

The Spiritual Truth Behind Giving Gifts

Christmas is a crazy, beautiful time of year. I love listening to carols, especially the old classics. I also love looking at lights and elaborate decorations and being together with family and friends. But looking back over the multitudes of Christmases, the best part has always been the hope of what presents I might get.

I loved making wish-lists as a kid. Going through the big Sears toy catalog and picking out what looked the most awesome. It didn't always get what I wanted, even though I admit I was completely spoiled. I received more than I needed, certainly.

I would spend most of December trying to find boxes throughout the house, hidden in closets or under beds. And then, when gifts would be set out under the tree, I would shake and rattle the wrapped boxes, trying to determine the contents.

When I try to put profound, grown-up words on what makes Christmas great, I come up with this: Christmas is great knowing that someone who loves you is planning something special, specifically with your joy in mind. They are preparing something to bring you happiness. This to me, is hope.

Still I have to admit that as I get older, I pretend it doesn't matter so much that I didn't get anything good for Christmas. "Oh socks! I love them! This sweater is beautiful—it's so soft!" But I can't escape the ache, the feeling that there should be something more. Something more in line with my heart's deepest longings. It's not 's hope!!

I don't want to confuse this hope with materialism. Materialism believes that physical comfort and possessions are

more important than spiritual values. Like I said, I can't deny that certain material things bring joy. But these gift-giving traditions can easily point to a profound spiritual matter.

There's Got to Be Something More

I don't know about you, but I feel this same way in life—there's got to be something more! I feel the pain in life, the uncertainty, fear, confusion and loneliness and everything in me desires for it to be different. There is something in me that says this so much of life *could* be different, and it probably *should* be. The difference between the way things are and the way I desire them to be creates a crazy dissonance or tension within me. Dissonance is a musical term used when two or more notes that clash with each other are played simultaneously. Tension is the feeling of being caught between the way things are, and the way you feel they could be.

The dissonance or tension between the way things are and the way I would like things to be can drive me crazy! Because I hope! I hope for things to be better, for things to make sense, for things to have some purpose. Maybe you feel this way as well.

Life is a story of dissonance, a story of tension and conflict. But I also believe it is a story of rescue. You are in the middle of a grand story. And there is a hero who is longing to rescue you, not take you out of it, but to bring to it beauty, purpose and meaning.

God Is That Someone

What makes Christmas great is when someone who loves you plans something special, specifically with your joy in mind. God is that someone, and He is doing just that for you! That's what He's been about for all of time—showing you His love and desire to invade your personal story, a story that you've been

thinking was all up to you, or at least, simply a product of chance. God is writing your story.

If you want to acknowledge and receive all that God is preparing for you, there's one gift you have to receive first: the most controversial name in society today—Jesus. God thought, *How can I give them a gift they will receive ... a baby!* Jesus is God's gift to you. That's why we as Christians celebrate Christmas.

God is preparing something great for you, and the way to those gifts today, is through the big gift—through the baby—Jesus. As you begin to see Jesus as God's gift to you, then all the other things God has for you will be given.

But, you need to know that seeing Jesus as your hero isn't going to get you out of prison. It isn't going to heal all your broken relationships. It isn't going to make everything shiny and new, like some on TV seem to announce. But seeing Jesus as God's gift to you opens you up to all kinds of new possibilities, new ways of viewing yourself, viewing other people, and the circumstances of life you find yourself caught in the middle of. Things will start to blossom with meaning and purpose. I promise.

This Christmas, give gifts to each other knowing that we are symbolically playing out the great love story God has for each us. But never let go of the hope that God, who loves you deeply, is working to make something incredibly special out of your life—specifically with your joy and His glory in mind.
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