

Giving at Christmas

Christmas is a time for memories. For me, putting together this issue brought back memories as we picked the very best Christmas articles over the last 36 years. While preparing, I reread all of my Christmas-related columns.

Some had to do with Christmas customs; others were about the culture wars to take Christ out of Christmas. Some years, I showed pictures of my staff or my young family and shared my own Christmas memories.

When we chose to include the best Christmas articles we've run in the last 36 years, I thought I'd pick my best column. But we soon decided I needed to introduce this issue, share my own memories and do what I've done at many times in the past: encourage you to give this year at Christmas.

Every couple of years, starting in 1984, I'd urge readers—much as I am now—to do what my wife, Joy, and I have done for years: give a tithe of what we spend at Christmas to the poor.

This was etched in my mind as a child when one Christmas my parents asked my brother, sister and I to pick a gift from the many we'd received and give it to a family in our church that didn't have much. I don't remember the details, but I think the father was out of work. In fact, I can't recall what I gave—but I do remember going to their house to give them our gifts and how happy they seemed.

Christmas is about giving. It's when God gave His Son. And didn't the tradition of gift giving originate with the Magi, who brought gifts to the Christ child?

Yet Christmas has become an orgy of consumer spending. Many retailers make most of their annual profit at Christmastime. Even as believers, we tend to get caught up in the world's values of buying gifts. Usually our purchases are for loved

ones who already probably have much more than they need.

The antidote, I believe, is to be proactive, to consciously give to the poor and to encourage others to do the same. When I first urged *Charisma* readers in 1984, and in many December issues since then, to give to worthwhile ministries at Christmas, it was because I believe that in giving to “the least of these My brethren,” as Jesus said in Matthew 25:40, you’re giving to Christ Himself.

A practical suggestion on how to do this is to give a tithe of what you spend on others. For instance, if you spend \$1,000 at Christmas on gifts, determine you’ll give \$100. My family does this. Over the years we’ve raised hundreds of thousands of dollars, much of it through Christian Life Missions, our nonprofit partner. If every reader of *Charismagave* only \$5, it would total more than \$1 million this year.

Yet giving isn’t just about money. That’s why we picked Steve Sjogren’s article from our December 1994 issue to show another side of giving. His article on page 46 tells how his church donated time to wrapping presents for shoppers at local malls and showing other free acts of kindness at Christmas. Maybe you’ll get some creative ideas while reading it.

When we planned this issue I wanted to motivate people to give generously, not out of tradition or compulsion, but because giving is a principle of God’s Word. So we invited Dallas pastor Robert Morris, who exemplifies this principle as well as anyone I know, to shed light on how God gives back to us—“pressed down, shaken together and running over” (Luke 6:38). Make sure you read Robert’s teaching on page 50.

To highlight a few ministries you can bless this Christmas, and to make it easy to give, we’ve included the following section that shows the ministries supported through Christian Life Missions, the nonprofit partner we’ve worked with for more than 25 years. Every penny you donate will go to the

ministry you choose. If you give through Christian Life Missions, your gift will be sent to the ministry and you'll get a receipt for tax purposes.

There are many other ministries or needs you can give to. It doesn't matter so much whom you give to, but that you give and do it as unto the Lord. We believe it will make all the difference in the way you celebrate Christ's birth this year.

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