

God's Greatest Christmas Present

In a season when our focus is on giving and receiving gifts, we must remember the most precious gift of all.

William Johnson was a typical 14-year-old—an adult one minute, a child the next. Some days he insisted on being called “Bill,” but other days he knew there was something safe about being “Billy.”

Christmas was coming, and his family asked him what he would like for presents. This question used to be a no-brainer: He asked for toys. Not socks and underwear. Not something practical for school. He wanted toys!

But no longer. Now he wasn't so sure. Part of him—the Billy part—still wanted something fun, something indulgent, something immediate. But now part of him—that emerging Bill part—wanted something practical, something long term. Bill loved biology and wanted a microscope—not one of those play microscopes he used to have, but a real one, a professional one.

Maybe that's what he should request for Christmas, but then, maybe not. He wasn't sure.

He noticed that the choice he was facing was similar to the choices many of the older teens faced. Some of them still focused on the pleasures of the moment—off-road bikes, slick cars or whatever would give them immediate gratification. They spent a lot of time hanging around with their friends.

Then there were those who seemed serious about their goals. They also enjoyed hobbies, sports and entertainment, and they, too, liked to be with their friends.

But it wasn't enough. They had goals and were working hard toward them. Planning for their future and focusing on their education was a higher priority.

Billy concluded that he wanted to be like this second group of people. Sure, he'd accept and enjoy whatever toys came his way that Christmas, but he would focus on something more lasting, something more serious.

Each member of the human race faces Billy's choice. All people want to have happy families, good friends, successful careers, good reputations, material prosperity and good health.

These goals are not wrong. God wants us to have them. By themselves, however, they are not enough.

These things come and go, and you cannot count on them to last forever. Even when they are present in our lives they are not enough to really satisfy. And they do not lead to eternity in heaven. They're not bad desires—they're not bad Christmas presents—but they are not nearly enough.

Jesus Is the Best Present

What we need most of all—the only thing that really gives deep and lasting meaning to life and that will last for all eternity—is the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. Jesus is the best Christmas present we could ever want or need, which

is why His Father gave Him to us. Here's what He offers to us.

1. Jesus models right living for us. What is a human being supposed to be like? Society has many conflicting answers: a macho man or a "sensitive '90s guy"; a 1950s housewife or a career woman; a model family man or a super-achiever.

God has the answer for men and for women: Be like Jesus. He's the only sinless person who ever lived. He's the model. When we read about Him in the Bible and as we get to know Him in prayer, we discover He is the perfect role model—one that makes us feel good about ourselves and blesses others.

2. Jesus shows us what God is like. Scripture says: "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18). The concept of "God" can be too vague, too theoretical, too abstract. We need to see God in a way we can grasp.

When Billy was little he would often call out to his parents at night for them to come to his room and bring comfort. They would call back to him from their room, "God is there with you, Billy," hoping to avoid having to get out of bed.

"But Mom, Dad," Billy countered, "I need someone here with skin on." Jesus is "God with skin on," and as we read about Him hear His gracious words and see His mighty acts, we know what God is like.

3. Jesus reveals the truths of heaven in our language. God speaks in a variety of ways—in nature, by means of human conscience, and through the prophets (see Rom. 1:19-20 and Heb. 1:1), but this is still not clear enough.

My father served for many years as a deacon, and sometimes he preached. His best sermon ever was titled "How Best to Speak to a Basset Hound." Dad pointed out that little of what he said ever penetrated his basset hound's thick skull. "But if somehow I became a basset hound without losing my human intelligence," Dad suggested, "I could speak my wisdom in the way the dog could understand."

In Jesus, God speaks the truths of heaven in the language we speak (see Heb. 1:2). The doctrines and moral commands of Scripture are not important just because they are God's truth. They are important because they are also good for us. They describe the way things are and how things work right.

4. Jesus paid the penalty for our sins so we can have eternal life. The Bible teaches that all have sinned and God's just sentence placed upon us is eternal death (see Rom. 3:23, 6:23). To be just and for the universe to be just, God must carry out that sentence. So God, in His love, sent His Son to pay that sentence for us by dying on the cross.

Something very illustrative happened at the moment Jesus died. In the Jewish temple was a veil keeping the people out of the Holy of Holies, the place where God specially dwelled on Earth.

This veil reminded people that their sins kept them from entering God's presence, either on Earth now or in heaven for all eternity. But when Jesus died, the veil of the temple was ripped in two from top to bottom, allowing those who receive Jesus' offer of eternal life to come to the Father (see Matt. 27:51-53).

The package was delivered! But like any Christmas present, the Father's gift to us of Jesus is not actually ours until we receive it. A present still in its box may have our name on it, but it's not ours until we open the package and receive it.

You may know a lot about Jesus and even believe many facts about Him, but if you have never received Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the Father's present of Jesus to you is still not really yours. If you have never asked Jesus Christ to be your Lord and Savior, you can do so by praying the following prayer:

Heavenly Father, I confess to You that the one thing I need most of all I do not have and cannot earn. I admit I have sinned in thought, word, deed and in what I have failed to do. As a result I not only feel guilty, I am guilty, and I need to be saved.

Jesus, I ask You to be my Savior. I receive what You did for me, paying the penalty for my sins. By Your grace I promise to obey and serve You. Thank You, Father, for Jesus, the greatest Christmas present ever. Amen.

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