

*Heart of the Matter*

“Giver vs. Taker”

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*Having looked into the tearful eyes of parents whose children have abandoned the Faith, I have learned there are a million miles between our children “going through the motions” in reference to their spiritual lives versus our children possessing hearts that dictate their actions. In this column, I plan to share with you what I hope to instill in the hearts of my own children and those whom I love.*

It’s no secret that we live in a materialistic society. The mainstream media constantly bombards us with advertisements of products that we “need.” My generation has perfected the art of “keeping up with the Jones.” In fact, most individuals my age wanted to start their marriages with the same material possessions that it took our parents thirty years to amass. And so we purchased it all—on credit. We are a generation of consumers and takers. Sadly, this selfishness is now being passed on to future generations, as children want more and more. Holidays such as Christmas are no longer about family and memories, but rather they revolve around commercialism and “things.”

**Here’s what I intend on teaching my children about giving versus taking.**

Every Christmas morning since you were born your mother and I have set up a video camera to record the events of the morning. It’s one of the ways we have recorded you growing up through the years, as you went from crawling over presents and playing with empty boxes, to running into the room trying to guess exactly what was in each box. One of our joys as parents

has been watching you tear open the wrapping paper and seeing your eyes light up as you see what was contained in the package.

Having been reared in the United States, you are extremely blessed. You have never experienced poverty or not had something you need. In fact, most of the time you get things you want. But your mother and I worry about what we are teaching you regarding giving versus taking. One of my greatest hopes is that during your lifetime you will learn the joy of giving. Undoubtedly, you will grow up around individuals who surround themselves with “things.” But remember things won’t buy happiness. Remember that those “things” can never fill the void in your life as He can. And never forget ultimately Who owns everything.

There are literally thousands of individuals who have abandoned the Faith in favor of material possessions. These people are selfish takers. They never learned the art of giving. In the book of Acts, Paul reminded the people the words Jesus Christ had shared, saying, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). Never forget this admonition from the Son of God. I pray that as you grow older you will constantly be on the lookout for ways to **give** to others. The feeling you get inside is like none other. Practice random acts of kindness. Never forget-- people are much more valuable than things.

When your mom and I were in Russia, we had the opportunity to visit the “flat” (apartment) of one of the local Christians. They lived a beautiful life, but it was obvious they did not own near the material possessions we did. They worked hard just to get by. During our visit, we complimented a picture she had hanging on the wall, and she literally went over and took it off the wall and gave it to us. We tried desperately to tell her no, but she insisted. In the years

since, I have forgotten her name but we still have the picture. Her act of kindness has remained in my memory for years. She truly was a giver.

As you mature, you will meet people who place an inordinate amount of attention on material possessions. Their identity is shaped not by who they really are, but rather by what they own. Many people spend years climbing the corporate ladder so that they can buy more “things.” These individuals remind us of the Rich Young Ruler who asked Jesus what he needed to do to have eternal life. “Jesus said to him, ‘If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me’” (Matthew 19:21). Rather than him ruling his possessions, his possessions ruled him. The Bible tells us he went away sorrowful because he had many possessions. Be thankful for what God has blessed you with, but never let your material possessions separate you from Jehovah God. Look for ways to share your possessions. Be a giver, not a taker!