

## One Gift That Will Make You Happy This Christmas

It's not too early to be thinking about gifts for Christmas. I assume that's the case since every commercial on TV that is not trying to sell me the prescription-of-the-week is filmed on a set that includes either a Christmas tree, Santa Claus, or smiling parents pretending to be excited they're up extremely early on Christmas morning.



You've probably seen the recent news of the person who won the Powerball lottery, winning \$2.04 billion. Most lottery winners opt for receiving their winnings in one lump sum, and the pre-tax lump sum comes to \$997,600,000. I don't play the lottery, but we all imagine what we'd do with over \$900 million. We could buy anything and everything for Christmas without ever messing with those Black Friday sales.

But we wouldn't be happier. According to Harvard Medical School professor Sanjiv Chopra, research into lottery winners has shown that, a year after winning big, the winners were not any happier; in fact, many were *less* happy.

There is one gift that will make you happy this Christmas, and it won't show up on your credit card bill in January.

### Gratitude.

According to Dr. Chopra, "Research has shown that if you express gratitude on a regular basis, you'll be happy, you'll be more creative, you'll be more fulfilled—you might even live ten years longer."

I've never thought in terms of gratitude equating happiness, but as a follower of Christ, it makes sense. When we express thanks to God, our focus is on God. We are thanking Him for what *He* does, what *He* provides, what *He* protects us from. When we take the focus off ourselves and look to God, we can't help but gain a better—a healthier—perspective. I can't wallow in discontentment over

what I don't have when I am thankful for what I do have.

A common theme in Scripture is the call to thankfulness.

- "Let's enter his presence with thanksgiving; let's shout triumphantly to him in song" (Ps. 95:2).
- "So then, just as you have received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to walk in him, being rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, and *overflowing with gratitude*" (Col. 2:6-7).
- "Give thanks in everything; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:18).

I had a friend once criticize God for being on an ego trip, always calling us to praise and thank Him. I contend that God calls us to thank Him because it benefits us. Yes, He certainly deserves our thankfulness and praise, but when we think of all the things He has done for us, both thankfulness and contentment rise in our hearts. And happiness grows out of our contentment.

The apostle Paul identified the source of his own contentment. This contentment stayed with Him in seasons of plenty and in seasons when he had little. His strength to be content came from Christ—looking to Him, trusting Him, and rejoicing in Him. (See Phil. 4:10-13.)

I am not dismissing the joy we experience in giving gifts at Christmas. But before you share your "If-you're-thinking-of-buying-a-gift-for-me,-here's-a-few-things-to-consider" list, get comfortable in chair with a cup of coffee and ponder all that you've received from God's gracious hand. Gratitude will rise and contentment will follow.

In that moment, your Christmas wish list just may not seem so important—or needed.

"Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!" (2 Cor. 9:15).