

What Gift Will You Give This Christmas?

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Unlike much of the rest of the world, we live in a country where most people have all the necessities of life. When we give gifts, we sometimes have to search far and wide to try to find something our family or friends need and want. Reenie, a young lady who attends the church I pastor, faced such a dilemma last Christmas. Her mother has everything she needs. So when Reenie asked her what she wanted for Christmas, she said, "Give something for me to someone else this year."

Reenie checked the website of Nazarene Compassionate Ministries (www.ncm.org) and decided to sponsor a little girl in India in the name of her mother. She sends \$25 a month, which helps provide for her physical, educational, and other needs. Several times a year her mother and the little girl correspond with one another, sending pictures, or drawings.

Child sponsorship is a way that we can really make a difference in the world. My son sponsors a child in Uganda and another in Honduras through Compassion International (www.compassion.com). This past year he made trips to both countries and personally met them. What a meaningful time, meeting a child that he has had a big part in educating and providing the basic necessities of life.

This year I presented the child sponsorship idea to my church. Many families have signed up; they really want to make a difference in someone's life. Sponsoring a child can be a great activity for the entire family, providing opportunity to grow culturally while at the same time teaching our own children the values of caring and sharing.

There is an old story of some tourists who were walking on a beach in Mexico when a poor looking campesino approached them. They watched as he would walk a few steps, reach down, pick up something and throw it into the ocean. As they came closer they realized that he was picking up starfish that had become stranded on the beach, returning them to their natural habitat. But the beach was cluttered with starfish for miles and miles. "Old man," one of the said, "why do you keep throwing back the starfish. There are so many starfish on this beach that you can never make a difference."

The old man didn't even look up. He just reached down, picked up another starfish and threw it back into the sea. "Made a difference to that one," he replied.

We watch the news, see the poverty and war in the world, and wonder how anyone can make a difference. We see such a great multitude of needs that we often fail to see the real individual needs. Child sponsorship offers a way to really make a difference by changing the world one child at a time.

Sherry, a young lady from Sidney, Ohio, accompanied my wife and me on a recent mission trip to Honduras. Throughout the trip, Sherry kept asking if we could travel to the border town of Las Manos so she could visit the child she sponsors. What a great time it was as she met the little girl in person that she had corresponded with through the years. Tears of love and joy flowed as she hugged her long-term friend for the first time. That's something money cannot buy.

But most people who sponsor a child never meet him or her, at least not here on earth. When Jesus advised us to lay up treasures in heaven I think he included helping little children around the world who can never repay us. Once he said, "Whatever you do for the least of these you do for me."

This Christmas, if we really want to present a gift to the Christ Child, we might start by sponsoring a child somewhere in the world. You can find one by visiting one of the two websites noted in this article.