

What Do You Prefer?

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One hundred and four years ago this month, the Wright brothers successfully got their "flying machine" off the ground. Full of excitement, they sent a telegram to their sister, Katherine. "We have actually flown 120 feet. Will be home for Christmas."

Katherine hurried down to the newspaper office with the news. The editor took one look at the telegram and said, "How nice. The boys will be home for Christmas." He totally missed the real news – that man had flown for the first time.

This December many people are still missing the real news. Not the news about flight, but the news about Christmas. For many people, Christmas is mainly about family reunions, gift giving, decorations, and vacation time.

There is a reason why many people focus more on gifts and parties at Christmas than on the coming of the Christ Child. It is because humans are usually more concerned about the present than about the future.

When given the choice between an immediate toy or of waiting for a better one at an undetermined time in the future, most children will take the immediate toy. We may justify their actions by saying they are only children and don't understand true values, but it has been shown that children who learn to wait are much more likely to be successful later on in life. Delayed gratification, the putting off of something good in order to receive something better, is crucial for those who want to achieve future goals.

Many adults are like children. They focus on the present even though greater reward lies in planning for the future as well.

The Bible says, "*A man reaps what he sows*" (Galatians 6:7). The person who refuses to create debt at Christmas time is more likely to enjoy January. The one who denies himself holiday desserts is more likely to be trim for the New Year. Forgiving a wrong may seem difficult but bitterness will poison one's body and mind, not to mention his or her Christmas Season.

Those who are ruled by their own desires can never be happy for long because desires always grow faster than they are fulfilled.

The real spirit of Christmas lies in giving gifts that benefit those we love for a lifetime – gifts like encouraging words, a contribution to a college education savings account, a Bible, or a smoke-free home. Many parents would rather give toys because toys more likely produce excitement on the face of a child. And yet, years from now gifts that had the future in mind will be much greater appreciated than discarded toys.

A great way to focus on the future as well as on the present is to attend church this Christmas Season – not as a one time annual event, but as the start of a new lifestyle.

In an old "B.C." comic strip, two ants are having a conversation. "Who is Jesus, Dad?" the little one asks.

"He's the reason for the season," replies his father.

"I thought Santa was the reason," declares the son.

"He is if you prefer Nintendo to everlasting life," the father answers.