

Series: The Different Gifts of Christmas
Message: The Well-Planned Gift
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Introduction

One of the fun things about the Advent season is Christmas cards. Over the years, I've received all kinds of cards. Funny cards, encouraging cards, inspirational cards, and more. We all like receiving cards.

Normally, in the United States, we send and receive cards in December. Question: Have you ever received a Christmas card in November? Every now and then, I get a card early. I always have to marvel at how well-organized some people are. Sometimes, I even get a little jealous. I'd love to be as organized as some of my friends.

My mother was one of those very-organized people who sent out cards early - Not quite so early that you received your card in November, but early. To do this took a lot of planning. My mother was not content with store-bought cards. She ordered cards from a catalogue, and they came early in November. Then, my mother would sit down at her dining room table. She would pull out a list. She worked systematically through that list, making sure everyone got a card. She hand-wrote a note in every card. Then, she carefully wrote the address on the front with wonderful handwriting. Stamps went on the envelopes - Special Christmas stamps, of course. A custom return address label went on the back. And when she was done, she drove the cards to the post office.



Cards and gifts that are prepared with such care are special.

We're starting a series for the Advent season. We're calling it: "The Different Gifts of Christmas." For the first Sunday of the Advent series, our message is entitled: "The Well-Planned Gift." We're going to learn today that: God shows how much he cares for us by giving us wonderful gifts - Gifts that he plans carefully.

We'll learn first that God has a plan for each of us.

A. A good plan

It's a **good** plan. Let's read something from the prophet Jeremiah:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29:11)

What's involved in God's plan for you?

God wants you to prosper.

We read that God wants to "prosper" you. What does that mean? We normally think of "prosperity" as money and possessions, but God offers us something more. We'll learn about that as we study together today. Before we do that, let's look at the ramifications of this. What kind of a person would want to "prosper" you? Well, someone who likes you. Someone who values you. In fact, we learn in the Bible that God loves you. And if you hang around our church, you know that the modern word "love" doesn't quite describe the feeling that God has for you. In fact, God *cherishes* you. That's why he wants the best for you.

The prophet Jeremiah is quoting God here. Just to make sure we understand, God adds something:

God doesn't want to harm you.

God wants to prosper you and *not to harm* you. Someone who wants to prosper you cares about you. They want the best for you. On the other hand, someone who wants to harm you dislikes you. In fact, if they want to harm you, they hate you. Why would God add this? Because there are a lot of people who think God hates them. How do we know that? We know that because of the way that people act.

The average resident of planet earth spends a lot of time and energy avoiding God. That's what you do when you think someone hates you. It's what you do when you think that you might be in some kind of danger. This message was first presented on a Sunday morning. Do you know what most people do on Sunday morning? Whatever it is, it does not involve coming to church. It's a lot of other things. But church, no.

Avoiding church is just one way that people avoid God. And that's a shame because God doesn't hate them - He loves them.

And to make that clear, God goes further: He says that he has "...plans to give you hope and a future." Hope: What a wonderful thing! Then God talks about a future. Question: Do you look to the future with hope? Or, do you look to the future with fear? You know what? God wants you to be able to look to the future with hope! He wants to prosper you – not to harm you.

God has a plan for you - A good plan. It's a plan that shows how much he loves you.

B. A mature plan

Let's ask a question: How did God come up with this plan? Did he just look around one day and see you and say, "Hey, let's make up a plan"? No. God doesn't just have a good plan for you. It's a **mature** plan - It's been around for a while. Let's read something that the Hebrew King David wrote:

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful,
I know that full well.

(Psalm 139:13-14)

David says here that God planned him out before he was born. Everything about him:

- His appearance
- his hair color
- His height
- What kind of frame he would have
- His brain capacity
- And not just his body, but his ***inmost being***.

God controlled everything about David's body and his life before he was conceived. David goes on.

My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place,
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.

(vs. 15)

So, God didn't wait until David was conceived and then move things around. God was at work in a secret place. To say that God wove David '...together in the depths of the earth' has a sense of the eternal. God's plan for David went way back in time.

But was it just David's body that God planned?

Your eyes saw my unformed body;
all the days ordained for me were written in your book
before one of them came to be.

(vs. 16)

God didn't just plan David's body and then turn him loose. God didn't sit around watching to find out what David would do. It says here that he planned every single day of David's life. And God recorded that plan in something like a book.

Once again, we have to consider what God said through Jeremiah. Did God want to prosper David, or harm him? Here's what David wrote next:

How precious to me are your thoughts, God!
How vast is the sum of them!

(v 17)

David considered all the thought and planning that God put into his life. Imagine the level of detail that it would take to plan out a whole life. That would be a lot of details, and a lot of thoughts. David says that, if he could add up all the thoughts that God put into his life, the pile would be vast - And every single one of those thoughts was precious.

So, God doesn't just see people and come up with a quick plan. He thinks for a long, long time. He starts long before we are born. God has a plan for each of us, and it's a **mature** plan.

C. A personal plan

Let's ask another question: Does everyone get the same plan? No, it's a **personal** plan. Let's go back to Jeremiah:

Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you... (Jeremiah 1:5)

God told Jeremiah that it wasn't just a matter of some generic plan. Even before Jeremiah as born, God knew him. That means God knew Jeremiah **personally**.

Lots of people know **about** someone. That means you know facts about their life. But when you say you **know** someone, there's more. When you know someone, that means you've met them. There's a sense of contact. To say that you know someone means you know them personally.

That's the relationship that God had with Jeremiah. And that's what he has for us.

God has a plan for us. It's a **personal** plan.

D. A Generous plan

A little while ago, we said we'd talk more about what God wants to give us in his plan. God wants to "prosper" us. That means he want us to have good things. So, God's plan for us is a **generous** plan.

When we think of generosity, we normally think of receiving **things**. Now, things are nice. I like receiving things. But God doesn't just want us to have things - He wants us to have the best things. In fact, he wants to give us the most valuable thing in the universe. What is that? God wants to give us himself. We've spent some time with Jeremiah. Let's spend a little more.

This is what the Lord says:

"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom
or the strong boast of their strength
or the rich boast of their riches,
(Jeremiah 9:23)

If you ask the average person, "What is the most valuable thing to have", they'd likely say one of three things:

1) *Wisdom*

Some people like wisdom. Everyone wants to be smart. They want to know things. Having a title like "PhD" makes people look up to you.

2) *Strength, Power*

Others would say they want to be strong. Being strong gives you power. Being strong makes you safe when you're under attack. And again, if you're strong, people look up to you.

3) *Riches*

Finally, people want to be rich. They want money. Perhaps money can give you strength and power. And of course, being rich is another way to acquire respect.

But God says don't boast about your wisdom. Don't boast about your strength. Don't boast about your riches. Don't boast about them because they're not worth boasting about. They're not as valuable as people think.

What's really important? What's really valuable?

...but let the one who boasts boast about this:
that they have the understanding to know me,
that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness,
justice and righteousness on earth,
for in these I delight,"
declares the Lord.

(Jeremiah 9:24)

What's the most important thing in the universe? God. If you know and understand God, you have what really matters.

More than that, God wants us, you and I, to be like him. If you become like him, you'll understand and know him more. When you understand and know him more, you enjoy him more.

People think that intelligence is everything. Being able to out-smart others is where it's at. But God has all the knowledge in the universe. What does he do with it? He exercises kindness.

People think that strength is what you want. When you're strong, you can take whatever you want. But God is all powerful. What does he do with his power? He exercises justice.

People think that money is the best thing to have. But God owns everything in the universe. And to him, it's not riches that matter, but righteousness.

Yes, God is the most valuable thing in the universe. God offers us the ability to know him. He can offer us nothing better.

How can you begin to know God? You begin by being saved from your sins through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9)

God offers you and me a wonderful plan, but we must choose to accept it. That means, you and I must repent. "Repent" means turn away from your sins and submit to the will of God. We mentioned earlier that people think God hates them. God doesn't hate us, but he hates sin. Sadly, a lot of people are more interested in hanging on to their sin than they are to finding God. That's why part of this process involves repenting.

Remember, God wants us to be like him. That means he wants us to be free to choose. In order to have a real choice, you must be allowed to choose badly. Because people think God hates them, they choose to disobey. They choose to run from God. God warns us that one day, the

judgement will come. He is not slow about this judgement. Rather, he is patient. He gives people time to make a decision if they need it. But be warned: One day, time will run out.

God offers us a wonderful plan. Choose to accept his plan. Choose to repent. Choose to receive the Love of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us tell you how - Come and talk with us. There will be some important info at the end of this article.

Do it because God has a plan for you: It's a **generous** plan

E. A Solid Plan

At this point, someone might have a question: "Is it possible that this plan could fail." That's a sobering question. Fortunately, that will never happen, because God's plan is **solid**.

The plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations. (Psalm 33:11)

We don't need to worry that God's plan for us will fail. Why not? Because God is all-wise and all knowing - That means he knows how to create the best plans. Because God is strong - He has the power to make his plans succeed. And because God is eternal - His wisdom, his knowledge and his strength, and all his other incredible attributes will be around forever. Together, these attributes make God sovereign - He is the sovereign king of the universe. That means he has total control, and he always will.

So, God has a plan - A solid plan. "The plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of His heart through all generations."

F. A proven plan

During the advent season, we celebrate a number of things about God. The main thing is God's love and generosity in sending Jesus Christ. We'll talk more about that as the Advent season unfolds. For our final point today, the Advent season adds one more quality to God's plan: It's a **proven** plan.

In the first Sunday of the Advent season, we light the candles of the Advent wreath. The first traditionally is the candle of hope and prophecy. The Old Testament of the Bible contains a number of predictions concerning the one called the Messiah - The great King. These predictions were given by the great Hebrew prophets centuries before the birth of the Christ child. One of our favorites that we traditionally discuss at this time of year is the prophecy about the location of his birth. Let's read about it:

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." 3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

6 "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."

(Matthew 2:1-6)

In this story we learn that Jesus had already been born. The king of Judah at that time was a man named Herod. He apparently knew nothing about the birth of Jesus - That is, until some foreign dignitaries walked into his court and asked where the great king had been born. Herod checked with the religious leaders who told him the child would be in Bethlehem. Why? Because one of the Hebrew prophets had predicted it centuries before. In fact, about six centuries before. The prophet's name was Micah. And as it turns out, Jesus was born exactly where the prophet had predicted. He was born in Bethlehem.

What would it take to do this? What would it take to make a prediction, and have it come true six centuries later? No human could do this.

I often say that I have trouble making commitments for the next week. If I say I'll meet somebody at 2 PM on Tuesday, I can try my best to get there on time. However, I might have a problem with my car. I could have a flat tire. There might be a traffic jam. So, there's no way I can give a 100% guarantee that something will happen if I predict it.

Only God could do something like this. Only God has the knowledge to know everything that could happen between the time the prophet made his prediction and the actual event. - An event that occurred centuries later. Only God has the power to intervene with anything that might prevent the prediction from coming true.

The fact of Bible prophecy is proof that God is everything he says he is.

- He is eternal.
- He is all-powerful.
- He is all-knowing.
- He is sovereign.

So, God can say something will happen and it happens - Even if it comes true centuries later.

So, God has a plan - A proven plan.

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

We all like it when we receive something during that holidays that was obviously well-planned. Those gifts are special. We've learned today that God cares for us. He shows that by giving us wonderful gifts. And those gifts come through a plan.

God has a plan for each of us. He offers it to us. And that means he has a plan that he offers for you.

It's a good plan - A plan to prosper you and not to harm you.

It's a mature plan - A plan that God created long before we were born.

It's a personal plan - It's personal because God knows you.

It's a generous plan - A plan that includes the ability to know God. That's better than wisdom, or strength, or riches.

It's a solid plan - A plan created by the eternal God. So, it's a plan that can never fail.

It's a proven plan - God shows that he has the power to complete his plans by giving us the prophecies in the Bible. Prophecies made about the coming Messiah – the Great King. Prophecies that came true even though they were made centuries in advance.

In this Advent season, I hope that you will rejoice in the plan that God has for you. He shows you how much he cares by planning very, very well.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net
