

VOICE OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

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SEEKING THE GIFT OR THE GIVER GOD'S MANIFESTED LOVE

Nothing that I am about to say should be received in the form of condemnation, for we are all searching for the Master's will in our lives, but one of the easiest traps to fall into is serving God for what we can get from Him rather than for the fellowship we can have in Him. Many times God is viewed academically or theologically, thus reducing Him to nothing more than an object of our needs. God is not the object of our needs. He is our need. Learning to focus on our Lord and not our needs is the first step in having our needs met. God delights in caring and doing for His children, but He is glorified when we direct our love and affections directly to Him. What if someone needed us just for what we could do for them and not for whom we are? How would we feel? Perhaps our Lord feels that way also and none of us would ever want that to be. True fellowship with our Father is the food that Jesus spoke of when He said man cannot live by bread alone. Existing isn't living. Many people simply exist in this world, but you and I will not settle for that. We want the food that provides us with joy, peace and love which radiates from His fellowship. I don't think that any of us would intentionally use the Lord's goodness carelessly; therefore, I hope this article will serve as a reminder to keep us on track and never do so.

Pastor George Ferrington



Christmas Program

When I consider all that God has done for us by His Son Jesus Christ, I am challenged to expand the boundaries of my belief. That means God is so great, it is truly difficult to absorb the fullness of His blessings to us. As a token, let me share these stories:

Humaita, (a prison in Brail), has an astonishing record. It's recidivism rate is 4 percent compared to 75 percent in the rest of Brazil and the United States. How is that possible?

I saw the answer when an inmate guide escorted me to the notorious punishment cell once used for torture. Today, he told me, that block houses only a single inmate. As we reached the end of the long concrete corridor and he put the key into the lock, he paused and asked, "Are you sure you want to go in?"

"Of course," I replied impatiently. "I've been in isolation cells all over the world." Slowly he swung open the massive doors, and I saw the prisoner in that punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the Humaita inmates—the prisoner Jesus, hanging on the cross.

"He's doing time for all the rest of us," my guide said softly.

In that cross carved by loving hands is a holy subversion. It heralds change more radical than mankind's most fevered dreams. Its followers expand the boundaries of a Kingdom that can never fail. A shining Kingdom that reaches into the darkest corners of every community, into the darkest corners of every mind. A kingdom of deathless hope, a restless virtue, of endless peace. (Charles Colson—Enduring Revolution)

To believe we are totally and eternally debt free is seldom easy. Even if we've stood before the throne and heard it from the king himself, we still doubt. As a result, many are forgiven only a little, not because the grace of the king is limited, but because the faith of the sinner is small. God is willing to forgive all. He's willing to wipe the slate completely clean. He guides us to a pool of mercy and invites us to bathe. Some plunge in, but others just touch the surface. They leave feeling unforgiven

Where the grace of God is missed, bitterness is born. But where the grace of God is embraced, forgiveness flourishes

The longer we walk in the garden, the more likely we are to smell the flowers. The more we immerse ourselves in grace, the more likely we are to give grace. (Max Lucato — In the Grip of Grace)

As I find time to stop and ponder this Christmas season, I am overwhelmed once again with the conviction that our greatest gift, our most wonderful blessing, and the loving relationship that should mean the most to each of us, is Jesus. He came to save us, and represent the fullest measure of God's Love toward each of us. There is no denying that God is Love and that love now lives within each of us. It exists as a child born in a manger with angels and animals looking on. It exists as a young lad, wise beyond his years, that was about His Father's business. It exists as a man, burdened by the same things we encounter in our lives, Whose faith and love and sacrifice has given us dominion over the world and death. What a God, and what a Savior. **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."** (John 3:16) Today, with all the hustle and bustle of the season, I hope you will stop and consider Jesus. He has, does and will forever love you more than you can understand. May God Richly Bless You.

Bro. Mike Woods

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24TH
SPECIAL CHRISTMAS SERVICES
BEGINNING AT 11:00 AM
NATIVITY, PRAISE, WORSHIP &
THE STORY OF CHRISTMAS
COME AND SHARE IN THE BLESSING
MERRY CHRISTMAS!

THE CHRISTMAS RIFLE

Pa never had much compassion for the lazy or those who squandered their means and then never had enough for the necessities. But for those who were genuinely in need, his heart was a big as all outdoors. It was

from him that I learned the greatest joy in life comes from giving, not from receiving.

It was Christmas Eve 1881. I was fifteen years old and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there just hadn't been enough money to buy me the rifle that I'd wanted for Christmas. We did the chores early that night for some reason. I just figured Pa wanted a little extra time so we could read in the Bible.

After supper was over I took off my boots and stretched out in front of the fireplace and waited for Pa to get down the old Bible. I was still feeling sorry for myself and, to be honest, I wasn't in much of a mood to read Scriptures. But Pa didn't get the Bible, instead he bundled up again and went outside. I couldn't figure it out because we had already done all the chores. I didn't worry about it long though, I was too busy wallowing in self-pity. Soon Pa came back in. It was a cold clear night out and there was ice in his beard. "Come on, Matt," he said. "Bundle up good, it's cold out tonight." I was really upset then. Not only wasn't I getting the rifle for Christmas, now Pa was dragging me out in the cold, and for no earthly reason that I could see. We'd already done all the chores, and I couldn't think of anything else that needed doing, especially not on a night like this. But I knew Pa was not very patient at one dragging one's feet when he'd told them to do something, so I got up and put my boots back on and got my cap, coat, and mittens. Ma gave me a mysterious smile as I opened the door to leave the house. Something was up, but I didn't know what.

Outside, I became even more dismayed. There in front of the house was the work team, already hitched to the big sled. Whatever it was we were going to do wasn't going to be a short, quick, little job. I could tell. We never hitched up this sled unless we were going to haul a big load.

Pa was already up on the seat, reins in hand. I reluctantly climbed up beside him. The cold was already biting at me. I wasn't happy. When I was on, Pa pulled the sled around the house and stopped in front of the woodshed. He got off and I followed. "I think we'll put on the high sideboards," he said. "Here, help me." The high sideboards! It had been a bigger job that I wanted to do with just the low sideboards on, but whatever it was we were going to do would be a lot bigger with the high sideboards on.

After we had exchanged the sideboards, Pa went into the woodshed and came out with an armload of wood—the wood I'd spent all summer hauling down from the mountain, and then all fall sawing into blocks and splitting. What was he doing? Finally, I said something. "Pa," I asked, "what are you doing?"

"You been by the widow Jensen's lately?" he asked. The widow Jensen lived about two miles down the road. Her husband had died a year or so before and left her with three children, the oldest being eight. Sure, I'd been by, but so what? "Yeah," I said, "Why? I rode by just today." Pa said, "Little Jakey was out digging around in their woodpile trying to find a few chips. They're out of wood, Matt." That was all he said and then he turned and went back into the woodshed for another armload of wood. I followed him. We loaded the sled so high that I began to wonder if the horses would be able to pull it."

Finally, Pa called a halt to our loading, then we went to the smokehouse and Pa took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and told me to put them in the sled and wait. When he returned he was carrying a sack of flour over his right shoulder and a smaller sack of something in his left hand. "What's in the little sack?" I asked.

"Shoes. They're out of shoes. Little Jakey just had gunny sacks wrapped around his feet when he was out in the woodpile this morning. I got the children a little candy too. It just wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy."

We rode the two miles to widow Jensen's pretty much in silence. I tried to think through what Pa was doing. We didn't have much by worldly standards. Of course, we did have a big woodpile, though most of what was left now was still in the form of logs that I would have to saw into blocks and split before we could use it. We also had meat and flour, so we could spare that, but I knew we didn't have any money, so why was Pa buying them shoes and candy? Really, why was he doing any of this? Widow Jensen had closer neighbors than us; it shouldn't have been our concern. We came in from the blind side of the Jensen house and unloaded the wood as quietly as possible, then we took the meat and flour and shoes to the door.

We knocked. The door opened a crack and a timid voice said, "Who is it?" "Lucas Miles, Ma'am, and my son, Matt. Could we come in for a bit?" Widow Jensen opened the door and let us in. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The children were wrapped in another and were sitting in front of the fireplace by a very small fire that hardly gave off any heat at all. Widow Jensen fumbled with a match and finally lit the lamp. "We brought you a few things, Ma'am," Pa said and set down the sack of flour. I put the meat on the table. Then Pa handed her the sack that had the shoes in it. She opened it hesitantly and took the shoes out one pair at a time. There was a pair for her and one for each of the children—sturdy shoes, the best, shoes that would last. I watched her carefully. She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling and then tears filled her eyes and started running down her cheeks.

She looked up at Pa like she wanted to say something, but it wouldn't come out. "We brought a load of wood, too, Ma'am," Pa said. He turned to me and said, "Matt, go bring in enough to last awhile. Let's get that fire up to size and heat this place up." I wasn't the same person when I went back out to bring in the wood. I had a big lump in my throat and as much as I hate to admit it, there were tears in my eyes too.

THE CHRISTMAS RIFLE Cont. from Page Two

when it had made so much difference. I could see we were literally saving the lives of these people. I soon had the fire blazing and everyone's spirits soared. The kids started giggling when Pa handed them each a piece of candy and Widow Jensen

looked on with a smile that probably hadn't crossed her face for a long time.

She finally turned to us. "God bless you," she said. "I know the Lord has sent you. The children and I have been praying that He would send one of His angels to spare us." In spite of myself, the lump returned to my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes again. I'd never thought of Pa in those exact terms before, but after Widow Jensen mentioned it, I could see that it was probably true. I was sure that a better man than Pa had never walked the earth. I started remembering all the times he had gone out of his way for Ma and me, and many others. The list seemed endless as a I thought on it. Pa insisted that everyone try on the shoes before we left. I was amazed when they all fit and I wondered how he had known what sizes to get. Then I guessed that if he was on an errand for the Lord that the Lord would make sure he got the right sizes.

Tears were running down Widow Jensen's face again when we stood up to leave. Pa took each of the kids in his big arms and gave them a hug. They clung to him and didn't want to let go. I could see that they missed their Pa, and I was glad that I still had mine. At the door, Pa turned to Widow Jensen and said, "The Mrs. wanted me to invite you and the children over for Christmas dinner tomorrow. The turkey will be more than the three of us can eat, and a man can get cantankerous if he has to eat turkey for too many meals. We'll be by to get you about eleven. It'll be nice to have some little ones around again. Matt, here, hasn't been little for quite a spell." I was the youngest. My two brothers and two sisters had all married and had moved away. Widow Jensen nodded and said, "Thank you, Brother Miles. I don't have to say, 'May the Lord bless you,' I know for certain that He will."

Out on the sled, I felt a warmth that came from deep within and I didn't even notice the cold. When we had gone a ways, Pa turned to me and said, "Matt, I want you to know something. Your ma and me have been tucking a little money away here and there all year so we could buy that rifle for you, but we didn't have quite enough. Then yesterday, a man who owed me a little money from years back came by to make things square. Your ma and me were real excited, thinking that now we could get you that rifle, and I started into town this morning to do just that. But on the way, I saw little Jakey out scratching in the woodpile with his feet wrapped in those gunny sacks and I knew what I had to do. Son, I spent the money for shoes and a little candy for those children. I hope you understand."

I understood, and my eyes became wet with tears again. I understood very well, and I was so glad Pa had done it. Now the rifle seemed very low on my list of priorities. Pa had given me a lot more. He had given me the look on Widow Jensen's face and the radiant smiles of her three children. For the rest of my life, whenever I saw any of the Jensens, or split a block of wood, I remembered, and remembering brought back that same joy I felt riding home beside Pa that night. Pa had given me much more

DEAR CHURCH,

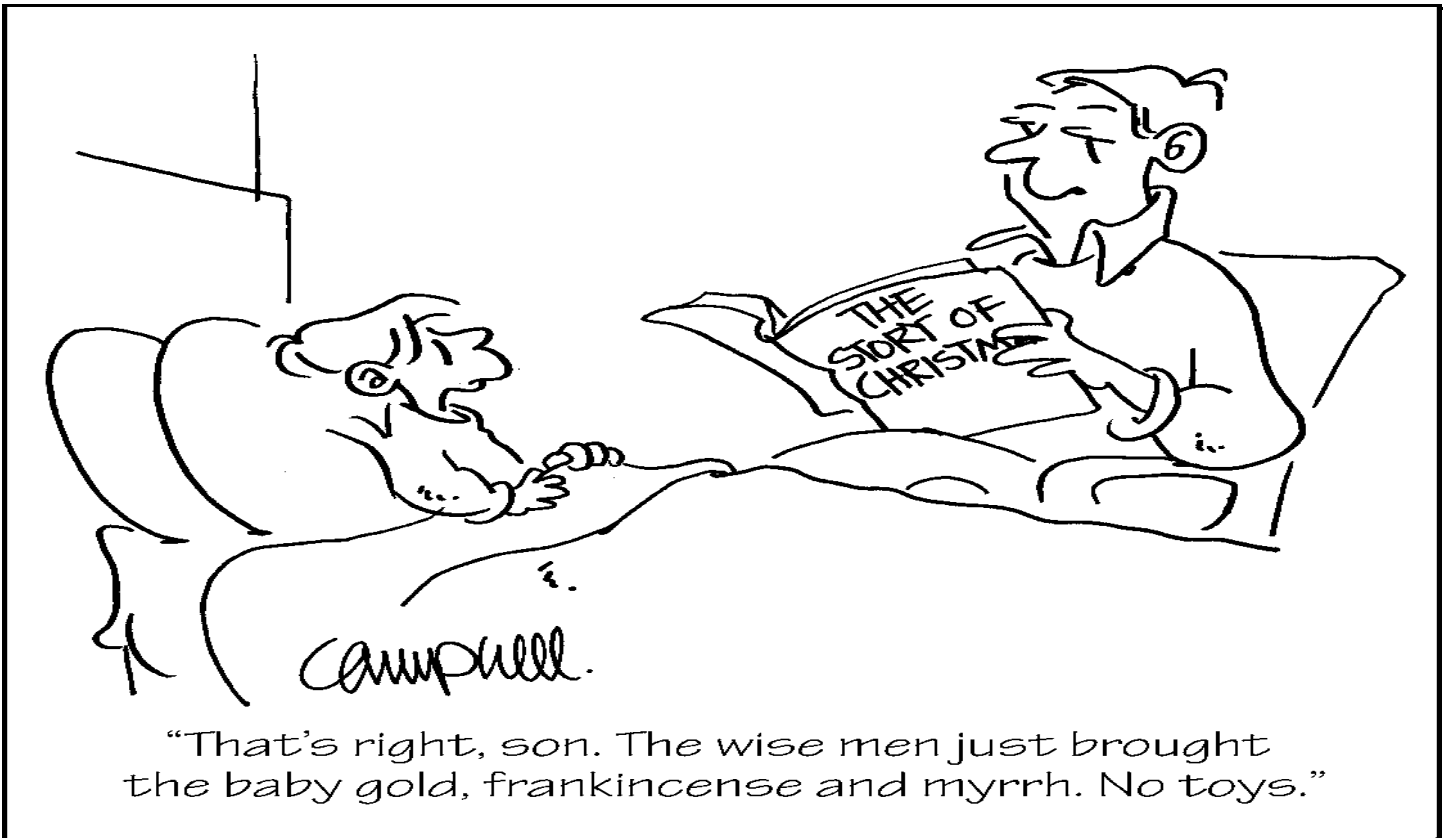
I want to share with you what our Father told me last week. I asked Him, "Why do we sometimes get our prayers answered quick and sometimes it takes a long time?" He used a little medical knowledge I have because I was a nurse and gave me this answer. When you are sick and go to a doctor, he usually runs a test to see what the problem is. When he gets the results of the test, he then knows what medication to prescribe. He gives you the medication and you begin to take it. Sometimes you feel much better after the first dose, but then other times it takes much longer for the medication to work. Sometimes the intruder in your body is easy to get rid of, but sometimes it is tough, has been there for a while and does not let go so easy. You have to take the medication for a while until it gets built up in your bloodstream enough to kill the intruder.

My Father said His Word is our medicine for our soul. Sometimes we only have to take one dose and the healing comes, but other times it takes many more doses before the healing comes. We have to get the medicine (God's Word) built up in our blood stream (our soul—which is our mind, will and emotions), so that it is more real than what is in the natural realm. Once the Word, the medicine, reaches its maximum potential, the intruder must go or circumstances must change. So keep taking your medicine, the Word of God, and let it reach it's maximum potential. Do not quit taking your medication. "So shall my Word be that goeth forth out of My mouth; it shall not return unto Me void, but it will accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Isaiah 55:11

Please remember to pray for Miss Mary Adams and me as we begin to prepare to go back on the mission field. We will be going to South Africa, Malaysia, Singapore and possibly returning to India. We want to do what our Father wants us to do. I will be leaving right after Christmas. As the holidays approach, remember to keep the real reason for the season as the central focus point, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Much love, Your sister Bess Graham





CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP
994 Willie Hill Road
Gilbert, La. 71336

