

The Best Gifts to Give Your Children

'Tis the season for gift-giving, and with it the yearly struggle to find, procure, and provide the "perfect" present for you child(ren). Though this year, in so many ways, is markedly different (what an understatement, huh?), we still live in an age of abundance. Such inevitably leads to spending beyond our means and likely indicates that we're contributing heavily to their sense of entitlement and even greed. So alternatively, or at least in addition to the more 'traditional' gifts, here are some more 'useful' ideas:

- **Knowledge and Understanding of God.** Since *faith* cannot be endowed- at least not by us, the next best thing is to provide that which enables it. We want our children to mature into *faithful* young men and women, so why not give them that from which faith grows- the *Word of God*, and the *knowledge and understanding* of it. Does your child have a good Bible that is age-appropriate and that they can read and understand? Are you investing the effort and time necessary to help them do so, Eph.6:4? You can't "give" them *faith*, nor can you leave them yours as an inheritance (not to discount the importance of a *good example* and *proper instruction*, but to emphasize that faith is and must be *personal*, Rom.14:22). But you can provide the means and motivation necessary to help them develop the *personal faith* necessary to be pleasing to God and saved eternally, Rom.10:17; Heb.11:6. Spend at least some of the money that you would have spent on disposable toys and gadgets (especially those that encourage the opposite of faith!) for your children and invest in their *spiritual* growth and maturity in, of, and through faith.
- **A Good Example of Love, Faith, and Fidelity.** While again this is not a "traditional" gift, it is of utmost importance. Nor is it *cheap* or *free*. It will cost you much in time and effort- not only to achieve, but also to maintain (consistency is key!). Children learn and practice what they live and experience in the family. Think about it: even children that are consistently *taken to Bible Class* at the local congregation spend roughly 1.5 hours a week studying and learning about God and spiritual things (two 45 minute bible classes). That means 166.5 hours per week are spent elsewhere, primarily in the home. An hour and a half a week cannot overcome a home-life consisting of an *exasperating father*, Col.3:21; an *unloving* (or *distracted* rather than *devoted*) *mother*, Titus 2:4; and parents that demonstrate a consistent *lack of interest in spiritual things*, *general* or *specific unfaithfulness* (to God, their congregation, or each other), and/or that fail to make and keep God and spirituality *the priority* in the home, Matt.6:33. Children don't necessarily need or deserve the latest trendy toy or electronic gadget, but they do desperately need and certainly deserve *godly parents* that consistently provide the best examples they can of *love, faith, and fidelity*- both to God and each other.

We give our children a lot of (eternally) *worthless* gifts. There is nothing necessarily wrong with providing them *perishable* things (cf. 1Pet.1:18) that they want and that bring them joy when we have the means to do so. But doing so to the exclusion of *imperishable* and *precious* things that provide *eternal joy and life* is to contribute to their *spiritual delinquency*, and fail in your duty as a parent. And though we may scoff at such, God certainly does not, cf. Matt.18:1-6! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at southportcofc.org)