

## THE ULTIMATE CHRISTMAS GIFT

By now I expect most if not all of you have been asked what you want for Christmas. Maybe you were even asked to make a Christmas list. Most of the Christmas lists I've seen are scraps of paper with handwritten suggestions as to what one might like or need. **A few have been typed and itemized** from 1-10 with # 1 being the most desired and so on down the list. I've even had at least one that was color coded, and had notifications by each item as to where they could be found. My grandson once cut out pictures from the ads just to make sure we knew what he was talking about.

Of course, what **we ask for is not always what we get**. In fact, we may be as disappointed at times as this little guy seems to be. But, that doesn't keep us from asking...or at least hoping. And the more precise our lists are may indicate how hopeful we really are.

**My daughters** are alike in some ways, but different as night and day in others. That would be the case with their Christmas lists. When we lived overseas we had a particularly tight budget\_ and though we saved for it, we also had to watch our pennies at Christmastime. So we'd tell the girls how much we were planning to spend on their gifts and ask each of them to compose a list for us. Now, though both of them were trying to get bang for their bucks, the way they compiled their lists was done quite differently.

My older daughter Mandy was one who would give thought to what big ticket item she wanted\_ but couldn't afford on the little money she earned as a clerk at the corner shop. She'd search the newspaper ads and window shop at the stores downtown looking for what she could get. There'd usually be just one item on her list. One year it was **TV** for her bedroom. She wasn't that concerned about the make, as long as the screen was big enough and it had a remote. Another, it was a stereo. Her mom told her that it might be all she would get, but that was okay with her. Sara on the other hand was into quantity. She'd try to figure out how many presents she could get for the amount we specified. She didn't want **100** things from the dollar store, but she definitely wanted more than just a couple presents under the tree.

What if you could only have one gift for Christmas? What would it be? What if it would be your last Christmas? Your only Christmas? What would be the one thing you'd ask for?

Throughout the centuries, God's children asked Him for many things. Rather than a Christmas list, they put them **on a prayer list**. Sometimes they asked for stuff\_ gold and jewelry and property. Sometimes they just asked for enough food to make it until the famine ended. When enslaved, freedom was **# 1** on their list. Like many of us, health and wealth were what ranked high on their lists. Still, barren women sometimes asked for children. And orphaned children asked for families who would love them. A few asked for all these things\_ and more.

Often, Father God was gracious and delivered the goods. Sometimes He didn't give them what they asked for\_ but gave them instead what they needed. It was rarely appreciated at the time. (*Like donations to a college fund*) On rare occasions, He withheld the desire of their heart because they were on His "*naughty*" list. They had runaway from home to live selfish and riotous lives\_ even refusing to "*come home for Christmas*" – yet expecting Him to send them everything on their list just the same.

And the good news is that though His children so often have been on His “naughty list”\_ for they fall so short of His glory, He never will remove them from **His list entirely**. For, even at their worst, our heavenly Father purposed in His heart to give His children His best\_ all they could hope for and more. And those who have been born again are forever on His “good” list. More about that later.

Still, rather than give His children all the things on their list, He chose to give them the one thing that they needed, but hadn’t thought to ask for. And in this one gift, we can find all we have ever dreamed of. **This ultimate Gift** is God’s one and only Son.

Why? In Jesus, there’s freedom, health, and happiness. In Jesus, there’s an eternal home in heaven. In Jesus, there is a reserved place at the Father’s table. In Jesus, there are loving relationships that will endure forever. And as I’ve already hinted, the good news is that more important than these things being on our Christmas list, we are on His.

You see, rather than send temporary relief, He sent His Son Jesus. And rather than dispatch a messenger with a care package, He sent a limo to pick us up and bring us into His home. No more worry about where we’ll sleep or where our next meal will come from. No more concern about how to make ends meet. No more sickness or pain, or burden or strain. No more worry or woe. No more torment or tears, or anxiety or fears. For that to be possible, it took more than for Jesus to be born in a manger. **He had to die on a cross.**

I cannot stress enough that we aren’t merely on a list to be given things\_ even just to receive Jesus. We are on the list of “*what*” Father God wants for Christmas. He doesn’t just want us to have stuff. His list proves that He wants us. **Isaiah 49:15-16** tells me His list isn’t written on paper, but **on flesh**. In response to those who felt forsaken by Him, the Lord said, **“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands.”**

And our names weren’t scrawled with pen and ink, but with a nail dipped in blood. It had been prophesied in **Isaiah 9:6** that the Messiah would be called **“the Prince of Peace.”** And in **Isaiah 53:5** we are assured that **“Jesus was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our sins; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him. And by His wounds we are healed.”** The rift in our relationship has been mended by the sacrifice of His Son.

Yes, God has a **Christmas list** and everyone in the whole world is on it. He wants us all to receive the Ultimate gift of His Son. If you are one of His children\_ one who has accepted His gift of love, your name is now on His special list (**See Revelation 20:12**)...of those to be received into the Father’s arms. What an awesome thing to consider that **our name is permanently on God’s list** in heaven.

Let’s pray...