

Celebrate Jesus

Worried about the influence of commercialism on your observance of Christmas? Here are some ideas for spending less and focusing on Christ.

Like millions of other families, each year at this time, our family expresses their love for one another by giving gifts. It's an appropriate time for giving because Christmas celebrates God's greatest gift to us—the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, at this time of the year most businesses are consumed with one question: "How much will consumers spend this holiday?"

For many businesses, the Christmas season will make or break their year. So, they advertise heavily: Christmas decorations begin to fill stores even before the end of October and our mail boxes are increasingly filled with junk mail. This advertising blitz and the hectic pace surrounding Christmas make it easy for us to lose perspective of what it is really all about.

We should focus on celebrating the most stunning event in all of human history—the birth of Jesus Christ. On that day, God most clearly demonstrated His love for us by sending His only Son to earth as Saviour. There is nothing wrong with expressing our love to one another by giving Christmas gifts. But we also must be intentional in helping our family and loved ones celebrate Jesus' birth.

Lorraine and I were challenged as students to live simple lifestyles and worked to apply that as we moved into the workforce. By the time the Lord gave us our two children, we were committed to making sure they would understand the real "reason for the season."

So, let me share some of the things we do to help maintain our focus on the Lord and to spend wisely during the holidays.

- Since our children were young, we have read the Christmas story as a family. There are some great books that younger children can follow and when they are older they can take part in reading the book.
- Have a birthday cake for Jesus. It was something tangible to help them understand we were celebrating His birth.
- We have agreed that expensive gifts are unnecessary. Gifts from the "heart," cards that express how we love and admire one another, and just being together, are what we value most.
- We never use debt to purchase a gift. If someone in the family is in a tight financial situation, we trust the family will understand. It is better to have fewer gifts than a family member being saddled with debt.

- If a family member really would like to have a particular gift, he or she has the freedom to make that known. This tends to eliminate the number of gifts that end up gathering dust in the garage.
- As a family, consider giving to a needy family. This helps us get our eyes off ourselves and what we receive and on others who are grateful for the assistance.
- Establish traditions and build memories that are meaningful and not expensive. When they were young our two girls would take home made treats to some of the people living in the large complex of Council flats opposite where we lived

I pray that you and your loved ones will remember this holiday season with fondness. This Christmas, may you and your family grow closer to each other and even closer to Christ.

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