

“A REALITY CHRISTMAS LIST”

Selected Texts

INTRODUCTION

1. How many of you ever had a Daisy BB gun on your Christmas list? I know I did, and I remember the Christmas I received it as a gift. When I was a kid, my Christmas list was very short. There was only one name on the list – mine. But things have changed over the years.

2. Some of you are struggling with your Christmas lists this year. Have you noticed it's especially hard to buy something for the men in your life? So, to help you this morning, I want to share with you the *“Top Ten Things Not To Get The Man In Your Life.”*

That man might be your husband, your father, your son, a grandfather, a boyfriend. I'd say this list applies to our pastors, too! But these are the top ten things not to get the man in your life...

10. Anne of Green Gables Collector's Edition with 74 minutes of extra footage.

9. Any knick knack. Absolutely none. It doesn't matter if he loves Emmett Kelley – none.

8. Tickets to the ballet, opera, or anything similar.

7. Another new tie – it doesn't matter how cute it is or if it lights up.

6. A Bath and Body Works soap basket.

5. New teddy bear pajamas – especially if they have feet.

4. Vacuum cleaner.

3. A weekend seminar on “Getting in Touch With Your Feelings,” especially if it's led by Alan Alda.

2. A pair of fuzzy bunny slippers. And...

1. A nose and ear hair trimmer (we're talking about what he wants, not what he needs).

3. Christmas involves lots of lists, doesn't it? We make a list for the gifts we want to give to others. We have a Christmas card list for the greetings we'll send. We make a list of people we'll invite to a Christmas party. We make all kinds of lists at Christmas.

Eg. Even a Christmas song talks about the “lists” of Christmas. Remember, *“He's making a list, checking ti twice...”*

Eg. I learned this week that there is even a book called, *The Christmas List*. Did you know God has a list of things He wants from you and me at Christmas? This morning, we want to examine three of those items. If you have a copy of the Scriptures why don't you turn with me to the 37th Psalm?

Today, we start a new series called *“A Reality Christmas.”*

Eg. You can't turn on the television today without seeing a reality TV show of some kind. Over the next three weeks, we especially want to focus on three realities that make Christmas what it is. We'll talk about *“A Reality Christmas Tree”* and *“A Reality Christmas Gift,”* but this morning... I especially want to turn your attention to *“A Reality Christmas List.”* These are three desires God has

for every one of us at this Christmas season. First of all, He wants me to give Him...

1. MY WILL AND MY WAYS

David said it like this in the 40th Psalm:

“I delight to do Your will, O my God...”
(Psalm 40:8).

Eg. Every once in a while, I meet somebody who is struggling with faith in God. That person might raise questions about the trustworthiness of the Bible or the reliability of the record of the life of Jesus.

Do you know what? Those questions are legitimate - but do they have answers. There is plenty of evidence to believe the record about the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus.

More often than not, the real issue is an issue of the will. Some of you have been exposed to teaching about Jesus for many weeks or months, but you have not yet surrendered your will to Him. Maybe you're involved in some habit or relationship you think is a roadblock between you and God. Perhaps you're afraid of what God might want from you.

Did you know that fear was a major hurdle for both Joseph and Mary on that first Christmas? Even though an angel appeared to each of them to confirm what God was going to do, the angel had the same message for each of them.

To Joseph, the angel said:

“Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife...”
(Matthew 1:20).

And to Mary, the angel said:

“Do not be afraid, you have found favor with God”
(Luke 1:30).

In other words, Joseph and Mary faced the same hurdle of faith that many of us have faced. It's the hurdle of fear.

The only way to clear that hurdle is by an act of your will where you choose to believe God.

I love these words of Psalm 37:

“Commit your way to the LORD; trust in Him and He will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun” (Psalm 37:5, 6).

Solomon wrote these words in Proverbs 3:

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight” (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

Eg. During the early years in the life of Billy Graham, he questioned the reliability of the Bible and his own faith in God. In his book, *Just As I Am*, he tells about visiting a retreat center in the San Bernardino Mountains of California. He knelt down in the woods beside a tree stump and opened his Bible. He couldn't read the Bible in the moonlight, so he had no idea what passage was in front of him.

But, Billy Graham began to pray and here are the words that he prayed:

“O God! There are many things in this book I do not understand. ...there are some areas in it that do not seem to correlate with modern science. I can't answer some of the philosophical and psychological questions others are raising.

.I'm going to accept this as Your Word—by faith. I'm going to allow faith to go beyond my intellectual questions and doubts, and I will believe this to be Your inspired Word.”

Graham said he got up from his knees with tears in his eyes. He said,

“I sensed the presence and power of God as I had not sensed it in months. Not all my questions were answered, but a major bridge had been crossed. In my heart and mind, I knew a spiritual battle in my soul had been fought and won.”

Do you know what Billy Graham was describing? He was describing a battle for his will. Some of you are going through that battle right now.

The Bible says that one part of faith is repentance. Do you understand what repentance is?

- It means to have a change of mind about something. It means to be heading one direction, and then turn around and go the opposite direction.

That's Biblical repentance. It's based on the death of Jesus Christ. When I surrender my will to Jesus Christ, I head a new way in life. I head a new direction. I adopt a new set of values for life.

I love these words in Psalm 119:

“Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD. Blessed are they who keep His statutes and seek Him with all their heart” (Psalm 119:1-3).

Eg. One of the things you can do “to walk in the law of the Lord” is to demonstrate compassion to people in need at this time of the year. I encourage you to participate in our “Give a Christmas” emphasis again this year as we distribute trees and gifts to under-resourced people in our community. It's a great way to “walk in the ways of God.”

You see, the first thing God wants from me at Christmas is my will and my ways. The second thing He wants from me at Christmas is...

2. MY WEAKNESSES AND MY WORRIES

Look at this next verse on your outline in 1 Peter:

“Cast all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7)

David said something just like that in Psalm 55:

“Cast your cares on the LORD and He will sustain you; He will never let the righteous fall.” (Psalm 55:22)

Jesus said it like this in Matthew 6:

“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?”

Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father

feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matthew 6:25, 26).

Let me ask you a question: *“Why do you think God wants us to give Him our weaknesses and our worries? What kind of a gift is that?”*

How would you feel if somebody came to you and said, *“Bob, I’ve got this problem. Would you solve it for me?”*

How would that make you feel? Do you know the answer to that question? You would feel **needed**.

Do you know why God wants us to come to Him with our weaknesses and our worries? Do you know why He wants us to cast every care on Him? Do you know why the God of heaven invites me to pour out my heart to Him when it’s breaking?

- Because when I do that, I’m telling Him how much I need Him in my life. It is the greatest evidence of faith.

And the Bible says, *“Without faith it’s impossible to please God”* (Hebrews 11:6).

Eg. When my daughters were little, sometimes they would fall and get hurt. They’d come running to me, and I would pick them up in my arms and throw my arms around them.

There is no greater feeling for a dad than to know your children need you and love you.

Eg. This week, I got an email from our younger daughter. She and her husband are thinking about buying their first home. She had some questions to ask me. I

didn’t know all the answers, so I asked one of the men in our church to help me.

But you know what? It was just nice that she asked!

There is no greater feeling for a dad than to be loved and to be needed. If that’s true on an earthly level, how much more is it true in a relationship with God. What He wants from us is to express to Him how much we need Him.

Eg. There is an old song that says:

“Give them all...give them all...give them all to Jesus. Shattered dreams, wounded hearts, broken toys. Give them all...give them all...give them all to Jesus.”

Do you know why? Because He wants us to depend on Him.

God invites me to give Him my will and my ways. He invites me to give Him my weaknesses and my worries. But there is one more thing He invites me to give Him this Christmas season. He invites me to give Him...

3. **MY WONDER AND MY WORSHIP**

Do you realize how much of the Christmas story relates to worship? Look at these words from Luke, chapter 2:

*“When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this Child, and all who heard it were **amazed** at what the shepherds said to them.*

*But Mary **treasured** up all these things and **pondered** them in her heart. The shepherds returned, **glorifying** and **praising** God for all the things they had heard and*

seen, which were just as they had been told” (Luke 2:17-20).

When the Magi visited Jesus, we were told ...

“They bowed and worshipped Him. They opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold, and of incense, and of myrrh” (Matthew 2:11).

Do you realize how much of the Christmas story involves worship? Look at all those words of worship: “amazed, treasured, pondered, glorifying, praising, bowed down, worshipped, opened, presented.” They’re all words of worship.

If you don’t do anything else at this Christmas season, don’t miss the opportunity to worship the Christ of Christmas. Maybe that means you stop in the middle of your shopping, pull out your Bible and just read the Christmas story for a minute. Maybe that means you gather your children around a nativity scene each night, unwrap a different piece of the scene and talk about the role it plays in the Christmas story. Maybe that means you write the words of the angel on a 3 x 5 card and read them before you eat each meal: *“Behold I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people...”*

Somebody said it like this:

“We spend so much time on our feet at Christmas - going to parties, going caroling, going shopping, going lots of places on our feet - we need to spend some time on our knees. We need to be filled with a sense of holy wonder that God invaded planet earth on a rescue mission for you and me.”

The God of Creation invites us to delight in what He’s done. The God of the incarnation invites us to discover who He is.

You ought to be amazed at Christmas. If you manage to go through this season without ever pausing to wonder about it all, you’ve missed the reason for Christmas.

Eg. Have you discovered that when you really love someone, you’ll go to great lengths to be with the one you love? You’ll drive for hours to be together - even if it’s only for a short while. You don’t mind staying up late to talk. You’re willing to spend a small fortune on somebody you’re crazy about. You jump at any chance to be together.

That’s part of what it means to enjoy the wonder in worship of Christmas. It’s to look for every opportunity to see Jesus.

Eg. In his book, *God is the Gospel*, John Piper makes this observation,

“The critical question for our generation is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, and all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ was not there?”

I don’t know about you, but the answer for me is, *“No! No way!”* I’m looking forward to heaven because **I want to see Jesus.** In light of what He did when He came to earth for you and me, I want to see Him face to face.

CONCLUSION

1. What better time of the year to wonder at the work of God in our lives? What better time to ponder what God has been teaching you?

Here’s a little exercise that will help you do some serious pondering before the New Year arrives. I want to challenge you to:

- Set aside at least one hour of time to be with God.

Find a quiet place. Turn off the TV or the radio or the CD player or your iPod.

And then make a Top Ten List of the things that happened in your life in 2009. Those things can be events that happened to you personally or things that happened to others that had an impact on you. Those things might be good or bad, victories or defeats. It doesn’t matter. Make the list as broad as you like.

Then ask yourself, “*What is God teaching me?* What lessons come up over and over? What have I learned about myself (positively and negatively this year)?

What have I learned about God? What does He want to change in me? I believe if you’ll follow that little exercise God will reveal some very special things to you at this Christmas season.

- What am I giving to God this Christmas?