

The Season for Giving

My childhood Christmas memories include savoring the sweet, sticky cinnamon buns my mother always made, memorizing lines for the annual Christmas program at Dad's church, packing up the old Studebaker and driving many miles to visit relatives.

And, of course, the anticipation and excitement of hoping for that special gift.

One year it was a bicycle. Another, a transistor radio. My family didn't live an extravagant lifestyle, but there always seemed to be plenty of presents at Christmastime.

Then one year my parents did something that is permanently etched into my memory, something that marked me for life.

It had to do with a poor family in our church. Probably by today's standards my own family was barely above the poverty line, but even to us this family was poor. The father was unemployed, and we were told the kids would get no presents that holiday season.

For us, Christmas morning began as usual. But after we had opened our presents and cleared away the wrapping paper, my parents—the way I recall it—asked my sister, Karen, my brother, Paul, and me to pick one of our gifts to give to the children in this family. Their simple request, as well as the act of relinquishing a toy I hadn't even played with yet to someone less fortunate, impressed on me the idea that Christmas is for giving, not taking. I was only 5 years old, then.

When I was a little older, everyone brought wrapped gifts to the church to be distributed to the poor through World Vision. My parents always emphasized that Christmas was Jesus' birthday and that giving to others was one way to give to Jesus on His special day.

Jesus commanded us to help the poor.

Still, many of us who are middle class are afraid of venturing beyond our comfort zones to face the harsh realities of poverty. How do we fulfill His mandate?

I've made it a point to help the poor by going on mission trips to Guatemala or by visiting the homeless on the streets of New York with pastor Bill Wilson. It isn't so much to help them (although that's an element) but to help me keep focused in a world where focusing is increasingly difficult.

Today, Christianity often seems to be characterized by the extravagant sets of the Trinity Broadcasting Network or the limousines and private jets of the most successful preachers. Yet millions of people live in poverty without hope of material betterment, let alone the comfort of knowing their sins are forgiven by a Savior.

So, at Christmas our family always reaches out to others. We pack special gift bags full of goodies and toiletries for the men at the nearby Teen Challenge drug rehab center who can't go home for Christmas. Or, we wrap dozens of gifts to distribute at Mother Weaver's mission, amid some of the worst rural poverty you'll find anywhere in the South, only five miles from our new headquarters building.

For several years I've tried to motivate the readers of Charisma to reach out to the poor at Christmas. We've sponsored Operation Holiday Hope and raised thousands of dollars to give gifts to the poorest of the poor in New York through Bill Wilson's ministry. I urge you to get involved in serving the poor in your own local community. There may even be a family with an unemployed father and kids who won't get anything for Christmas if you and your family don't offer to help.

Whatever you do, do something. You may mark your kids for life as my parents marked me and you'll be realizing the truth of

Jesus' statement in Matthew 25:40: "The King will answer, 'Truly I say to you, as you have done it for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you have done it for Me'," (MEV).

Merry Christmas from Charisma Media.

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In honor of Mrs. Amy Alice (Farley) Strang (Oct. 3, 1928 – Jan. 25, 2022).