer is your best resource. Not sure what to do in a situation? Turn to prayer. Feeling a little lost or overwhelmed? Turn to prayer. Having some financial trouble, and you want to attract more abundance? Turn to prayer. Going through a health challenge? Turn to prayer. Going through some legal issues? Turn to prayer. Grieving a loss of something in your life, or someone? Turn to prayer. Having challenges in your family? Turn to prayer. Want to attract a healthier relationship? Turn to prayer.

Whatever it is in your life, I guarantee you 100%, turning to pray is the best first step you can take.

Eric Butterworth says that not using the power of prayer is the thing that frustrates our potential more than anything else. Not turning to prayer creates more unhappiness and creates more lack and limitation in our lives than anything else. By not utilizing the most powerful, valuable resource we have. That, the more we pray, the easier things flow. The more we're in alignment. And the more we open ourselves to God, goodness and abundance.

So my question to you is: are you willing to use your spiritual gift of prayer more consistently? Because I guarantee you it will make our lives better.

And the final one is the gift of myrrh. This is a kind of a little mysterious thing: myrrh. It's a resin that is produced from a small, tough, scraggly tree. And it grows in north Africa and by the Red Sea. And it was really used, more than anything, for healing wounds and bruises and bleeding. It was used in China; used in Egypt. All over the place! It was mentioned the most in the Bible. One of the things it was famous for: it was one of the spices -- burial spices -- for embalming Jesus.

Now, spiritually, myrrh represents the power of healing, the power of overcoming, the power of transformation, and the power of resurrection. Myrrh is the gift of the overcoming power of God: the resurrecting power of the Christ. It is that power that heals our hearts. It is that power that releases our pain. It is the power that lets go of negativity of the past, and transforms our lives. Brings greater inspiration. It is the power that was behind the healing of the woman who was hemorrhaging. For healing those who were blind. For the conversion of Paul and the resurrection of Jesus. It is the power that lets us know that all things are possible.

My favorite scene is *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens is at the end, when Scrooge is being shown his headstone. And that he was not only on a trajectory to die, but die alone. And then he got scared and terrified, and he said these words to whichever ghost that was. I don't remember. But here's what he said: *"Are these the shadows of things that must be or might be? I know a man's deeds foreshadow certain ends, but if a man's deeds change, won't the ends change?"*

And basically what he's saying is: even when our lives are going a certain trajectory, we still have the power to choose today and change what the outcome's going to be. And that is the gift that God has given us: the power to change. That, regardless of how many times we've made mistakes, regardless of how things haven't worked out, we have the power to change our thoughts, our ideas, our attitudes, our intention, our vision, our actions and bring about different results. It is a great and powerful gift that we have.

Where in your life do you want things to improve? Where in your life does something need healing? Where in your life is it time to let go of something, or make a change? Where in your life do you need to make peace with something?

You have the power, in so many ways, to change your life! To transform it! To rise above! And to overcome! And you don't need to know how; you just have to open a space for that possibility. God will show you how when you begin to look at those areas of your life, and make an intention to change it, to improve it, to overcome and not let anything stop you from living the fullness of life that you are here to live.

One of the things I love about Scrooge when he ... that next morning when he wakes up, and kind of gets a second chance, he is giddy like a child! He goes from being this grumpy, old, mean guy to this childlike person. And you know what happens in these transformations? It brings out the best of ourselves. He brought out the best version of himself. It was in there, but needed his inner change to transform it.

And, even though he had the whatever scared out of him that got him there, it got him there. Because it shows that that potential is in each and every one of us.

So what is the best version of yourself for you now? What would the better version of yourself in your relationship be? What would your better version of yourself be with your work? Or your better version of yourself in the attitude in which you live every single day of your life? You have the spiritual power of myrrh, which is the power to overcome, change and transform, and create better things in your life.

So this year, you might get a gift you don't like. You might get a gift that you don't use or want. I saw a study, and it said 61% of the people report that, every year, they get at least one gift that they don't like or don't use. That means only 39% are really enjoying them. Well, the fact is: 100% of us get these spiritual gifts, and I hope 100% of us use these gifts, and not just 39%. Because these spiritual gifts are powerful. They're practical. And they're the things that make life most fulfilling ... not material gifts!

The gift of gold is a consciousness of abundance, of knowing that things will work out.

The gift of frankincense is the gift of prayer, to tap into that intelligence and power that created the universe, and made us, and has so much good waiting for us if we connect to it.

And, finally, the power of myrrh, the overcoming, transforming power to change and have your life rise to another level.

I hope you get all the gifts you want. I hope you open them, and use them and enjoy them. But even more so, I hope you and use the real gifts of Christmas, which are your spiritual gifts.

God bless you all! ***[Congregation applauds]***

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