

Why the Best Gift Can't Be Wrapped

Admittedly Christmas is one of my most favorite times of the year. The smells, the lights, the music, the gifts—I love it all. As a father, being able to watch my sons unwrap an earnestly longed for present on Christmas morning is one of the greatest joys of my year. I'll never forget one Christmas when the gift giving was finished and the family was gathered eating breakfast and enjoying the recently opened packages. My oldest son opened several presents that Christmas morning, but not the present he was desperately hoping to receive. Though he was outwardly expressing thanks for the gifts he had opened, the disappointment could be seen in his eyes. There was only one present he really wanted.

After about 15 minutes of family time, my wife casually announced, "Hey, honey, didn't we forget one gift?" All of a sudden you could smell the anticipation in the air. Hope was beginning to simmer. "One more gift? ... Could it be mine?" You could hear the questions running through my son's head. The family began to gather around as I walked from the back room holding one more ornately wrapped present. "Oh yeah, how could we have forgotten this gift?" I said as I walked toward my oldest, extending the present. My son froze in utter disbelief, and then he frantically began to rip through the bow and wrapping paper.

There it was—the gift he was hoping he would receive. Tears began to stream down his cheeks as he walked over to his mother and me with a huge hug and said, "Wow! I can't believe you guys did this for me. Thank you."

As a father I love being able to provide for my sons and my wife. I find no greater joy than giving a gift that is so earnestly desired. I think it's a small picture of how Christ

feels toward you and me as His sons and daughters. Christmas is about presents but not necessarily the ones under the tree. You see, Christmas is about the gift God put on the tree. The free gift God gave at Calvary needs to be accepted and opened, just as if it were a present under the tree. The gift of eternal life, the gift of unexplainable joy and peace, the gift that despite what is going on in your life, you can rest assured in the promise that your Savior holds you in the palm of His hands. As Christians, Christmas should be celebrated as a daily practice not just during the month of December.

I know for many, Christmas can be a season of pain, heartache, or even pressure to provide when the budget simply isn't there. I know the challenges of life can be overbearing and those challenges can be magnified during the holidays. But I urge you this month to set your focus and energy on Jesus and to learn to unwrap, maybe for the first time, the gift that was delivered in the most unexpected way. You may not know what your future holds, but you must remember who holds your future. May you be filled with an everlasting love for the gift of the cross.

"I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of." –John 10:10, THE MESSAGE

Ricardo Sanchez is the author of *It's Not Over*, which released September 2012 by Passio. He is a Grammy-nominated, Dove-Award-winning international worship leader and a sought-out conference speaker. Sanchez has written or cowritten songs such as "Power of the Cross," "Every Prayer," "I Call Your Name," "Power of One," "Great God," "Moving Forward," and many others, which are sung in churches across the globe. He serves as a consultant and worship coach to churches and worship ministries and hosts Windows 2 Worship seminars in the United States and abroad. Sanchez and his wife, Jennette, and their three sons live in Atlanta, Ga.