

## When is a gift not a gift?

Message for Good Friday, March 29, 2013  
by Bruce Fraser

**Scripture:** John 3:16, Romans 6:23

*Show a beautifully wrapped gift.* Here is a gift for someone. Or is it? Ask a teacher to help me with this one.

- The word “gift” comes from the verb “to give.”
- When I give you something for free, it is a gift.
- But what if you don’t accept it? I can’t really say that I’ve given you something if you don’t receive it.

Keep that in mind as I tell this story about the gift of doughnuts.<sup>1</sup>

Brother Christianson taught religion classes at a high school. He had an open-door policy and would take in any student that had been thrown out of another class as long as they would abide by his rules. Steve had been kicked out of his sixth period and no other teacher wanted him, so he went into Brother Christianson’s religion class.

Steve was told that he could not be late, so he arrived just seconds before the bell rang and he would sit in the very back of the room. He would also be the first to leave after the class was over.

One day, Brother Christianson asked Steve to stay after class so he could talk with him. After class, Brother Christianson pulled Steve aside and said, “You think you’re pretty tough, don’t you?”

Steve’s answer was, “Yeah, I do.”

Then Brother Christianson asked, “How many push-ups can you do?” Steve said, “I do about 200 every night.”

“200? That’s pretty good, Steve,” Brother Christianson said. “Do you think you could do 300?”

Steve replied, “I don’t know...I’ve never done 300 at a time.”

“Do you think you could?” again asked Brother Christianson.

“Well, I can try,” said Steve.

“Can you do 300 in sets of 10? I need you to do 300 in sets of ten for this to work. Can you do it? I need you to tell me you can do it,” Brother Christianson said.

Steve said, “Well...I think I can...yeah, I can do it.” Brother Christianson said, “Good! I need you to do this on Friday.”

Friday came and Steve got to class early and sat in the front of the room. When class started, Brother Christianson pulled out a big box of donuts. Now these weren’t the normal kinds of donuts. They were the extra fancy, BIG kind with cream centers and frosting swirls. Everyone was pretty excited. It was Friday, the last class of the day, and they were going to get an early start on the weekend.

Brother Christianson went to the first girl in the first row and asked, “Cynthia, do you want a donut?” Cynthia said, “Yes.” Brother Christianson then turned to Steve and asked, “Steve, would you do ten push-ups so that Cynthia can have a donut?” Steve said, “Sure,” and jumped down from his desk to do a quick ten. Then Steve again sat in his desk. Brother Christianson put a donut on Cynthia’s desk.

Brother Christianson then went to Joe, the next person, and asked, “Joe, do you want a donut?” Joe said, “Yes.”

Brother Christianson asked, “Steve, would you do ten push-ups so Joe can have a donut?” Steve did ten push-ups,! Joe got a donut.

And so it went, down the first aisle, Steve did ten push-ups for every person before they got their donut. And down the second aisle, till Brother Christianson came to Scott. Scott was captain of the football team and centre of the basketball team. He was very popular and never lacked for female companionship. When Brother Christianson asked, “Scott, do you want a donut?”

Scott’s reply was, “Well, can I do my own push-ups?”

Brother Christianson said, “No, Steve has to do them.” Then Scott said, “Well, I don’t want one then.” Brother Christianson then turned to Steve

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<sup>1</sup> I have not been able to verify the source of this story, so I can’t claim it to be an actual event. Even if it’s fiction, it’s still a great story!

and asked, "Steve, would you do ten push-ups so Scott can have a donut he doesn't want?"

Steve started to do ten push-ups. Scott said, "HEY! I said I didn't want one!"

Brother Christianson said, "Look, this is my classroom, my class, my desks, and my donuts. Just leave it on the desk if you don't want it." And he put a donut on Scott's desk.

Now by this time, Steve had begun to slow down a little. He just stayed on the floor between sets because it took too much effort to be getting up and down. You could start to see a little perspiration coming out around his brow. Brother Christianson started down the third row. Now the students were beginning to get a little angry.

Brother Christianson asked Jenny, "Jenny, do you want a donut?"

Jenny said, "No."

Then Brother Christianson asked Steve, "Steve, would you do ten push-ups so Jenny can have a donut that she doesn't want?"

Steve did ten, Jenny got a donut.

By now, the students were beginning to say "No" and there were all these uneaten donuts on the desks. Steve was also having to really put forth a lot of effort to get these push-ups done for each donut. There began to be a small pool of sweat on the floor beneath his face, his arms and brow were beginning to get red because of the physical effort involved. Brother Christianson asked Robert to watch Steve to make sure he did ten push-ups in a set because he couldn't bear to watch all of Steve's work for all of those uneaten donuts. So Robert began to watch Steve closely. Brother Christianson started down the fourth row.

During his class, however, some students had wandered in and sat along the heaters along the sides of the room. When Brother Christianson realized this, he did a quick count and saw 34 students in the room. He started to worry if Steve would be able to make it.

Brother Christianson went on to the next person and the next and the next. Near the end of that row, Steve was really having a tough time. He was taking a lot more time to complete each set.

Steve asked Brother Christianson, "Do I have to make my nose touch on each one?"

Brother Christianson thought for a moment, "Well, they're your push-ups. You can do them any way that you want." And Brother Christianson went on.

A few moments later, Jason came to the room and was about to come in when all the students yelled, "NO! Don't come in! Stay out!" Jason didn't know what was going on.

Steve picked up his head and said, "No, let him come."

Brother Christianson said, "You realize that if Jason comes in, you will have to do ten push-ups for him?" Steve said, "Yes, let him come in."

Brother Christianson said, "Okay, I'll let you get Jason's out of the way right now. Jason, do you want a donut?"

"Yes."

"Steve, will you do ten push-ups so that Jason can have a donut?"

Steve did ten push-ups very slowly and with great effort. Jason, bewildered, was handed a donut and sat down. Brother Christianson finished the fourth row, then started on those seated on the heaters.

Steve's arms were now shaking with each push-up in a struggle to lift himself against the force of gravity. Sweat was dropping off of his face and, by this time, there was not a dry eye in the room.

The very last two girls in the room were cheerleaders and very popular. Brother Christianson went to Linda, the second to last, and asked, "Linda, do you want a donut?"

Linda said, very sadly, "No, thank you."

Brother Christianson asked Steve, "Steve, would you do ten push-ups so that Linda can have a donut she doesn't want?"

Grunting from the effort, Steve did ten very slow push-ups for Linda. Then Brother Christianson turned to the last girl, Susan. "Susan, do you want a donut?"

Susan, with tears flowing down her face, asked,  
 “Brother Christianson, can I help him?”

Brother Christianson, with tears of his own, said,  
 “No, he has to do it alone. Steve, would you do  
 ten push-ups so Susan can have a donut?”

As Steve very slowly finished his last push-up,  
 with the understanding that he had  
 accomplished all that was required of him,  
 having done 350 push-ups, his arms buckled  
 beneath him and he fell to the floor.

Brother Christianson turned to the room and  
 said, “And so it was, that our Saviour, Jesus  
 Christ, prayed to the Father, ‘Into your hands I  
 commend my spirit.’ With the understanding  
 that he had done everything that was required  
 of Him, he collapsed on the cross and died.”

“And like the doughnuts left uneaten, many  
 people leave the gift of life and love which Jesus  
 offers.”

Jesus gave his life for us on the cross. Or perhaps I  
 should say he *offered* to give his life for us. It’s up to  
 each one of us to choose whether or not we accept that  
 gift.

Here are a couple of Bible passages which describe the  
 gift:

**John 3:16, Today’s English Version:**

For God loved the world so much that he gave his only  
 Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not  
 die but have eternal life.

**Romans 6:23, New Century Version:**

When people sin, they earn what sin pays – death.  
 But God gives us a free gift – life forever in Christ  
 Jesus our Lord.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day scorned the gift – but  
 not all of them: Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimethea  
 accepted the gift. Pilate couldn’t comprehend it. The  
 soldiers did their job; for them it was just another day,  
 another death. Except for one, the centurion – the  
 captain of the group: he believed; he received the gift.

What will you do with Jesus? Here is the gift. What  
 will you do with it?