

The Best Christmas Gift You Can Give Jesus This Year

“One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. She had put it aside, one cent and then another and then another, in her careful buying of meat and other food. Della counted it three times. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.

There was nothing to do but fall on the bed and cry. So Della did.”

So, begins the classic tale titled “The Gift of the Magi,” written by O. Henry and published Dec. 10, 1905. It has been in print ever since and adapted multiple times and ways in books, theater and movies. You most likely remember the story of a young couple, entirely in love, who each wanted to buy the other something meaningful for Christmas. They were living on the edge of poverty and had no money to purchase what they wanted, so Della sold locks of her beautiful hair to buy Jim an exquisite chain for the expensive pocket watch given to him by his grandfather. Meanwhile, Jim pawned his precious pocket watch to purchase hair combs for her hair.

Although they were each holding gifts that were no longer useful to them, the irony of their extravagant purchases paled in the light of the love they held for one another. Jim and Della Young powerfully demonstrate that true love is unselfish and sacrificially giving.

The great missionary to India, Amy Carmichael, said, “You can always give without loving, but you can never love without giving.” I am in awe of the Magi. They traveled 900 miles motivated to worship Jesus alone. They considered it the highest honor to see the baby and to give Him gifts. They weren’t inspired by what they would receive but what they

could provide. This is worship.

Whenever someone says, "I love you," the statement includes an implied question, "Do you love me?" Think about it. We love our children unconditionally and communicate our love in a myriad of ways they will never comprehend until they grow to our age. And still, when we say, "I love you" to the little darlings, we enjoy hearing it returned to us. I know Margie and I do.

God has emphatically declared His love for us in a myriad of ways, but the highest expression is on the Cross! There on Golgotha's hill, Jesus forever shouts, "I love you!" to all humanity. Corrie Ten Boom once said, "The measure of a life, after all, is not its duration but its donation." How do we measure the life and love of God then? "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Our response to God's "I love you" is called worship. Worship is our "I love you, too!" Its expression includes singing, the raising of hands, clapping, jumping and dancing. But worship is far more than what typically defines it in modern Christianity. In reality, worship is a lifestyle.

The lifestyle of worship includes singing and all the above, but at its core, it reaches further inward. Holiness is worship. Prayer is worship. Devotion is worship. Giving is worship. Doing good for others is worship. Simply put, the way I live my life every day when no one is looking is the expression of my worship. Loving God with my life is my response to God's great "I love you" to me.

Worship Isn't Always Convenient

The Magi serve as an example for us. They traveled 900 miles to find Jesus motivated to simply worship (See Matt. 2:1-12). The leading religious leaders and scholars were a mere five

miles away from where Jesus was born but never made an effort to find Him. Moses didn't encounter the Almighty in the burning bush until he turned aside from his usual path (see Ex. 3:3-4). King David, who understood worship like few others, declared He would not offer anything to God that didn't cost him personally.

Worship Is an Offering

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). This phrase, especially in the Aramaic, carries the idea that those who try to give more than they receive are the blessed ones! Indeed, this is true of the Magi who made the inconvenient and uncomfortable journey to Bethlehem. They came to worship. And they worshipped by not only bowing low before the King, but they gave gifts of their substance to Him. Gold in recognition that He is King. Frankincense was acknowledging that He is the great High Priest. And myrrh brought rejoicing that His death would bring life to all who believe and receive.

Worship Is Its Own Reward

Like the Magi of old, true worshippers today consider the blessing of worship to be the right of participation. There is no record of anything they received. We don't even know if the holy child smiled at them. I, of course, assume He did, but I don't know for sure. What did these men who invested so much of their time, substance and energy hope to receive from their act of worship? Their joy was merely in the knowledge that they were privileged to recognize Jesus and give themselves to His purpose and plan. This is worship.

What about you and me? Are we more focused on what we will receive than what we can give? Does the auditorium need to look a certain way? Does the music have to be our style? Does the attire of the singers have to be pleasing to our eyes before we can enter in and truly worship? Are we conscious of

His presence in the ordinary, mundane moments of living or only in a more important setting with a concert feel?

Do we need convincing of the return on our investment before we can let it leave our hand? Do we need our names on plaques of recognition to motivate our generosity? Are we gladly scheduling family gatherings, office parties and gatherings with friends during the holiday seasons but reluctant to add worship services, prayer gatherings or ministry outreaches?

Again, I am in awe of these unnamed Magi who vanish in history after their act of worship to the King who was but a baby when they saw Him. I want to be a wise worshipper and love God as they did, only more. I pray the core of my life will always be Jesus, simply Jesus. How about you? {eoa}

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