

Three Gifts Under the Tree

by Jim Cymbala

God offers us three gifts under the tree: a pure heart, a steadfast spirit, and a willing spirit, which we can receive by asking Him to give them to us.

Duration: 36:23

Scripture: Psalm 27:5, Psalm 51:10, Jeremiah 13:23, Matthew 5:8, John 13:34, Philippians 2:12-13, Hebrews 13:9

Topics: "Gifts"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses three unusual gifts that God has given to believers. These gifts are a pure heart, a steadfast spirit, and a willing spirit. The speaker shares the testimony of a former heroin addict who found Christ and emphasizes the depth of God's love. The speaker also highlights the importance of surrendering to God and allowing Him to shape us according to His will. These gifts were purchased for us on the 'blackest Friday' when Jesus hung on the cross, and they are part of the salvation that Jesus provided. The speaker encourages listeners to open these gifts and rely on God's power to live a righteous life.

Transcript

I want to talk to you today about three presents under the tree. Three gifts under the tree. Three gifts under the tree.

How we got those gifts, when they were purchased, when you should open it, we'll get to that later. But I want to talk to you about three gifts that are very unusual gifts that most of us don't think about too often and we confront problems in our personal lives and we don't realize God's gifts to us, the full extent of them. I have ringing in my mind a sentence that a late choir member who's with the Lord now, Danny Velasco, said in his video.

He was out in the street. He went from earning thousands of dollars a day as one of the top makeup artists in the fashion industry to becoming a heroin addict and living in the street for years, hearing voices and being one of those people you cross the street to get away from. And then the Lord invaded his life due to the prayers of some dedicated people in this church.

He attributed it because they just fastened on him and made him a project and said, we're not going to let go until God changes him. And he said in this video, as he's recounting how he found Christ, he said, you know, the thing about God is nobody knows how deep the love and the grace of God goes. It goes so

much deeper and further than any of us could imagine.

We can all say amen to that, can't we? It was, we think we have a hold and a concept of God's grace and help, but then we make new discoveries. These three gifts are found in one of the most dramatic parts of the Bible. And at a very embarrassing moment in the life of King David, even though they're found in the Old Testament.

And remember, whenever you read the Bible, any verses or truths or promises or commands in the Old Testament, you read them and then you suspend yourself for a second and you say, is this applicable to me? Is it found in the New Testament also? Because only if these verses or commands or teachings are found in the old and in the new, is it applicable to us. That's why someone just said to me they had pork for Thanksgiving and they said, thank God we're not under the law and we can eat pork. How many say amen to that? I mean, come on, come on now, we can eat some ribs.

That is very, very good blessing. But they're strictly forbidden in the Old Covenant. So that's why you have to think that through and say, all right, is this applicable to me? Because I'm not a Jewish person living back 2,000 years ago under the law of Moses.

So now help me to rightly divide the word of God. We're gonna apply this word to the New Covenant now because it's found in the old and of course it's very, very deep. In fact, Moses never went anywhere deep like David went.

David was a prophet before there was a new covenant. He was seeing things about the new covenant that we have through Jesus Christ who's called the son of David. He understood things that I believe a lot of the choir members and us, as I say these words to you, you're gonna say, I never knew that.

I never thought of that. I never saw that ever in my life. Now I realize why I've been battling in vain with certain things.

So these are three presents under, three gifts under a tree and they're found as we're gonna see in this psalm that almost all the commentators agree was written after David's great sin with a woman by the name of Bathsheba who he saw, he desired, he took her. He had relations with her. She got pregnant to cover it.

He ended up killing her husband by other people's hands but he was guilty of it and for months and months, he lived somehow with this guilt and didn't fess up until God sent a prophet and told him, you're the man and then he began to repent and turn to God asking for mercy and in the psalms, there's a small group of psalms called the penitential psalms meaning showing penitence and sorrow over disobedience and sin. This is maybe the most famous one, Psalm 51 and in it, he's asking God for mercy. Remember your love.

Remember your tender kindness toward me. Remember all of these things. Don't take your Holy Spirit from me.

On and on and on but he mentions in two verses these three unique gifts that are under the tree for us today. Verse 10, create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Read that with me out loud.

Create in me a pure heart, O God and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Then verse 12, restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. Read that one with me out loud.

Come on, everyone. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. So David has sinned.

David has been soiled and now we are allowed to listen in to his prayer to God, which is recorded. Some of the commentators are not sure this was the Psalm of David because of the last verse which talks about restoring the walls of Jerusalem and that seems like more of when they were, had been sent away from the land but it fits too well. Always remember when you read the Psalms, the little subscription below, the little titling below the number of the Psalm, that's not inspired.

We're not sure when they came, a Psalm of David, a Psalm of Moses. None of that's inspired. The Psalm is inspired and we wanna learn from it.

Everything else is conjecture. So David says to God this, create in me a pure heart or a clean heart. Create in me a clean heart.

A couple of things about that sentence, they're very interesting. Number one, the word he uses for create is the same word that's used, the same verb that's used in Genesis 1.1. In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth. What did God create it out of? Nothing.

So David is not saying fix my heart. David is not saying repair my heart. David is not saying do a little work on my heart.

David is saying create out of nothing and give me a new heart, a clean one, a pure one. Because I've been involved in some dirty business and now I look to you and I cry to you out of nothing by your supernatural power, create in me a clean and a pure heart. That's quite a gift.

Notice what strikes us also here is that David is not trying to fix it himself. He's saying to God, you're the only one who can do it. I spent a good part of my younger life trying to fix up everything so that God would look and say, well done.

Haven't we all done that? Come on, how many of you here have messed up and you just promised yourself, I'm gonna do better next time? Lift up your little humble hand, would you please? Not David. I told you David was a man before his time. David says, no, you do it, God.

Because I can't do it. I can't get a clean heart. You're gonna have to do it.

It's gonna have to be a gift from you and now I'm asking for you to do it. I want that clean, unspotted. I feel dirty what I did, covered it up, the murder.

I just, I'm polluted. But I remember another time in my life. So God, would you please create in me a pure heart? Let's apply that now to the new covenant and see in the New Testament, do we hear such talk? In one way, that does not apply to us if you try to take it literally because when you become a Christian and most of us here are Christians, how many are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ have been born again? Just say amen.

So we already have a new heart because the promise is that when you put your trust in Christ, God says, I will give you a new heart, I'll put a new spirit within you. So the Holy Spirit is already living inside of us.

We're not in David's time.

David didn't know the language of you must be born again. David didn't, the old covenant, they didn't know about being born again, having the Holy Spirit live inside of them. It seems like most times in the Old Testament, the Spirit came on people and used them.

But in terms of the language of the new covenant, Christ in us, the hope of glory, they knew nothing of that. They knew nothing of that. But don't you get what David is saying? That is a lesson for all of us.

What David is really saying is, God, I want to be clean. I want to be pure. You're the only one who can make me that way.

We shouldn't analyze it literally. What we should do is hear the pathos of it. David is crying, I don't want to be dirty.

I want to be cleansed. And I want to have a right heart, a pure heart. Because when our hearts aren't pure, when our hearts are soiled, when our hearts are hateful, when our hearts are dirty, when our hearts are resentful, when our hearts are unforgiving, when our hearts are whatever, it ruins everything in life.

It ruins everything. You can't enjoy Thanksgiving. You can't enjoy Christmas.

You can't enjoy anything because there's this constant struggle going on in our life. The flesh fights against the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit fights against the flesh.

And we all know that. We all know the pangs of guilty conscience, don't we? And the closer you walk with the Lord, the more sensitive you get to these strings away from God. So we can learn from David that it's right to come to God and say, God, make me the person, the pure, clean person, starting with my heart.

Notice there's another lesson in here for us. Not only is David saying, God, you gotta do it. Not only is David asking for purity of heart because here's the third point.

Out of the heart comes the issues of life. Jesus never deals with the surface. He goes right to where life begins.

If your heart is bad, your life's gonna be bad. If our hearts are cleansed by the Lord and if God sanctifies our hearts and does a work in our hearts, then proceeding out of the, Jesus said, out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks. If you got a dirty inside, you got a hateful inside, what do you think you're gonna have? Is bad, beautiful speech? No, there's someone my wife and I know who's just so full of bitterness and hatred is for so many years now, this person we know closely who lives in another state.

They've been rebellious and angry when they were a teenager and that was decades ago. They were already hateful and mean-spirited and just nasty. And as I've watched that person and heard some of the things that person has done, I thought if someone could get an x-ray and just go into that person's heart, you would see that the only reason they're acting this way is that's what their heart is full of because out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks.

Watch over your heart with all diligence for out of your heart comes the issues of life and God is about fixing our hearts. He does heart surgery. Praise God He does heart surgery.

Can we put our hands together and say amen to that? He goes inside where we live and He fixes. Forget how He does it. The point here is not understanding all of that.

It's just, God, I wanna be right in my heart. I wanna be clean in my heart. I wanna be pure in my heart.

If we just pray, oh God, cleanse my lips or God, cleanse my eyes. If the heart is bad, it's gonna manifest itself. And He puts it on God.

No one ever told me that. I was always trying to fix myself. I was trying to just try a little bit harder and then I'll be what God wants me to be because everything in life works that way.

You fail a test, you study more. Somebody beat you in basketball, you go to the park earlier and you work out harder. Everything in life is like that but not with God.

David said, no, I don't have a chance and David was a better man than all of us put together. David said, I don't have a chance. Create in me a pure heart.

God has under the tree today a present, a gift for any of us who will just ask Him for it. You can have a new heart. You can have your heart cleansed.

But notice David goes further. David says, and renew a steadfast spirit in me. David's still praying and he says, I only want a pure heart but I want a steadfast spirit.

Renew a steadfast spirit. Now that word in the Hebrew means constant. It actually comes from the word, the Hebrew root which means erect, standing up straight and it evolved into meaning steady, constant.

In fact, some translations have in the margin renew a constant spirit in me. And what David is saying is, God, I'm so tired of being a yo-yo. I'm so tired of going up and then going down and going down, then going up and then getting all excited and going up and then going down and then going up and then going down.

The other day I was in the airport somewhere in the last three weeks. I don't know. I've been in a lot of airports in the last three, four weeks but somebody, a grown man in a business pulled out a yo-yo and was playing with a yo-yo and doing that thing where you, how many know what I'm talking about? What's that called? Somebody work with yo-yo? Cradle.

They did a cradle. The dude is doing a cradle with a suit on in an airport with a yo-yo. And it must've been New York because I noticed nobody even gave him a second look.

It had to be New York. It was like LaGuardia. It was like, oh, the dude is playing with a yo-yo.

That's fine. And what David is saying is, I can't take that anymore in my life. And haven't we all battled with that? This is not the kind of sermon where you run around and scream amen at me.

I know that, but it's true, isn't it? And David saw it and said, there was once a time when I was more constant and now I'm going up and down, down and up. I'm so tired of going down and up. God, would you give me a constant spirit? Would you give me a steadfast spirit? I don't wanna go up and down anymore because that rollercoaster ride does so much damage to your spirit and your emotions.

Am I right, ladies and gentlemen? I'm just opening my heart. I'm talking to you here like a man to men and women, right? We're all the same. My late friend, David Wilkerson, told me about once was preaching here, telling about the battles of trying to get from God a constant, steadfast spirit that these drug addicts he was trying to help at Teen Challenge.

He's thinking back years ago where a guy checked himself into the program and said, look, I'm done with heroin. I'm not taking heroin anymore. So he said, now look, I'm gonna have to kick.

They were not permitting methadone and there was no gradual kicking. No detoxing with methadone. The guy said, I'm gonna kick.

Now, so he got a room and he told the leaders of Teen Challenge there, he said, I'm locking myself in. You do not come from me no matter what, no matter how I scream, no matter how I cry, no matter how I yell, no matter what I say, no matter I take back what I'm saying now, do not believe me. Believe me now.

You lock me there and you wait in the morning, you come and get me. But I am going through the next 10 hours and that's it. Do not come in the room no matter what I say.

They said, all right, we'll do that. He said, they're about to leave. He said, no, do me more.

He says, somebody has a pair of handcuffs here. I want you to handcuff me to the radiator because I don't trust myself because I've been going up and down with this thing. Up and down, down and up.

I can't take it anymore. You handcuff me to the radiator. They handcuffed him to the radiator.

They went away. Next day, eight, nine o'clock in the morning, they go into the room. He's not there.

Neither is the radiator. He unscrewed somehow the radiator, a radiator like this, heavy, okay, with it connected to his handcuff. Couldn't break the handcuffs.

Unscrewed it, picked up the radiator, carried it down the steps, went to Fulton Street and scored some drugs. That's why David prayed, Lord, renew a steadfast spirit in me. I don't want to go up and down.

I don't want to live in Romans 7. I want to live in Romans 8. I want to live in victory. I don't want to be this up and down person. Isn't that something we would all love as a present? And notice who he's asking God to do.

Notice who he's asking to have this accomplished. God, you renew a steadfast spirit in me. What do you think? I'm going to make myself steadfast? Can a leopard change his spots? This is revolutionary.

You're not going to find this in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. This is David probing, going way out. Well, let's look in the New Covenant.

For the first one, Jesus said, blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. All the places in the New Testament that indicate God wants to sanctify and purify his people. He wants to do it.

Remember this, ladies and gentlemen, brothers and sisters, wherever there's a command in the Bible for us to do anything, you must find the promise that God says he will give us the strength to obey the command. There is no command you can obey on your own because Jesus said, without me, you can do what? Nothing. So if you just read the command, you can fall under a New Testament legalism.

It's New Testament verses, love one another even as I have loved you. Try to do that. Go ahead, go tomorrow and ride the number three train and try to love other people even as Christ loved you.

Try to do that. Not going to happen. So for every command, we have to find a promise where God says, I will do that.

David was a thousand years ahead of his time. He said, no, not only have to give me a pure heart, but I want you to make me steady. I want you to hold me, hold me.

You know, there's a song we used to sing here. I don't think that any of the keyboard players know it, but we used to sing it years ago. Hold me, hold me.

I'm in the midst of a storm. Hold me, hold me. I'll be safe in my father's arms.

How many have gone through times in your life? Unless God held you, all hell would have broken loose. Come on, lift up your hand high. We have the right to say to God, that's the second gift under the tree.

Not only a pure heart will he give us. You know, taking this passage and in the Old Testament, I'm just remembering now in its Old Testament context, it was a minister who was in New York City working with a late friend of mine who did like a series and actually wrote a book. But under the Old Testament concept of a pure heart, a pure heart, here's how you get a pure heart.

Listen, the only way you're going to get a pure heart is God is going to give us a pure heart. How many want a pure heart from God? Lift up your hand. How many want that first gift? How many lift up your hand and say, pastor, I want a steadfast spirit.

I want God to hold me. During this Thanksgiving, Christmas season, in the days to come, God hold us. Don't let us fluctuate up and down.

The very sin, Paul says, the sin I say I won't do, I find myself doing. And the good that I say I'll do, I don't do. What's going on here? Romans 7, I'm not steadfast.

I want to know that God will hold me and keep me. Third present under the tree. Oh my goodness.

Why in the world did nobody tell me this? I really, I'm so disappointed. I'm sad that my parents grew up under such legalism that nobody ever told that 12-year-old, 14-year-old, 18-year-old, and told me that you could ask God for this. David says finally, and now Lord, I want you to sustain me with a willing spirit.

Look at verse 12 again. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me. You know what he's asking for? He's saying, God, there's things I know I should do that I don't want to do.

And there's things I shouldn't do that I want to do. My will is the problem. God, now you grant me a willing spirit.

You make me want to do what's right. You work inside of me so that you change my very desires and longings because I can't do it, God. I can't make myself willing when I'm unwilling.

And you can bite your nails. You can go on a 40-day fast. Unless God does it, you're not gonna have a willing spirit.

Willing means that you actually want to do it. You actually want to do it. You know, I myself, I have many faults, but when I was speaking at the prison in Angola and talking to the men in the prison, about 400 of them, two weeks ago, went down there representing the church to try to bring some encouragement and cheer before the Christmas season, Thanksgiving season.

And I was telling the guys because these guys are in for double murders. These guys are double life sentences. These guys are just horrific crimes.

And I was saying, you know, God can change you and make you willing to do things that you didn't want to do before. And I say, take, for example, me. I'm so selfish naturally.

I wouldn't give a hoot about any of you guys. I don't care about any of you. I flew down from New York after a pastor's leadership conference, and I needed to rest, and I prefer to be with the church family, but I'm down here, you know why? Because I love you.

Jim Cimbala left alone. Why would I care about you? What money are you going to give me? You're all serving forever, and you're not allowed to handle money. Some of them have not touched money for 20, 30 years.

Some of them, I met a guy, he hasn't had a visitor in 25 years. And I want to take a group of other men here and go down there in the new year, God willing. So we go and just give them a visit.

All in favor, say aye. We can just go in and you go from cell to cell, or they'll line up and you can just meet them. I mean, if no one has a visitor for 25 years to talk to, how would you like to live that way? But I told them that, and they didn't hear a minister talk like that, and they were taken aback, and they were like, what are you saying? I said, yeah, you got it.

I don't care about you. Why would I care about you? You're serving double life sentences. You can't give me a dime.

Why would I be here if God hadn't given me a willing spirit? That I love to be here, that I want to be here, that I love you guys, and you can give me nothing. I love you because he gave me a willing spirit. That's what David prayed for.

He said, God, make me willing where I'm unwilling. You know, that's what all self-control is about, that God has to make you willing to do hard things. All the books are gonna come out now on dieting.

We're all gonna indulge, and then January will come, and they'll all be new book, how to lose weight, how to do this, how to do that. But you know what the battle is? You can buy all the books in the world. Something has to happen where God makes you willing to say no to something.

That's not good for you. And to say yes to something that's good for you. And David said, I can't do that.

David, David, you're a thousand years before your time. Most people are straining even now trying to do it in their self, and David says, no, I got three gifts I want to tell you about. You can say to God, God, give me the pure heart I need.

Number two, God, renew in me a steadfast spirit. I'm tired of being a yo-yo. Number three, God, you grant me a willing spirit.

You make me willing. God, I can't. You're the potter.

I'm the clay. How can the clay do anything? The clay can only be shaped as it yields itself to the potter and say, God, make me the person you want me to be. Let me tell you when these presents were bought for us.

They were bought on Black Friday, but not the Black Friday that they talk about here. They were bought on the blackest Friday that ever happened in the calendar. Jesus hung on the cross.

You know how black it got? At high noon, it was totally pitch black. And Jesus hung on the cross and loved us so much. Now, after giving his life for our sins and paying that price, you don't think he'll help us? With a pure spirit? You don't think he'll make us more steadfast? You think if we come to him and ask him to make us willing, you don't think he'll do that? Restore the joy of my salvation? You don't think after all he went through, you think he'll turn us away now if we come sincerely? Well, of course not.

He will help us. He didn't just forgive our sins and say, now try your hardest, live the Christian life. That's what I grew up around.

Live the Christian life. No, he said, trust in me and I'll give you the power to live the Christian life. I'll give you the right heart.

I'll give you a steadfast spirit. What verse can we stand on in the New Testament? Oh, I'm thinking about one so good. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.

For it is God who works in you, both to and to according to his good pleasure. God's spirit gives us the power to even will to do what's right. Isn't it true that most of us, like my younger years, we think we can do most of the job and we just need God to help us around the edges.

And then the longer you walk with God, you become more like David. Oh God, do it all. Do it all.

Come on, how many have learned he has to do it all? Come on, can we put our hands together? He has to do it all. Yeah, these gifts were bought for us on a Black Friday for sure. This is part of the salvation that Jesus purchased for us.

Not just shedding his blood, but making these gifts, these graces available to us today. That's why you need to open them right away. Don't wait.

You can open them today. You can open them today. You can say to God, God, just grant me a pure heart.

Lord, please, no more up and down. Renew a steadfast spirit within me. Lord, make me willing.

Make me willing. Oh, the tree. I didn't mean a Christmas tree.

I meant the tree. He was nailed to the tree for us. That's where these Christmas presents come.

Bought on a Black Friday, and certainly placed under a tree, but it has no green fur to it. It's the cross. And he wants it for all of us because here's the story of Christmas.

You're gonna hear a lot from Pastor Tim, myself now in the weeks to come about Christmas and some part of the story. But here's what Christmas can summed up, in summed up form can mean. I love you,

and I wanna help you.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, and whoever believes in him would not perish, but have everlasting life. Draw away from the specifics of that. And really what it's saying is, I love you, and I wanna help you.

I know, but I'm not worthy. I know you're not worthy, but I love you, and I wanna help you. I know, but I've messed up so many times.

I know, but I love you, and I wanna help you. I wanna help you wherever you are in the journey of life. You're not a Christian? Receive me, and I'll make you a believer.

I'll make you a Christian. I'll give you a new life. You are a Christian who's struggling.

I'll help you, because I love you. Let's close our eyes, bow our heads. If you're here today, and you say, Pastor, I need him to hold me.

I need him to help me. Some part of that message directly fit my situation. I need him to help me.

We don't wanna know what. None of us are priests. You have one high priest named Jesus Christ.

He's the only one you need to talk to. But we'd love the opportunity, the pastors are gonna stand on the steps here with me. We'd love the opportunity, and the deacons and deaconesses, just to walk among you and put our hands on your shoulder or your elbow for just a moment, and just agree with you.

God, do that work that you promised you would do. We're tired of struggling. We're not gonna make any more new promises, because in ourself, there's no good thing.

God, you have to do the work, Lord. If you're here today in the balcony or downstairs, and you'd like us to just stand with you for a second, get out of your seat now, and just come up and say, Pastor, that was for me. That was for me.

God, the Holy Spirit is speaking to me, and I wanna respond, and I wanna step up and have you pray with me and for me. Come on, just get out of your seat and come. Out of the balcony, just come.

Just face me. Hold my friends, Lord. Hold us.

Create out of nothing but your own power a pure heart in all of us. Not only wash away our sins, but let your Holy Spirit dwell in such a way that our hearts are pure and clean. Renew a steadfast spirit, Lord.

Save us from up and down, down and up, and hold us in your big, strong arms, and we will be held. I will be steadfast when you hold me, Lord. Sustain us with a willing spirit.

Make us willing where we're unwilling. We submit our wills to you, our hearts, our lives to you, God. But one thing we know, these presents, these gifts are for us, Lord, and we're asking for them in Jesus' name.

Let all self-struggling stop right now in the name of Jesus. Let trust and faith and rest begin as we yield ourselves to you. We present our bodies, our minds, our hearts, Lord, Jim Cimbala will never change.

In himself, he can never change, but Christ can live through me, Lord, conquering all of who Jim Cimbala is. That's what we ask for for all of us, Lord. Thank you for your word to us today.

Thank you for the tree, not the Christmas tree. Thank you for the tree of Calvary. Thank you for Black Friday, Lord.

We know for one thing for sure, you do love us. And now, Lord, let your face shine upon your people today. Grant us the joy of your salvation, your joy, not our joy, not us trying to work up joy, your joy.

Let it flow through us like a river. Help us to love one another and encourage one another, for we pray this in Jesus' name. And everyone said, Amen.

Now we want you to turn around and start wishing 10 people Merry Christmas. Come on, we can say it now. Thanksgiving is over.

Give somebody a hug and say, Merry Christmas.

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