

A TIME FOR GIFTS

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When I was eight, I had a birthday party with all my friends from school. One of my closest friends at the time, Tyler, gave me a beautiful mermaid box full of string and beads. I loved it and Tyler beamed with pride. He'd picked it out himself from the store! We continued with the gift opening and a few gifts later I found myself opening an identical mermaid box from another girl. Tyler was devastated and began to cry. He wanted so badly to show me his friendship in a unique and thoughtful way . . . and now, in his mind, that moment had been ruined. I remember my little eight-year-old heart aching for my friend. Though I didn't really know how to express it at the time I wanted desperately to show him that he was appreciated and loved for his efforts. It seems like such an insignificant moment looking back now but the point I'm trying to make is that I remember, even twenty years later, how I felt in that gift giving scenario.

Now, I've never been much of a "gifts" person. I find when it comes to giving gifts I become stressed and overwhelmed and the whole process becomes a lot of emotional work instead of life giving and rewarding. When it comes to receiving gifts . . . oh man, I have so much going through my head. Did I respond well enough? Did the person giving the gift get the reaction they were looking for? Did they feel loved and thanked by me? Now as I describe these feelings I think some of you may think this anxiety is unwarranted - *Just embrace and accept the gift in love Nicole! Don't overthink it!* I hear you. And believe me, I give myself that pep talk at every birthday and every Christmas. I'm sure there are some of you who relate with me. You deeply appreciate the gift or the person so much that you become overwhelmed in your response.

Please read Ephesians 2:4-10

Verse 8 says, "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God." When I read this passage, I can hear my inner voice speaking - (sarcasm intended) *Wow! A free gift that I don't deserve. Just embrace and accept the gift in love Nicole! Don't overthink it!* Easier said than done. I can feel the anxiety creeping in. How can I actively accept this? How can I show God, who I love so much and who loves me so unconditionally, that I appreciate this? Is appreciate even the right word!?

I take comfort in this though. The passage from Ephesians mentions a few times that this free gift, while for me and given out of love, is for God's glory and plan. So, my reaction to it is nothing compared to God's grand scheme. He is unphased by my feeble attempts to fumble together an "appropriate" response. He sees my heart, my intentions, my desire to accept this gift even though I don't know how. I can hear him whisper - *it's enough Nicole. Your heart is enough.*

As we approach this gift giving season, I want to encourage you as a child of God. He sees you. He sees your heart and your desires. Regardless of circumstance or abilities he has a gift for you. Believe in your heart that He is right there, saving you by grace, even though you can't fathom why you'd deserve it or articulate a worthy response.

It's enough. Your heart is enough.