

Giving at Christmas

Jamil is a 9-year-old boy who is part of Bill Wilson's Metro Ministries Sunday school in Brooklyn, largest Sunday school in America. His is a typical story: absent dad, mom on welfare. He's been riding a bus to Bill's Sunday school for two years.

Last Christmas Bill told the 20,000 kids he ministers to that Christian people from all over the world who love them provided the money for their Christmas gifts. After the service Bill noticed Jamil was quiet—clutching the shiny new truck he had received.

"Pastor Bill," Jamil asked, "Is it true what you said in there? That there's a bunch of Christian people who love us and send us these presents?"

"Yes, it's all true."

"Pastor Bill," Jamil continued, "will you tell those people the next time you see them, 'Thank you'?"

Bill has told that story in churches and on television programs around the country in an effort to raise money to buy 30,000 gifts this year. Normally he ministers to only about 20,000 kids a week, but when word gets out about the gifts, the number swells.

That's because Bill ministers in one of the poorest areas of New York City, where most of the families are on welfare. Bill

says that for many of the kids, the gift Metro provides will be the only gift they receive at Christmastime. Their parents are more likely to spend money on drugs than on blessing their children.

In my comfortable suburban world, it's difficult for me to believe that people live like this in America. Yet I've been to Brooklyn many times and seen the poverty and the need with my own eyes.

One of the reasons I go to Brooklyn is to be reminded of how blessed I am. Seeing the poverty helps me keep things in perspective. It also makes me want to do what I can to make a difference.

I have learned it is more blessed to give than to receive. And for years I've tried to write something at Christmastime that would motivate the half million or so people who will read this column to do something to reach out beyond themselves.

Several years ago I had an idea. What if the readers of Charisma banded together to raise money for the kids at Bill's church? I asked Bill why we couldn't raise enough money to buy each kid a real gift instead of the small Christmas stockings with a few treats he had been asking churches to provide.

Bill had been wanting to do this. But the size of the task was overwhelming. A decent gift would cost at least \$10–\$200,000 total for 20,000 gifts. It was a daunting goal, but we agreed to get busy.

I shared the need with Charisma readers, and about \$80,000 came in—much less than what was needed. But Bill had involved

other ministries, too, so there was enough. Since then the program has grown, and today ministries such as TBN, Joyce Meyer, Richard Roberts and Tri-State Christian Television, headed by Garth Coonce, also donate. Donations from a large number of individuals and ministries are needed to reach the goal this year of \$300,000.

I praise God that other ministries have caught the vision for Bill's "Operation Holiday Hope." But remember that this project began as an idea to encourage Charisma readers to give. It was "our" project. So I'm appealing to every reader to give \$1 this year. A 100 percent response would bring in more than \$500,000!

Of course many won't give, so I encourage those whose hearts are touched by the story of Jamil and who want to make a difference to give more than \$1. We need some to give large gifts—as my wife, Joy, and I intend to do. Working together we can help Bill Wilson reach the goal.

Won't you respond now? While you're thinking of it, please send your best gift to our nonprofit partner, Christian Life Missions, and we will pass along every dollar to Operation Holiday Hope. Just mail your check to Operation Holiday Hope, c/o Christian Life Missions, P.O. Box 952248, Lake Mary, FL 32795-2248.

Thank you for your generosity—and for showing the love of Christ to thousands of kids like Jamil in Brooklyn this Christmas.

Stephen Strang is the founding editor of Charisma. His first

book, Old Man New Man (Creation House), is now available at Christian bookstores or at .