Dear Lexie,

All I Want for Christmas Is ...

"Tis the season to be jolly," is what a famous Christmas song says. It is also one of the many songs we hear throughout this season. This is a season in which we all should be feeling jolly and happy and in celebration mode. But for many this is a season of memories of loved ones lost, financial need, loneliness and sadness.

The Giving Tree of Life

Did you know that a recent Harvard study showed that simply contemplating generosity boosts your immune system? In addition, the study concluded that giving money to someone else lifted the giver's happiness more than spending it on themselves (surprisingly, the
This Sabbath: 
December 13, 2014

Speaker: 
Pastor Pranitha Fielder 
"The Supreme Gift"

Special Musical Guests: 
Sligo Bell Choir

study participants' generally predicted that spending on themselves would make them happier). It turns out, giving actually makes us feel happy! When people give, it activates regions of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection, and trust. A wide range of research has linked different forms of generosity to better physical and mental health. Individuals who provided practical help or gave emotional support had a lower risk of dying over a five-year period than those who didn't. Interestingly, receiving is not linked to reduced health risks.

Redeeming the School Bus Stop

And there it is. The big yellow school bus is just ahead of you during rush hour as you're trying to get to the office a few minutes early. The lights blink first yellow, then red. The stop sign swings out and it seems as if the entire neighborhood is trying to board this bus. Then you hear some stragglers running and calling, "Wait for me! Don't leave me!" And laughter echoes in the darkness.

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“Tis the season to be jolly,” is what a famous Christmas song says. It is also one of the many songs we hear throughout this season. This is a season in which we all should be feeling jolly and happy and in celebration mode. But for many this is a season of memories of loved ones lost, financial need, loneliness and sadness.

How do we look at Christmas? What does it really mean to us? In a time when materialism is on the rise, Christmas becomes an “All I want for Christmas is”… an Xbox, those new pairs of shoes, a new jacket, the latest toy, a new car, and so on. For some, it’s just I want food, companionship, shelter, a hug, kind words, prayer. So again, how do we see the Christmas season?

I have been speaking to the kids at Sligo Adventist School about the Christmas season and what it means. This week we spoke about a children’s story that was very much on point. We talked about the wise men that followed the star to where the Messiah was born. Those wise men did not just decide to look up at the sky and follow a star. They didn’t decide to follow the star because it was the brightest, or nicest star. They followed it because they had studied what the prophets had written and said about the Messiah’s coming. They studied the stars and planets, night after night, searching for the signs that might help them predict the coming of the great I Am. They paid attention to the prophecies and the writings that were given by the prophets several hundred years before. They paid close attention, so that they would know when it was time to visit the Messiah. Finally they saw THE STAR and followed it to where the new KING was.

I’m so glad that the story did not end there, because if it did, it would not have brought much hope for us today. As a matter of fact, it has not ended yet! The Bible tells us in Acts 1:11 “ ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’ ” What an awesome promise! He is coming back to take us home with Him. The question is, are we paying attention to the signs? Are we diligently looking into the word of God so that we may recognize signs of His soon return? You see, this is the great hope that we all should be holding on to – the fact that Jesus came the first time, lived on earth, died for our sins, rose again to give us eternal life, and is soon coming again! Mark 13:33 says, “Be on guard! Be alert! You do not know when that time will come.” Let’s be on guard for His soon return.

So, when you think about this Christmas season, I encourage you to think about others and not yourself. For Jesus did not come the first time to be served but to serve, and He wants the same from us. How do we end the statement “All I want for Christmas is”… to help others, to hug someone, to volunteer, to give back to my community, to give back to my church, to bring hope to others? It’s your choice, it’s up to you, but let’s keep in mind, it’s not about you but about Him!
The Giving Tree of Life

Jamie Jean

“Whoever is kind to the poor lends to the Lord, and he will reward them for what they have done.” (Proverbs 19:17; NIV)

Did you know that a recent Harvard study showed that simply contemplating generosity boosts your immune system? In addition, the study concluded that giving money to someone else lifted the giver’s happiness more than spending it on themselves (surprisingly, the study participants’ generally predicted that spending on themselves would make them happier). It turns out, giving actually makes us feel happy! When people give, it activates regions of the brain associated with pleasure, social connection, and trust. A wide range of research has linked different forms of generosity to better physical and mental health. Individuals who provided practical help or gave emotional support had a lower risk of dying over a five-year period than those who didn’t. Interestingly, receiving is not linked to reduced health risks.

Researchers suggest that one reason giving may improve physical health and longevity is that it helps decrease stress, which is in turn associated with a variety of health problems.

“A cheerful heart is good medicine.” (Proverbs 17:22)

As evidenced by the benefits to our physical and mental wellbeing resulting from giving, God, in His infinite wisdom, designed us to be generous. Furthermore, the benefits extend into an important realm: our spiritual health.

“Money has great value, because it can do great good. In the hands of God’s children it is food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, and clothing for the naked. It is a defense for the oppressed, and a means of help to the sick. But money is of no more value than sand, only as it is put to use in providing for the necessities of life, in blessing others, and advancing the cause of Christ.” (Ellen G. White, Christ’s Object Lessons, pp. 351, 352)

We often focus on the dangers of money, greed, and financial idolatry. For good reasons, we are cautioned to store up treasures in Heaven and not on earth. But money itself is not bad. There’s nothing wrong with having money. Money is not evil. It is merely a tool. Money can be a powerful instrument for good when put to proper use.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control...” (Galatians 5:22-23; NIV)

The problem actually lies in our own hearts and how we relate to money. It doesn’t matter whether we are rich or poor, but rather whether material wealth occupies a priority above our duty to God and His will. Fortunately for us, God built a spiritual safeguard through the gifts of giving and service to others. And He offers this gift freely to those who seek to reflect His character. By serving the Lord through sharing His blessings with others, we put our trust in Him to magnify the positive impact that money can produce when invested in God’s purposes. When we give, we open our hearts to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and it’s actually good for our health. When we keep our earthly blessings to ourselves, King Solomon put it best:
“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my labor, and this was the reward for all my toil. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.”

(Ecclesiastes 2:10-11; NIV)

Whereas the Bible offers us eternal blessings when we give freely from what we have.

“Sell what you have and give alms; provide yourselves money bags which do not grow old, a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12:33-34; NIV)

“The poor man who has faith and confidence in God, who trusts in His love and care, and who abounds in good works, judiciously using the little he has in blessing others with his means, is rich toward God. He feels that his neighbor has claims upon him that he cannot disregard and yet obey the commandment of God: “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2)

Ten days symbolizes a test period in the Bible. The benefits from practicing the gift of giving is something we can assess fairly easily, so I challenge you to give with a generous and trusting heart this holiday season—as well as ALL seasons and see how it improves your spiritual and physical wellbeing. You can start with just ten days and see what happens...

“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; NIV)

Please share your personal experiences with giving and the benefits or blessings you’ve received as a result in the comments section below. I look forward to hearing your stories!

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And as you wait for the students to climb aboard what is your typical reaction? Is it wishing they would hurry up and get on, or:

- Wonder where those kids are going?
- Is it to one of the schools I’m praying for?
- Are these some of the students I’m asking God to bless?
- Did they get breakfast?
- Enough sleep last night?
- Are their coats sufficiently warm?
- Do they have gloves and scarves and boots?
- Did the homework get done?
- Is the first period teacher usually grouchy?
- Is anyone on this bus being bullied?
- Is anyone celebrating a birthday today?
- Is the driver fully awake?

And as you wait the prayers take shape – for joy, for kindness, safety, good health. And your list grows longer. And the car behind you beeps to remind you to get moving.

(by Chris Daley & Dawn Reynolds)

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