



MONDAY MANNA
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A TRULY GIFT-WORTHY CHRISTMAS

By Robert J. Tamasy

In many parts of the world, Christmas is synonymous with gift giving. How that is practiced varies from culture to culture, but in most cases a spirit of generosity and good will prevails. We exchange gifts of some sort in our homes with family members and friends. Businesses sponsor Christmas parties for employees, often accompanied by gifts as tokens of appreciation for another year of diligent labor. Sometimes annual bonuses are presented, dependent on how prosperous the company was over the past 12 months.

So it becomes a time for testing out the adage, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," which is based on Acts 20:35 in the Bible. We all like to receive gifts, but do we know how to enjoy giving to others, recognizing it as a blessing?

There are efforts to dilute the sense of the season in retail and business settings with greetings of "Happy holidays" rather than "Merry Christmas," and in many communities traditional religious displays are discouraged. But there is no question without the story of Jesus Christ, there would be no "Christmas."

So as we observe the festivities of this time of year, and prepare for the surprises of Christmas morning – especially as reflected on the faces of young ones around us – it would very appropriate to remember this holiday was not a corporate invention to boost year-end sales. It commemorates the birth of Christ, of whom the Scriptures declare, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

With that in mind, consider some of the things the Bible says about giving:

True giving is encouraging. We often think of giving in terms of tangible objects, but sometimes the most valued gifts are kind, timely words. *"Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones"* (Proverbs 16:24).

True giving is wholehearted. Few things can be more disheartening than receiving gifts from someone that does it grudgingly, as if they were forced to do so. *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"* (2 Corinthians 9:6-7).

True giving is rewarded. We should not give with the motivation to receive in turn, but often our generous giving results in our being rewarded in some way. *"Give, and it will be*

given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you” (Luke 6:38).

True giving is sacrificial. The greatest giving is not what we give from our abundance or excess, but what we offer when the gift involves a considerable cost or sacrifice. *“Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends” (John 15:13).*

True giving is thankful. Followers of Jesus understand the magnitude of what God has done for them and given to them. So expressions of gratitude might be the best gift of all. *“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever” (Psalm 118:1).*

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Reflection/Discussion Questions

1. When you think in terms of giving gifts, what immediately comes to your mind?
2. Does your family practice Christmas gift giving? If so, what does this tradition look like for you?
3. What is the most memorable gift you ever received?
4. When you hear or read the familiar verse, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,” what is your reaction?

If you would like to look at or discuss other portions from the Bible that relate to this topic, consider the following brief sampling of passages: Psalm 30:4-12, 75:1, 84:11-12; Proverbs 3:27-28, 11:24, 18:16, 22:9; Luke 12:42-48