

# What Does God Want This Christmas?

One of the greatest developments in science occurred—so the story goes—when Isaac Newton asked himself, “Why do apples fall?” In fact, although there are an infinite number of stupid answers, there are far fewer stupid questions and sometimes the most childlike questions are actually vitally important. Asking the question, “What does God want at Christmas?” is therefore not as childish as it sounds.

There are two extreme views of God in this context. One view is that God can want precisely nothing: He is perfect in every way and so must be devoid of emotions. The trouble with this is that it is heading towards the God of the philosophers: an all-powerful being who is cold, dispassionate and utterly unapproachable, a He—or perhaps an *It*—who might be worshipped but cannot be loved. The other view is to imagine a God with limited powers but generous longings who is intensely frustrated because His desires cannot be met. The trouble here is that you are heading towards the God of the pagans who, while He might be loved, cannot be worshipped. The Bible balances the two views: God is supreme and all-powerful but, at the same time, He loves and He desires. The result is that He can be both loved and worshipped.

So the question “What does God *want*?” is a valid one. What does God desire? It’s easy to come up with things that we think God might want: peace on earth; justice; an end to hunger; the protection of his creation; and so on. Yet we find a clear answer about God’s priorities in Paul’s first letter to Timothy, where, in the context of living wisely, he says this: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:3-4, NIV). God’s priority is this one thing: He wants “all people to be saved.”

Notice that God doesn't just simply *want* people to be saved, as merely wishful thinking. Paul describes God as "our Savior." *Savior* is a word we will hear a lot in Christmas carols; it means someone who acts for us, who rescues us, who liberates us. That's what our God has done; He is Savior, and if you want to know how He saves, Paul continues, "There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim. 2:5, MEV). The words could not be clearer. In Christ, God came down and became one of us so that he could represent both parties—God and humankind, become a ransom and even on the cross, a sacrifice. God wants us to be saved so much that he bent down, lowering himself from the highest heights of heaven to a cradle and then ultimately to a cross—a staggering descent from inconceivable glory to unspeakable shame.

Notice too that God wants *all* people to be saved. Don't be distracted by thinking of your pet hates: nasty terrorists, crooked financiers, shady politicians or your neighbor. Think about yourself. You are included in that little word *all*. Have you realized that *you* are part of what God wants? Perhaps you responded years ago to God's love for you but you have let the relationship grow cold and formal. Perhaps, though, that love of God in Christ Jesus is news to you and you haven't yet accepted it. What does God want for Christmas? He wants you.

In Christina Rossetti's poem, "In the Bleak Midwinter," the last verse suggests that she too had considered the question, "What does God want at Christmas?":

*What can I give Him, poor as I am?  
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;  
If I were a wise man, I would do my part;  
Yet what I can I give Him—give my heart.*

*Exactly!*

May God be with you—and you with God—this Christmastime.

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