



WHAT GOD WANTS FOR CHRISTMAS

Aimee Joseph

There has been much activity in the junk drawer at our house of late. Small, nimble hands have been busy working on crafting an entirely homemade Christmas (part childhood tenderness and part necessity, as the duct tape wallet market has died down, leaving my children broke).

These homemade, heart-spun gifts mean far more to me than a minivan with a bow or a new vacuum ever could. Any parent can tell you that even more more than the creative gifts, the tender hearts behind them are the greatest gift.

My children also gave me gifts when they don't even realize or intend to. One son leaning hard on my shoulder, snuggled close so that I could read Prince Caspian aloud to him. A treasured gift of attention. Another son calling for more crackers and hot tea while laid out on the couch sick. The gift of dependence. A third son inviting me to his favorite stuffed animal's third birthday party of the week. The gift of initiation.



Directly after spying on my children's attempt to create yet another homemade gift today, I found myself in Psalm 50 reading and studying about what God most wants from us, His children.

Asaph, the psalmist, begins with the powerful image of God as King summoning all creation as witnesses. The king then proceeds to call His people to be brought forth to be judged and addressed.

God is summoning the people who are His, those who claim Him to be their God. God's people could not write the coming words off as something applying to those pagan people. Likewise, my stomach sinks a bit when I realize that I am included in the audience of His address.

One can imagine the shaking, the shuddering, the knocking knees of the subjects being called into the throne room of the High King.

Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. Psalm 50:7-12.

If it is hard to find a present for someone who has everything, imagine how hard it is to find a present for the One who created everything. But let us not be confused. God is not a hard master. He is not impossible to please. Rather, He is merely attempting to show the ridiculousness of God's people thinking that outward behavior, sacrifice or conformity to standards is enough to make His heart leap.

God's beef with His people, some of whom may have been earnest and faithful in their adherence to the sacrificial system laid out in Leviticus, does not lie in their outward conformity to His law.

We no longer live under the sacrificial system because Christ was the ultimate and perfect sacrifice offered once for all. Yet, we still act much more like the ancient Israelites than we would like to admit. God is not nearly as interested in our stealy resolve to get our act together or our checking the boxes of quiet times and tithing as He is in something else. Though these things are not insignificant, they are not central.

Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and perform your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you and you shall glorify me. Psalm 50: 14-15.

God is not a hard master, leaving us guessing what He desires. He declares boldly that He wants our hearts.

He longs for our **dependence** upon Him so that He might be our **Deliverer**. Both God's ultimate deliverance of us from the penalty of sin through Christ's death and resurrection and His ongoing deliverance of us from the power of sin ought to result in our **deference** to Him and our practice of **disciplined lives** through His Spirit.

God wants us to lean into him, like my son leaned into me on the plane. He wants us to cry out to Him, to rely upon Him, to abide in Him. We must continually repent of our self-sins (self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, self-confidence, et al) and leave the sufficiency and righteousness and confidence to the only One to whom they truly belong.

Just as we love chances to be ourselves, God loves every opportunity that affords Him the chance to manifest to us His essential glories. Dancers love to dance, writers love to write, mothers love to mother, and the Deliverer loves to deliver.

This Christmas, we don't have to guess what is on God's wish list. He has told us out right. God desires our hearts to depend on Him, to cry out to Him, to trust in His deliverance through Christ and to thank Him profusely in deference and disciplined lives led by the Spirit.

It seems human parents have received their love of heart-spun, homemade gifts given by their children from the Heavenly Father.

May we be adult children of the Father who have the child-like desire to present to Him our hearts.