

Your 99-Cent Christmas Gift

It happens every year for most American families. We swear this Christmas will be different from the others, that we'll spend less on gifts and truly celebrate Jesus rather than join in the commercialized bingefest. But by the morning of Dec. 25, our living room once again turns into a sea of presents.

I'm no Christmas Scrooge. In fact, I'm tempted to splurge a little this year just to see my 5-year-old boy's YouTube-worthy reaction as he walks into a room full of bundled surprises. But it's not the seasonal allure of overspending nor the innocent desire to create lasting memories that has me rethinking things. Instead, it's the idea that my family and I could buck the system and, with simple, small sacrifices, actually do something that lasts infinitely longer: We could change the world.

Our Christmas re-evaluation began after hearing a few stories. Like about the teenage orphan girls in Moldova who couldn't sleep for nights because they were too excited about their lone Christmas gift—a single toothbrush and some new socks—arriving later that week. Or the reports from missionaries brought to tears by children in an Indian slum who couldn't stop hugging them after they handed out flip-flops.

The price of those plastic shoes? A whopping 99 cents a pair. For less than a buck, a child's life was changed and the dwindling fire of hope for goodness in the world—that question that emerges from deep inside as a child lays awake at night and wonders if anyone out there cares—was rekindled.

I want my family to give *those* kinds of presents this Christmas. I want my sons to grow up understanding the essence of Christ's coming is best expressed through sacrificial

giving—that rather than spending \$30 on the latest Wii game we could feed a family for a month. Because ultimately, it boils down to such simple choices: Instead of spending on Starbucks this month, you could provide an entire classroom with textbooks; rather than going to the movies, you could give an impoverished family the means to grow sustainable crops.

These aren't major life decisions for us. Yet for those receiving our "pocket change," they can be life-changing. And that's what this issue of *Charisma* is all about. For years, we've spent each December emphasizing humanitarian aid. But in light of this unique time when most Americans are rethinking every dollar they spend, I believe we all need a reminder. We are the hands and feet of Christ, the active expression of His love. Amid financial crunch, God still calls us to give when we have nothing. And it's through that upside-down, kingdom principle that we can change the world—even 99 cents at a time.