

## Gift Certificate

by Peter Covington

When I was younger, I had a consistent go-to gift for my parents whenever I forgot to get something or had no money, or both. I would give them a certificate for service of some kind or another.

Of course, I was giving something they already possessed, because if my parents had asked me to do something, I would have done it. But the certificate came with a stated or implied promise to not grumble and to complete said task with alacrity and a positive attitude.

The certificate itself was hand made and used formal language as imagined by a child. These were easy to give to parents because they actually gave away nothing except time to make the certificate, but they were generally well received.

However, certificates did have their limits. For example, I had to be truly desperate to give one to my little sister. To give service to her seemed to upset the balance of the universe, it hurt my dignity, and gave something that I felt I didn't owe her at all. I was also very slow to give one to another relative since that would mean going to another location, which was never easy before I had control of my mobility.



As a child, I felt like I was getting away with something when parents would accept these gifts with gratitude, but as a father who eventually received very similar gifts, I better know their value. Without exception,

such gifts were gifts of self.

Here is evidence that the value of a gift is truly in the thought. One year, at Christmas my oldest daughter got a little silly and emphasized the quantity of certificates she gave away and gave multiple certificates to each person for very small services such as clearing her plate after a meal or playing with the dog, which were things she did well anyway. But each certificate came with a spirited drawing of the represented service which was truly a gift of self. My wife sometimes had little patience with silliness and exacted the full worth of

every certificate according to its exact wording. I gladly used mine without much fuss to let the worth of each gift truly shine from my daughter.

When I think of giving gifts of service to God I also sometimes feel like I'm cheating the system. Most of these acts of service come from abilities that God has given me talent to do and that I enjoy from repetition and expertise. Sometimes I decide on service which is outside my comfort zone and stretches me, but each time I am reminded that I am the only one impressed by what seems like sacrifice.

The fundamental truth is that willingness, openness and loving intent are the actual gift in any relationship. We are the gift and we are the value in that gift.