

I remember attending a friend's Christmas gathering where all the kids clamoured to get their presents. I watched with interest as the kids vigorously ripped off the wrapping paper and gave a momentary exclamation of delight as they acknowledged what they had received. Very quickly these kids were scanning around looking for their next gift to open. Eventually the frenetic ritual came to an end as the last presents were opened and the adult audience went off for some quiet relief to recover from what had been an intense time to say the least.

The end result of this was that the children showed little or no appreciation of what they had received. I watched these kids rip open a parcel and give it a brief look and then toss it aside in anticipation of another gift to rip open. Their lack of appreciation could not have been more clearly illustrated to me when some time after the gift opening had finished, here were the smallest of the bunch playing with the boxes rather than the presents they had received. It seemed ironic that the kids were getting more fun out of the boxes than their contents.

When we look a bit closer at this situation these children pictured what has happened for many folks at Christmas. Instead of seeing the real reason for the season they

have become consumed with gifts of all sorts rather than the gift of the baby Jesus who came to rescue mankind from the consequence of our sin.

PRAISE the Lord for:

- Over 1000 commitments to Jesus from prisoners in USA this year in partnership with Crossroads Prison Ministries
- A couple coming on board to help our South African hub focusing on the promotion of the paper throughout South Africa
- The privilege to partner with different ministries around the world (medical, church plant, humanitarian) who use the paper to complement what they are doing
- A number of substantial gifts received for the various Challenge projects we manage

The reason that we give a gift is to express our love to family and friends, and as Christians to acknowledge the giving of the gift of the baby Jesus; but often the gifts we give come from a sense of guilt or because it is expected. Jesus came as an expression of His love for us and to save us from our sins. Matthew 1:21 says this; **“And she will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”**

The problem with Christmas today is that the gift giving has become an end in itself rather than celebrating the coming of the greatest gift of all – JESUS. Some of the advertising that I am seeing on television is just horrendous because it is missing the whole reason for the season. Christmas has now become some sort of means to help the shops increase their sales for the year.

What is even more tragic is the fact that many people and families are purchasing gifts that plunge them further into debt. Last Christmas credit card debt reached record levels in Australia after the dust of Christmas shopping had settled. Many live with

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this debt until Christmas rolls around once more.

Like those kids we metaphorically end up playing with boxes that the gifts have come in rather than treasuring the gift itself. We get caught up with the incidentals rather than celebrating the most incredible thing that could be given to a man or woman, to a teenager or child. The word 'save' in Matthew 1:21 means to be whole spiritually, emotionally and physically. Now let me ask you; what better gift could you receive this Christmas then to be made whole in this way?

The other thing that came to me as I saw those kids ripping open their gifts was that a wrong precedent for our kids was being set in terms of the amount of gifts, and the reason for the giving of those gifts. Living in this materialistic mad world the last thing we need for our kids is to validate such materialism by overdoing the gift giving at Christmas. I think if we underline to our children why we have Christmas and what gift giving signifies I believe we are doing them an immeasurable service for their future growth and development as Christians.

On behalf of the Challenge team I would like to wish all of our faithful Challenge users, prayer warriors and givers a wonderful Christmas and fantastic New Year for 2023.

CARL CARMODY
EDITOR CHALLENGE

PRAYER needed for:

- Wisdom for deputation for 2023. A number of opportunities are opening up; we just need confirmation
- Our Impact Africa Mission trip for 2023 as we begin the process of confirming ministry opportunities and gathering a team
- A number of potential Impact WA trips next year. We have 3 churches keen to have a team assist in evangelism, ranging from a weekend to 10 days. Pray the planning comes together for each of these projects
- Current trip to South Africa (8 Nov-13 Dec) for Carl as he is working in prisons as well as speaking opportunities and attending a huge conference called REAP in Johannesburg. Pastors and leaders attend from as many as 15 African nations for training etc
- Our production team in Australia (Bob, Jody, Janice, Harriett) as they have all battled a few different health issues over the last couple of months.



This year, 2022, for the first time, Challenge editions have been printed in the Philippines.

Challenge Direct Deposit details :

BSB: 066162 (Commbank)
Account: 00900455

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Contact us by phone (08) 9453 3311
Email: info@challengenews.org