

THE LAST GIFT

(adapted from Phil Callaway *Who Put My Life On Fast Forward?* Eugene, OR: Harvest House Pub. 2002, p.p. 169 to 172)

Donald Swan: God's grace is like a key, that comes from time to time and unlocks the heavy doors of my life.

Sense of memory and smell linked:

-memories of childhood.

- scent of shrubs triggers flashback of childhood – *hiding under porch*.

-memories of Christmas.

- smell of Christmas baking / roasting turkey / fragrant poinsettias & mandarin oranges triggers flashbacks of childhood Christmastimes – *Sunday School Christmas pageants, Aunt Salome's surprise arrivals and a full house of cousins*.

Agony of waiting:

-children looking forward to Christmas:

- dreaming of gift wishes as they watch TV commercials about toys and wander the aisles of toy stores.
- dolls, mechanical & computerized toys, electronic gadgets.

-forced wait to open presents:

- in days leading up to Christmas morning.
- couldn't open on Christmas Eve.
- wait until parents are awake and up.
- wait until aunts arrive.

-imposed wait to discover what was under the wrapping paper.

- in moments of unwrapping presents as we tried to remove gift paper without ripping it.
- in finding that most presents were gifts you were expecting or were able to guess.

Christmas coming alive:

Phil Callaway writes:

At last the time came. And this year the disappointment was overwhelming. With only three presents left beneath the tree, I held in my lap a small Tonka truck, three pairs of black socks, a shirt with pins in it, and a cowboy poster that read "When you reach the end of your rope, tie a knot in it and hang on."

The first remaining gift was a George Beverly Shea record for my Mom. The second was for Grandpa, a box of chocolates from my brother and me. The last gift was green and shiny and just the right size. My sister grinned and picked it up. Then the most unexpected thing happened: She turned and handed it to me. "Open it," she said. "It's yours. Tim put my name on it to fool you."

... [I ripped open the gift and] ... let out a triumphant “Whoop!” and danced around the living room, holding the bow and arrow high like the Stanley Cup. Grandpa stopped sampling chocolates and smiled widely. “It’s from all of us,” he said.

“You be careful with that, son,” said my mother.

“He’ll be okay,” said my dad.

I remember only a handful of gifts from my childhood. A Detroit Red Wings hockey jersey. A Hot Wheels race car set. I remember ice-skating and carol singing and candle making, and Grandpa’s story of a Baby whose tiny brow was made for thorns; whose blood would one day cleanse the world.

But it was the last gift that made Christmas come alive for me.

You see, that bow and arrow caused me to realize that Christmas is all about grace. A gift I don’t deserve, coming along when I least expect it. Changing everything. Forever. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9.6).

-gifts cause us to understand that Christmas is all about grace:

- gift of wine from my neighbours this year as gratitude for occasional help.
- a gift we don’t deserve:
 - coming when we least expect it.
 - unlocking the heavy doors of my life.

-this is what God has done in sending his Son.

Jesus
He came not to a throne, but to a manger.
He lived not as a king, but as a servant.
He chose not an earthly kingdom, but a cross.
He gave not just a little, but everything.
(Holly Gerth)

-prompts us to to try and give the last gift of grace to others:

- who don’t necessarily deserve it.
- who aren’t expecting it.