

Gift-Giving

(**INSTRUCTIONS** for class: take turns, each person reading one paragraph or question. Then each one select one of the numbered questions paragraphs to answer, and for the group to discuss.)

Americans have a saying that comes from Jesus' words in the Bible, "It is better to give than to receive." They also talk about "the joy of giving." Cultures have traditions of gift-giving that vary widely.

For example, when a Japanese friend's mother died, the American asked her friends "how can I show love to her - with a gift?" They advised not to give a gift because they said she would have to give to give a gift in return of approximately 1/2 the value of the gift she received, and it would be a burden. This surprised the American because it is different from this person's giving custom.

Recently a Japanese Mom had a baby. Her American friends wanted to bring her meals for the first couple weeks so that she could focus on her new baby and her two other children. (Motherhood can be exhausting!) She was very worried about somehow "paying them back" for all those meals. The friends said, "Please just accept our food, and then someday you can help a different person when they need it."

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think it's important to pay someone back when they give to you? Why or why not?
2. What are the gift giving traditions in your culture? Do you have traditions of serving or volunteering in your native culture? Please give examples.
3. If you take a friend out to lunch or take food to a sick neighbor, is that friend or neighbor expected to reciprocate (do something for you in return)?
4. Do you have any traditions of giving without expecting something back? If a friend wanted to do something special for you without receiving anything in return, would you allow that friend to do it? Are you embarrassed if someone helps you?
5. Do you prefer to give or receive?
6. Is it possible to actually give a gift to someone if they insist on paying you back? Explain your answer.
7. What would your native culture say about the following kind of giving?

Jesus taught his followers to "Give to everyone who asks of you, and whoever takes away what is yours, do not demand it back. And just as you want people to treat you, treat them in the same way. And if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, in order to receive back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great." (The Bible: Luke 6:30-35)

NOTE - Jesus elsewhere tells us to lay down our lives for and wash the feet of our friends as well. He doesn't mean to ONLY love our enemies, but love them as well as our friends.

8. The Bible tells us the bad news and good news about our danger, and God's rescue that he offers:
"The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord!" (Bible: Romans 6:23)
Do you know how to receive this everlasting life from God?