



Christmas Gifts

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There once was a time when we didn't start Christmas Season until after Thanksgiving. Nowadays commercialism has us gearing up for Santa already after Hallowe'en. If we reflect on how our mental images have been altered over the years, we can see how easily we've been drawn away from the original religious meanings of Hallowe'en and Christmas to an almost exclusively secular (if not purely mercantile) mindset. How easily we let ourselves be duped!

There's something about our IVC engagement, too, that's not unlike that drift. It feels so good, so warm to be reaching out to help others less fortunate than we are, to be extending a hand to a fellow human in need, to be bringing some cheer into a rather drab life, etc. Well, it is a warm, fuzzy, after all!

How readily we deceive ourselves! We feel we are benefactors when in truth we are beneficiaries. Show me one IVCer who has not benefited from this often new contact with people poorer than we are. I am not referring to those vague feelings of pity or satisfaction that can accompany one's engagement.

Rather I'm thinking of the often subtle changes in our personal scale of values, of the priorities we build into our daily schedule, of our attitudes which shift almost imperceptibly toward greater compassion, sensitivity and affection for the people we are now working with.

We can read all those wonderful, challenging stories about Jesus in the New Testament or we can hear them expounded from a pulpit, but it's in direct service to the needy that they begin to take on flesh and blood and that we come to appreciate what a great gift is being offered us by the simple fact that we have chosen to reach out and serve our neighbor. We are the ones who benefit most.

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