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Dear friend,

What does Christmas mean to you? It's interesting how differently we each think of Christmas.

- Many think of Christmas as a season of good cheer among friends and family.
- The retail world would have us think it is all about presents and buying "things." If sales on Black Friday are any indication, the retail world is making headway with an 11% rise in sales this year over last.
- For people who are alone, Christmas represents one of the loneliest times of the year.
- And for still others, Christmas is a time for benevolence and sharing what we have.

So friend, what does the Christmas Season represent for you? If we pause to consider the reason for the season, the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Christmas is the celebration of how God sent His Son to the world as a gift from above. As God gave us this gift of His Son, many ascribe to the holiday tradition of benevolence by sharing what they have through the giving of gifts.

We may consider giving gifts as benevolence, but they're really not the same. What's the difference?

The dictionary defines benevolence as the "*desire to do good to others; goodwill; charitableness*" or as "*an act of kindness; a charitable gift.*" This definition (as well as popular notions of the concept) infers that benevolence is essentially giving something without getting something in return.

Giving gifts to those we love, while motivated out of love which is good in and of itself, is not really benevolence since we receive gifts in return... or at the very least we receive love back in return. Real charity or benevolence is more accurately portrayed as we give to our church, volunteer at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen, sponsor an orphaned child, or give to the poor who can't repay us.

As this year is quickly drawing to a close, **we need your help** to care for the poor in Ethiopia! Having started the new BCI Academy (elementary school) this year has caused us to use every bit of our reserves, putting the ministry in the position of a \$21,000 deficit year to date. We are not able to send the full budget of support this month, so we are writing in hopes that you would consider the ministry during this holiday season.

As an act of pure benevolence, friend, would you send a yearend gift for support of the orphaned children and impoverished families in Ethiopia? If you are one of the hundreds of past team members, then you have seen the need with your own eyes, and the impact Blessing the Children is having in the lives of these poor. We depend on the kindness of people like you, friend, to continue the ministry work in Ethiopia (one of the two poorest countries in Africa). Please send what you can today.



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A world-wide outreach blessing needy children.

Will we remember what we gave or received for Christmas years from now? Probably not, but we will remember time spent with those we love and the accomplishments of life as we've helped others less fortunate. Through your partnership and support, you are more than just demonstrating your love for your neighbor. In fact, you are carrying out what the Bible refers to as "pure and faultless religion" according to James 1:27.

"Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world."

God doesn't speak any more plainly or simply than He does here in James. Your care of orphans and widows in Ethiopia through your support of this ministry is the religion that God accepts as *pure and faultless*.

It's amazing to think how God is using us together to save the lives of orphans half way around the world in Africa. God brought us this unique opportunity and we are humbled by His grace. Our prayer for 2010 is that God will use us to the fullest, that through His divine provision we can:

1. Complete phase two construction of BCI Academy,
2. Start vocational training for impoverished families to become self sufficient,
3. Provide 40 impoverished children a school scholarship of \$30/month, and
4. Sponsor an additional 62 orphaned children, bringing our total to 180.

We are praying: *"Lord, we open ourselves and all we have to you and your will. May You be glorified by what You accomplish through your humble servants' hands, and may many lives be touched and changed through our obedience to You and Your Word! We surrender all to You. Amen!"*

Would you pray about a year-end gift? We would like to finish 2009 strong and we need your help. Though God has been providing the bare necessities for the sponsored children, we would like to wire enough money that they could celebrate Christmas (which is celebrated January 7th in Ethiopia) with extra food for them and their families for the holidays.

Please give as generously as you can. And as we sit down to our great holiday meals with our family and loved ones, we can rest in the knowledge that we are ministering to the need of the orphans and widows.

May the Lord richly bless and keep you, friend, and your family this holiday season,



Keith V. Strawn
President/Founder

