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Gifts Money Can't Buy

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FAMILY TIES

GIFTS

MONEY CAN'T BUY

BY SUSAN E. MURRAY

During the Christmas season, many engage in thinking about, anticipating, planning, choosing, and giving gifts. That's a wonderful part of being alive—the giving and receiving of gifts. From a spiritual standpoint, we recognize the best gifts are those from God. Think how Mary anticipated the impending birth of Jesus. Certainly Heaven was abuzz celebrating God's gift to humankind.

Have you noticed how sometimes kids have more fun with the wrapping and boxes than with the toys that came in them? Is that much different from enjoying the thoughtfulness, the sense that a gift is given from the heart, or just knowing someone is excited about our life? Like the wrapping paper on a present, it's the meaning behind the gift that can give the greater joy.

Do you know what it feels like to receive a gift that's out of season, one that was obviously an unwanted gift being passed on, or getting something that is sizes too big or too small, or in a least-favorite style or color? What about one with the price tag left on? We ask, was this given out of obligation? Was getting a bargain or spending a small fortune to look good the most important thing to the giver? These experiences get added to other messages we receive about our value and importance to others.

How can you go wrong in gift giving if you choose to be genuinely excited and interested in someone's life, long term? While we get excited about the birth of a child, how long does it take to begin focusing on what sacrifices we're making, or how the child doesn't meet our expectations? When a toddler is doing the important growing that often taxes adults, are we daily and consistently excited about their life or wish they'd just get past this stage?

When a child heads off to school are we more excited about their life or more frustrated by the amount of homework they

have? What about an adolescent who appears to have forgotten everything we've worked so long to teach them? Are we really, daily, intentionally excited about their life? If so, how do we let them know?

What about our spouses? We were pretty excited in the beginning. We certainly were excited about their life and how they excited us; but, how about in the years after marriage? Does your spouse know, on a daily basis, you are excited about his or her life?

For the older adults in our lives, most of whom say they have everything they need (and many actually do have all the material things), do we half-listen? Are we full of suggestions when they just want to be listened to, when they want us to know they still have opinions and valuable thoughts? Are we truly excited about their life, or do we just want to get on with our own?

So, as you are "gifting" this holiday season, being truly intentionally interested in and excited about another's life may be gift enough, if the truth were told. Of course, you can sweeten life by the thoughtful and heart-felt, tangible gifts you give this season.

Susan Murray is an associate professor of family studies who teaches behavioral science and social work at Andrews University. She is a certified family life educator and licensed marriage and family therapist.

