

Norman C. Schwab
Yacolt EVFree
February 13, 2000

Great Valentine's Day Gift Ideas Ephesians 4:23-32

This last week I was listening to a radio talk show, that offered tips on how to do Valentines Day on the cheap. The host was frustrated with all the pressure he felt to spend \$50 bucks on flowers that get thrown away in a couple of days. Spend another \$50 bucks on dinner that gets consumed and then it's gone. \$20 bucks on a box of chocolates and of course some sentimental gift that comes in a small box with a big price tag. The talk show host was giving tips to guys on how to do Valentines Day on the cheap without insulting your Valentine.

I say there should be at least one day of the year where we forget our scrimping and stinginess. I think we should give to our Valentines something that is priceless. Something that would last for a very long time. Something to be treasured and valued and enjoyed at its memory for not just a couple of days, but for years and years to come. This Valentines gift would be more beautiful then six dozen roses. More tasty then a meal at the finest of restaurants. More sweet then a 20 pound box of Sees candy. More valuable than a 1-1/2 carat diamond ring. This gift given to your valentine will do more to enhance your intimacy, increase your ability and quality of your communication and closeness. This Valentines Day give her the gift that she will remember for a lifetime. This Valentines Day give him the gift that will excite him like no other.

Now these gifts don't come cheap. These gifts are able to be given only after a lot of hard work and self-denial. These gifts involve sacrifice and commitment on your part..yet these are the gifts of love. These gifts will ultimately reflect your true love for your Valentine. Are you interested in hearing some great Valentines Day Gift idea's? They don't come cheap but they are well worth the lavish investment in your relationship.

We find these Valentine's Day gifts listed in the World Best Selling book. The Bible. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Ephesians. Ephesians chapter 4. Ephesians is a letter written by the apostle Paul to

the people who attended the church in Ephesus. Paul began his letter by reminding them of incredible privilege they have of being in Christ. The same holds true for all of us here who are believers in Christ. Chapter one, we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies. He has chosen us before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless. In Him we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins. We are co-heirs with Christ. We have been sealed by His Holy Spirit. He enlightens our eyes to spiritual truth and empowers us with the strength of his might. We who were once dead in sin, a hopeless situation have been made alive. We are men and women made new for it is by God's grace we have been saved. We are His workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works. Christ has been rooted deep within us so that we could understand how deep, how long, how high and how wide Jesus love for us is. For it is He who is able to do exceeding abundantly beyond all that we can ask or even think. In the first three chapters of this letter Paul writes with great effervescence the incredible, significant and purpose filled position of privilege the believer finds himself in. Then Paul explains how that place of great privilege will work its way into real gut level living. It's the practical application of our incredible position of favor with God. A short outline of the book is this. Here is all that we have been given...now here is how we should be living our lives because of it.

Paul explains that we are no longer who we used to be, therefore we no longer have to wear the dirty old clothes we used to wear all the time. Believers ought to be putting on some new clothes. Our old habits. Our old ways of doing things don't make sense to continue. Why? because our old ways of relating with people. The ways we used to treat our Valentine are no longer in keeping with who we are. We once acted according to our old self, a life that was going no where and had no hope. A life terribly stained by sin with no hope of any cleansing bleach. No future. But now...as a believer there is cleansing. There is a hope. There is a future. We no longer have to live in the old mans' rubble. We no longer have to listen to the father of lies. No longer are we compelled to be dragged around by the chains of deceit by the Evil One. We don't have to be blinded by the glamour of sin anesthetized into a stupor of spiritual deadness...why? Because we are no longer who we used to be. We are called to put off those behaviors that are no longer consistent with the

privilege place, significance and value we have been given as prince or princess of the king of the universe. Put off the old smelly clothes and put on the new spiritual clothes. Put on behavior that is consistent with who we are in Christ. Romans 6:13 Do not go on presenting the member of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. While non-believers have no hope of recovery from getting any freedom from the shackles of the sin that weigh them down. No amount of self help seminars will solve their core problems. We believers have hope. And that hope is being "in Christ".

Turn with me to Ephesians chapter 4 verse 23. In order to enhance our relationships with others, including our closest relationships with our Valentine. We need to be throwing away some old smelly worn-out behaviors and putting on some clean, fresh, godly new behaviors. Coming from the context of the passage Paul is saying. Don't be like the pagan who haven't got a clue how to live right and well. They are darkened in their understanding. They have become callous to the things of God. Ignorant and given over to sensuality, greed, deceit and every kind of impurity. They are living hopeless lives going no where with no future. That will gravely affect their relationships with others. But you..you are different. Don't wear those old clothes because they don't fit who you are anymore.

Verse 23 says, "you be renewed in the spirit of your mind...put on the new self which has been hand crafted by God in righteousness and holiness." We are to be renewed. This is in a present tense, continuous. We are to replenish, refresh, restore our minds. Why the mind? Because it is the mind that will drive our actions. If our mind is filled with garbage then we will act our garbage. If our mind is filled with anger we will act our anger. IF our mind is filled with bitterness, that bitterness will express itself somewhere in our lives. If our mind is filled with sinful sensuality somewhere it will sneak out into our lives in sinful sensuality. If our minds our filled with greed, greed will come out. If our mind is filled with lies, those lies will come our of our mouths. We must be renewed in our minds. Romans 12:1,2 I urge you brethren by the mercies of God to present your bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God. This is your spiritual service of worship. And do not

be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of you mind...." David in Psalm 51 calls out to "Create in me a clean heart and renew a right spirit within him." We guard our minds by being very careful what we allow to come into it. What magazines, movies, computer games, video. jokes, stories. No matter how we may deny it's limited affect on us...We are profoundly affected by what we take in. To renew our minds, we must not only limit the intake of garbage, but increase the intake of the good stuff. Prayer. Meditation on God's word. Listening to the Bible on tape if you are not much of a reader. Somehow you must get the truth in. Worship songs that direct our thoughts to God and fill us with singing of Him. Spending time with believers, not allowing the embers of your fire to go out from forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. John 8:31-32. If you abide in my Word and my words abide in you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free." Freedom come when we renew our minds by abiding in His word and giving His spirit plenty of chance to move us to new thinking. For it is new thinking that produces new values and New values brings new priorities and new priorities will produce new actions and new actions will promote new habits and new habits will forge new character and we will then present our bodies a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God.

What gifts would you like to give your Valentine tomorrow. It's probably not something you can run down to VanMall and buy with money. It's not a gift that comes to you instantly. It will take time and possibly a lot of failed attempts and struggles before you begin to get it just right. But a gift worth giving is a gift worth pursuing, for even in the pursuit there is great value.

Since we are believers in Christ and are no longer who we used to be. Since we are no longer forced to wear our smelly worn out sin stained clothes, our relationships with other people ought to be different. If any man be in Christ he is a new creature old things are past away behold new things come. Christ begins to work into us righteousness and holiness. Some may say, well I'm a believer but I don't feel very righteous or holy...I still struggle quite a bit with the old habits of doing things. This is Paul's point. Positionally the believer, we are declared righteous before God whether we feel like it or not. Practically god begins to work that holiness and righteousness into us day by day little by little.

Holiness should not be viewed as some sort of mystical spiritual experience that is only reserved for church on Sunday or maybe when we read our Bibles and pray. Holiness and righteousness were never meant to be cloistered away in some monastery far away from other people. True goodness never stays locked away in an airtight hermetically sealed plastic bag. Holiness and righteousness must be fleshed out into real life, tested in relationships, stretched, tried on, well worn among the daily grind of people. It is in the practical living out of the holiness and righteousness that God gives us...that we find some great Valentine gifts we can give to those closest relationships.

First Valentines gift idea this morning. Give the gift of truth telling...dipped in love. V. 25 says, "Speak truth...each of you with his neighbor for we are members with each other. Don't keep lying. Speak the truth, for we are all part of each other. Husband and wife. Christian brother and sister, so because we are part of each other there is no point in lying to ourselves. We are looking out for the others best interest in speaking the truth in love....notice I did not say easiest interest. Best interest in love. Knowing that he comes in love even with difficult things we can respond and receive them better. Because we are members of each other when we tell the truth we are actually helping ourselves.

The setting for a Peanuts cartoon was a classroom first day of the new school year. The teacher asked the students to write an essay about returning to class. Lucy wrote, Vacations are nice, but its good to get back to school. There is nothing more satisfying or challenging than education and I look forward to a year of expanding my knowledge. The teacher was impressed and lavished compliments on Lucy. Then in the last frame, Lucy leans over to Charlie Brown and whispers, "After a while you learn what sells." Tempting isn't it. Tempting to say what sells, what others probably want to hear, what appears to be the easy way out, what doesn't rock the boat as much..whether it's true or not.

Truth telling is the foundational building block of any relationship. Truth telling builds trust and trust promotes closeness. Truth is conforming our words with reality and then dips them in love so they go down easier. This morning promise to give your Valentine the gift of truth telling, no matter how painful it may be, for without truth there can be

no trust and without trust relationships will die. Give the Valentine's Day give of truth telling.

Second Valentine's Day gift idea is to give the gift of righteous resolution. Tell your valentine from now on I want to resolve our differences in a different way, a righteous way. I don't want to get sinfully angry and shout and yell and rant and rave, or ignore and sweep it all under the rug, hope it goes away and allow it to blister and fester. This is the gift of righteous resolution. V. 26 says "Be angry and yet do not sin. In your anger, don't sin. Keep short accounts. Resolve your conflicts in a spiritual way before the sun goes down...don't give the devil an opportunity to prick you with a thorn of bitterness.

Sinful anger is all too easy to shoot at your Valentine. We too easily hurt the very ones we love the most. One woman justified her anger saying she explodes and then it's all over with. Yep. explodes just like a shotgun, but just look at all the damage she leaves behind."

How can we express the anger we feel in a controlled and spiritual way? On one side, don't let it bottle up until it explodes all over your valentine. Keep short accounts. If something frustrates you, speak the truth in love. Don't ignore it hoping it will go away. The devil wants you to allow it to boil up inside until it comes out in sinful anger. The devil wants you to keep your anger and resentment bottled up inside because he knows its tearing you up, not them. He is the destroyer and enjoys eating you up from the inside out as your anger feasts on itself.

On the other side don't let your righteous anger die our into compromise, apathy and complacency. We have a need in our day for more righteous anger free from sin, directed toward sin. We need to hate more of what God hates. We need to stop compromising and excusing sin in ways that god never does.

Anyone can become angry. That is far too easy. But to be angry with the right person at the right time, to the right degree, for the right purpose, and in the right way...is a great gift indeed. While pent up anger will eat away at your soul. Moving toward resolving conflicts in a righteous way is like a hot tub after long hard day. It soothes the soul.

How does one give the gift of righteous resolution. First, remember what you have been saved from, out of a life that is a dead-end, hopeless. Now you are a prince of the king of the universe. We who have been

forgiven much can forgive this offense as well. Second, Confess your part of the mess. Maybe it was selfishness, maybe revenge, or bitterness, jealousy, insensitivity, pride. Go before God and confess your part in the conflict and then to that person. You let God point out and deal with the other persons part, big or small. Don't give the devil an opportunity to drive a wedge between you and your valentine. Erin and I every night before we go to bed, we pray with each other. It is very difficult to pray with someone you are angry with. It may be a conflict we need to hash out at time when we are not so tired...but we choose a time to talk about it so we don't ignore the conflict. Give your valentine a great gift of righteous resolution.

A third gift we can give our valentines this year is the gift of hard, honest work. Men who work hard and honest with financial integrity, day in and day out to provide for the family. Women who work hard and honest wherever God has directed them work and serve. This is a mark of love for the other person. Not stealing but working hard. That is great gift to your valentine and shows how much you love them. verse 28 says let him who has been stealing, steal no longer. To steal is to take that which is not yours, or withholding that which is not yours to keep. We can be tempted to steal more then money. It can be all to tempting to withhold our affection, when God calls us to love our wives and husbands. This withholding or stealing from them gives the devil a great foothold. In I Corinthians 7:4 it tells us that marriage means your wife has authority over your body and your husband over the wife's body. You are not to withhold affection. Stop stealing from each other. Do not steal affection where its due.

Maybe you are stealing honor from them by cutting them down and talking poorly of them, even if it is thinly disguised in mask of humor. Maybe you find yourself stealing time or priority or maybe you are stealing the leadership that is rightfully theirs. We steal from anothers God given position by criticizing them behind their backs. Talking to friends but never directly to them. We steal by failing to do our part, our share. In our laziness we steal. In our pulling back and pulling away. In our aloofness of affection we steal. Don't steal from your valentine...this year give them the gift of hard and honest work.

The fourth gift you may choose to give your valentine this year is found in verse 29. Give the gift of encouraging words. What a great gift to receive, like a very sweet morsel that goes down smooth. A perfectly ripe piece of fruit is an encouraging word. Have you received any this week? Have you give the gift of an encouraging word this week. We can give out ripe words or rotten words. Verse 29. Let no unwholesome word come out. That word unwholesome actually means rotten. It could be dirty swear words, or it could be those cutdowns, negative little jabs of your verbal knife. Not too strong or friends might object..just enough to slice the other so he bleeds.

Controlling the tongue is not easy. On a tombstone behind an English church read the epitaph. Beneath this stone, a lump of clay, lies Arabella Young, who on the 24th of may began to hold her tongue. I don't think many of us would like to be remembered as such. Another man was asked why he always called his wife Peg since her real name was Mary. Well he said, Peg is short for Pegasus, and Pegasus is an immortal horse, and an immortal horse is an everlasting nag, so that is why I call my wife Peg.

We laugh...but it's not funny. Think of all the heartache behind every time he calls her Peg. Everytime she nags right back. No one starts out marriage like that. Who would ask for something like that? Yet far too many Valentines end up in a nag and rag relationship. The world has enough rotten mouths of greed and anger and distrust and cut downs, the last place you want to hear rotten words are from home. Vow to never publicly cut down your valentine even in humor. Give her, give him the Valentines Day gift of encouragement. Your relationship can change, you can breath life into your relationship with words of encouragement born on the wings of the spirit. For husbands or wives that struggle with this, I challenge you when you come home to find your spouse. This may appeal to the hunting instincts of you men. Find her and then offer one genuine compliment. What a great Valentines Gift of love. There is great renewing strengths in words that build up, giving grace to those who hear it.

In the book, *The Whisper Test*. Mary Ann Bird wrote that growing up she knew she was different and hated it. She had a cleft palate, misshapen lip, crooked nose, bucked teeth and garbled speech. When

the kids would ask her what happened to her lip, she would tell them it happened from a piece of glass. Somehow it was more acceptable that it was an accident rather than something she was born with. Mary remembered an event that shaped her life. Her much loved 2nd grade teacher Mrs. Leonard had an annual hearing test. She knew from past years that each one would come up to her desk, she would whisper in their ears a sentence like the sky is blue or are those shoes new? and the children would have to repeat it back. When Mary came to the desk. Mrs. Leonard spoke seven words of encouragement that changed her life. She whispered "I wish you were my little girl." Words of encouragement have great power. We who are new creatures in Christ ought to make liberal use of words that build each other up. Give your Valentine this year the gift of encouraging words.

When we sin we pain God. It hurts Him to see us make such poor decisions, because he loves us and wants what is best for us. When we hurt a brother or sister with our words, or anger or steal from them we grieve the Holy Spirit. Parents know a little what this is like when children are fighting with each other.

v. 31 put aside all bitterness. A resentful spirit that refuses to be reconciled. Put away wrath, passionate rage. sinful anger. Clamor of raised voices in a quarrel or argument shouting and screaming at each other. Put away your slander. Ripping on each others reputation. Talking ill of others behind their back. Put away malice, the plotting of evil against each other. Instead. Be kind. Be tenderhearted. That word is splachnoi. From your guts. Forgive. Let go of your claims, your rights to revenge. Cease the resentment. Knock it off. Stop holding onto your self destructive grudges. Forgive each other. What a great gift we can give our valentines..Give the gift of forgiveness. Stop nursing that grievance. Forgive and let it go.

Not easy is it? The process of renewing your mind in righteous and holy living..out in the scrapes of real life with real people. It's not easy. But it is worth the hard work of pursuing after. Holiness lived out in real life is not a condition we somehow, happen to drift into. We must actively cultivate a holy life. Phillippians 2 calls us to work out what God has worked in. It is God's process of working His holiness into our practical lives. Putting away unholy behaviors and putting on holy habits. Which

Valentines Day gift would be the hardest for you to give? The gift of truth telling? Righteous resolution to conflict? The gift of hard, honest work...refusing to steal? The gift of encouraging words? How about the gift of forgiveness? It would be tempting for you to give only those that you are strong in. I challenge you to pick the one that is toughest for you. And this is a gift that he must discover on his own like a sweet surprise in a lunch box. Like a note tucked into a clothes drawer. You don't have to write it out, or say it out. Just begin to live it out and it will not be missed. It will become the greatest Valentines Day gift your spouse has ever received.