



The Weekly Leigh Mail

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Words of Practical Encouragement - Birthdays

Good Morning!

Today is my birthday and it is April Fool's Day. I have been tricked and surprised for 46 years. My dad made the most of this annual event and spent ten years torturing me with tricks. I'm not sure I looked forward to my birthdays, but I certainly remember them. He would look for an opportunity when I was misbehaving on my birthday, and use my waywardness to cancel whatever birthday plan I had been expecting. Then he would proceed to take me to my punishment, which usually turned out to be a much bigger gift than I could ever have imagined. I remember being dragged once to the shed for a beating—which was a big surprise since he never beat me—only to find the bike of my dreams waiting for me. Many pastors have reminded me that the idea of one sinner marrying another sinner and then raising a functional family is illogical. My dad was proof that you can put 'fun' into the word 'dysfunctional'.

Now that I am grown up, the gifts aren't nearly as dramatic, but equally surprising. I walked into Foundations today to discover a student made a big cake for me to share with the class. Twelve year-old Marissa loves to bake and was so happy to bless me. Thanks, Marissa! I guess I'm surprised because I still wake up marveling at the concept of Christian community. I'm shocked when anyone, besides my dad, remembers my birthday. He's passed on, so God continues the gift giving through others. God never forsakes us or abandons us. I know it is just a cake, but it's so much more. Marissa had to think ahead and ask her mom to buy supplies and the whole family had to get up early to transport carefully transport it. For me. Why?

To me a proof that there is a God, the very one described in the Bible, are gifts from others. I know my own tendency is self-preservation, self-centeredness, and selfishness. I know how hard it is for me to serve others before myself. I am the sinner described in Romans 3:23. So, a logical conclusion in my prideful brain is that everyone else would be even more depraved. And then, someone brings me a cake. Or my husband wakes me with a kiss and a glass of water. Or my boys clean the house without asking. Or a friend invites me to dinner. Or a CC mom sends me a birthday card.

I've trained my boys to refute the question, "If God is so loving, why do bad things happen to good people?" with the response, "Since people are so wicked, why does a just God ever do anything good for us?" I have never deserved a gift, and yet I get them all the time. Millions and millions of gifts every second. My breathe, a laugh at Anna's pun in class, a M&M, the thought, "Should that be *an* M&M or *a* M&M since M is pronounced 'em'?" a clean, warm room, student's stories about buck-naked Lady Godiva, and unbelievers who ask why I call myself born-again. Pastor Alan Wright tells how He imagines Jesus exclaiming to His Father "Do it again, Abba!" with the gift of ever sunrise.

I stay in Classical Conversations so my family can study with families who believe every creation breathed by the Word made flesh is an adventure to explore. I love surrounding myself with women smart enough to run the UN and joyful enough to be with children all day for many years. I delight in watching a mother's eyes light up when a small child gives a presentation worthy of an adult. I laugh at a presentation on President Madison's bird that cursed in French.

I am thankful for the many gifts the families in CC send me, and am ashamed at my inability to respond to each of them. There are just too many. The best gift today was when 6 year old Sophie raised her hand to request prayer for my safety during my summer travels. You are doing a great job raising children that love others more than their own life. Please don't grow weary.

Dear Lord, Thank you for another year of life. To live is Christ, to die is gain. Thank you for the glimpses of heaven we receive in life that entice us to long for the gain of entering into your presence. Thank you that you enable us to be better than we are on our own. Please help us remember that every perfect gift is from you.

Love, Leigh