



THE CHRISTMAS GIFT

I DIDN'T WANT

By Chad Morris

I didn't want this gift, but over time it became priceless.

Every Christmas I learned to expect two kinds of gifts—those I wanted and those my parents wanted me to have.

I remember one Christmas in particular. I was an ordinary 15- or 16-year-old boy. I tried to act casual about my gifts, but inside I was crazy with anticipation. I was hoping for some new music, sports equipment, or maybe a movie. I pulled a small rectangular package from under the tree with my name on it. The size surprised me. I couldn't think of anything I wanted that was that shape.

Of course that didn't stop me from happily ripping off the paper. Inside was a white box. The label glued to the top indicated a new set of scriptures. I didn't think much of it. My parents often reused old boxes.

As I lifted the lid, I thought of the possibility that the label might be accurate. I hoped it wasn't. I hoped against hope.

I didn't want new scriptures. I didn't need them. I already had the set I received when I was baptized. Sure, they were getting old and the binding was falling apart, but for how much I used them, they worked just fine.

My heart sank. Inside the box was a beautiful compact set of maroon scriptures with my name embossed on the cover. I remember looking up to see my mom watching me. I'm sure she was nervous about my reaction. She said something like, "I know you didn't ask for them and it isn't the most exciting gift, but we thought you could use them." I gave a polite smile, which I'm sure was completely transparent. I looked at the scriptures for a few minutes, trying to show appreciation, but eventually put them back in their box and gave my attention to my other gifts.

I tried not to think about all the things that I wanted more than new scriptures. I tried not to feel disappointed.

I tried not to hypothesize about a way I could take them back without my parents knowing, but I didn't try very hard.

I would love to report that later that Christmas day I opened those new scriptures and felt the great Spirit that comes through reading them. But I didn't. In fact, I don't believe I did anything with them other than put them in a corner of my room. I'd love to report that over the following weeks I gained a greater appreciation for my gift. I didn't. About the only attention I gave them was during sacrament meeting, mindlessly separating the pages that were stuck together.

In all honesty, I don't think I appreciated that gift for a long time. However, eventually I began to study them. I took them to church and to seminary. I began to read them on my own. They proved crucial to my decisions. At a time when

I wondered if it wouldn't be better to live what I thought was a more exciting lifestyle, like that of some of my school friends, I read Mosiah 2:41. I'm so grateful for that verse. I began to realize that only those who keep the commandments of God are truly happy.

Months later, my youth leaders challenged me to read the entire Book of Mormon before attending a summer camp. I agreed but procrastinated, and I soon fell behind. In a rush to catch up, I began to read for longer periods of time. I can still recall sitting on my porch reading for the better part of an hour. Before this, I was lucky to read for 10 minutes at a time. For the first time in my life, I lost myself in the scriptures. I realized that Alma the Younger was a real person. He wasn't just a story my leaders taught me. He actually rebelled against his prophet father, and, through faith and the Atonement, was still able to change.

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I wondered what happened next. I had pieces of the story in my mind, but it hadn't come together into a whole. I kept reading, watching him grow. For the first time I actually enjoyed what I read.

These experiences and many others began to build my small testimony. Yet, I still questioned. I questioned a lot. I decided to read the Book of Mormon daily and ask for confirmation that it was true. After many nights of reading and many prayers, I felt I received an answer from heaven. It was something I couldn't create. There was no one else around to lead me to the feeling. I felt a warmth—almost like a light—in me. It somehow seemed to calm and excite me simultaneously. I felt that my Heavenly Father had heard my prayer. He sent a message through my thoughts that the Book of Mormon is true and the Church is His kingdom on earth. I also felt He wanted me to know that He had been answering my prayers continually throughout my life. I just hadn't realized it. Where would my testimony be without the scriptures?

Later I read the same scriptures to calm my nerves on a plane to the mission field. I read them to inspire and motivate me

through my college years. I read them to confirm if I should ask my wife to marry me. I read them for guidance in my career. I read them to find out how to be a better father. Every day I felt I learned and grew more. My testimony became stronger. I found the strength to trust in the Lord more and more.

The majority of my Christmas presents I received growing up were eventually packed in boxes, broken and discarded, or given to secondhand stores. But I still have those maroon scriptures with my name embossed on the cover. They are faded and worn. Some pages are torn, and the margins are filled with notes and quotes.

I cannot think of another Christmas gift that I have used more or one that has affected me more than what was in that little white box. Over time, it changed my life. It helped me come to my Savior Jesus Christ and learn to follow Him. It helped me gain a testimony of His gospel and motivated me to do my part in it. It has helped me become more like Him. What could be a more fitting Christmas gift? I thank my Heavenly Father that my parents gave me a gift I didn't want. **NE**



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