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"Complete Gifts"

 LUTHERAN HOUR MINISTRIES  
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*James 1:17-18: "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. Of His own will He brought us forth by the Word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures."*



This devotion is elaboration on this weekend's Lutheran Hour message, which is titled, "Scrapped Gifts," and can be found at [Lutheranhour.org](http://Lutheranhour.org).

Years ago, I traveled with some friends to the country of Guatemala in Central America. It was a service-immersion trip with our church. Of my many memories from this trip, alongside pictures of lush volcanic mountainsides, brightly colored fabrics, and the smiles of welcoming people, I can still see the rebar. Rebar—the long steel rods used to reinforce concrete projects. You don't normally see rebar, because rebar is designed to be hidden, when the project is finished. But, in many of these neighborhoods in Guatemala, almost every other building had rusty, spindly, steel rebar rods sticking up from the top of unfinished structures, four walls waiting for a roof, a one-story house hoping for a second story. From my North American perspective, it made the whole neighborhood look incomplete.

North Americans who go on service trips to developing countries are often disturbed with this incompleteness. We like to see things finished. We want to post pictures of a job well done—the house we built, the well we installed, the program we offered. These short-term trips help us put our faith into practice. But they may also leave us laboring under the illusion that our service is complete.

In the Bible reading we heard from the letter of James, you hear the phrase, "perfect gift." The word that's translated "perfect" could also be translated as "complete"—complete gifts. "Complete" is a word of hope for us, reminding us that God, our Father, not only gives good gifts, but perfect gifts—complete gifts. Even though God's good creation project is still unfinished, even though we're still waiting for the return of Jesus, even though God's kingdom has not yet fully come and God's will is not yet fully done on earth as it is in heaven, we trust that one day God will make it complete.

That's how my friend from Guatemala explained those unfinished building projects I saw. He explained how difficult it is to get a loan to build a home there. So, the people scrape together what they can, build when they can, and in between, they wait with expectation. What looked at first to me like laziness or shoddy work—all those open walls and bare roofs with rusty rebar protruding from the top—those were actually projects full of promise, an architecture of hope.

It's a good picture of how followers of Jesus can pursue the common good with our neighbors right here at home. We don't have to labor under the illusion that it's up to us to finish the project. That's God's work. God gives good gifts. And God will give complete gifts, perfect gifts. When Jesus returns in glory, we will see the goodness of God's creation in complete perfection. Until then, we build in hope.

**THE PRAYER:** Father, set me free from the burden of thinking that I have to finish your work, and help me build alongside others in love, peace, and hope, in Jesus' Name. Amen.

This Daily Devotion was written by Rev. Dr. Michael Zeigler, Speaker of **The Lutheran Hour**.

### Reflection Questions:

1. Have you been part of a service-immersion experience (e.g., VBS, mission trip, volunteer service day)?
2. If so, what did you learn? If not, what do you think would be good for you to do?
3. How do such experiences shape our everyday lives?

Today's Bible Readings: [Isaiah 17-19 \(http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2017-19&version=ESV\)](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2017-19&version=ESV). [Ephesians 4 \(http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%204&version=ESV\)](http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians%204&version=ESV).

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## Daily Devotions

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