

December 2009

RISE inside

The Cost of Christmas



RISE co-editor Molly Wegener encourages us to count the cost – then add to others – this Christmas.

When I mention the word 'Christmas', what comes to mind? Stress, worry or anxiety about how much there is to do, how much it will cost

and just how exhausted you will be at the end of it all. Of course there are wonderful times of celebrating with family and friends but at what cost? I wonder if there is another way to look at it. So often through media and advertising we are trying to be convinced that the more we have the happier we will be. However, I believe that less is best.

Let's get rid of the stress and worry and replace it with peace and joy.

Christmas is a time to slow down and reconnect with those we love. When we spend time together, sharing our lives, stopping the busyness, and simply being there for each other we move closer to what really fills us deep inside. Being connected to others, especially those we love and who love us brings a satisfaction that cannot be compared. The traditions that we celebrate provide an opportunity to refocus on what is important. They also provide specific ways to show our love and appreciation. What traditions do you follow at Christmas? Or are you so busy cooking and shopping and cleaning that you really don't have time to think about them. I know that there are things that you repeat but are you doing things that are really important to you.

May I encourage you to think about how you would really like to spend your time this Christmas?

You may be wondering where to start as I often used to. Over time I realised that it is quite simple which therein lies the key. My motto when I look at making any changes is to, 'Simplify my Lifestyle and Focus my Life'. Every time I need to make a decision I use this principle of Simplify and Focus. I ask myself how can I reduce the number of options I have. Whenever I am afraid that I will make the wrong decision I remind myself that it probably doesn't really matter if the 'right' choice isn't that obvious.

Most traditions are treasured because they involve being together and sharing what's important to each other. Think outside the box this Christmas in how you may like to show your love and appreciation for others. One suggestion is to have each person fill out a piece of paper for each other person. It can be kept very short, anonymous or signed, and as simple as three positive words to describe each person. They can then be folded and hung on the tree being given out with the presents. Another idea is to have the family create or do something for someone else in need. Producing together and thinking of others less fortunate than us is an opportunity to teach our children (and remind ourselves) what truly matters in life.

Most of us know the saying, 'You reap what you sow'. I have also heard someone else add to that by saying, 'You reap ONLY what you sow'. Each day we have the opportunity to invest in our lives, in our health and wellness, and in our relationships. It is amazing that even a little 'investing' each day goes a long way. How can you add to the lives of those you love this Christmas? The memories that you will make and the bond that you will create will become some of your most treasured things in life. Life at its best is spent with those we love.

RISE co-editor Molly Wegener is also owner of discover L.I.F.E. and is a Professional Organiser/Lifestyle Designer.

December 2009

RISE people

Liz Tobias on Jazz, Music and Worship

Liz Tobias is a well respected Jazz vocalist and pianist whose career has taken her all over Australia and the world. An Adelaide girl, Liz has enjoyed the music scene her all her life, and in particular the Adelaide Jazz scene, performing regularly at weddings, corporate events, hotels and festivals. Most notably, Liz spent some time performing with the successful local group “E Type

Jazz” on lead vocals, and on piano.

She entered the Elder conservatorium at age 16 and has received many scholarships, awards, and won numerous competitions throughout her career. Her most recent success was in Zory, Poland in September 2009, where she won the Voicings International Jazz Competition. She has been invited to return to Poland in May next year to perform at the Easy Jazz Festival, which is a major event in that part of the world.

Known to her close friends as Mamma Jazz, Liz is also host of Life FM’s “Celebrate” on Sunday mornings at 7.00 am. RISE Magazine caught up with Liz to find out a little more about her.

RISE: What is your passion in life?

LIZ: Jesus, and the freedom He’s given me. I’m passionate about the gifts He has blessed me with. Spending time with the people I love..cooking and feeding them! The name “mamajazz” came from looking after my class mates at school and university. The “Mama” bit came from school and then the “Jazz” bit from the conservatorium. I’m passionate about people and seeing them reach their full potential. I love it when my students reach their goals and when people around me succeed at what they love.

RISE: What else is important to you?

LIZ: It’s important that no matter where these gifts take me, I remain level headed and real about God’s calling on my life. It would be so easy to place singing and gigs and rehearsal above my husband and family. My grandmother passed away this year, and through the celebration of her life my husband and I realized the greatest thing we could do is leave a legacy

behind - of family and God’s ministry. So I am very close to my family and they ground me when the need arises. I think they quite enjoy doing so!!!

RISE: Do you have a ‘day job’ and, if so, what is it?

LIZ: My days sometimes start at 9 pm on a Saturday evening! I sing probably 2 or 3 nights a week. I teach singing throughout the day at Scotch College, Pembroke School, Concordia College and Tabor Adelaide. It’s a juggle to balance teaching and gigs. I think most musicians have made an art out of it! Also in there I fit Life FM preparations and rehearsals for various gigs, eg. a Motown show coming up soon in Adelaide called “Uptight!”

RISE: What do you believe your purpose in life is?

I believe my purpose is to sing my music and minister to people without them even realizing it. When I was in Europe for this competition, one of the pieces I sang (which turned out to be a real hit and the winning song) was my own arrangement of “It is well with my soul,” a hymn many people would be familiar with. I arranged it in a modern Jazz sort of way, with another song called “Sea Journey” superimposed on top of it. I had the opportunity before I sang to share with the audience about the composer of the hymn and how the tragedies in his life cause him to write about the peace God grants to us. I said to the audience “when sorrows like sea billows roll in your life, ask God to help you out too!” People loved the song and the meaning behind it and yet they didn’t realize they were listening to an anointed piece of music. Praise God!

RISE: How did you come to be on Life FM?

LIZ: I’ve grown up in the same church as the Chant family for as long as I can remember and Michael Chant was looking for someone who could lead our listeners in worship, whilst building the content of the show musically. He asked me a few months ago to get involved with Life Fm and I’ve been loving it ever since! I love reaching out to people who I’ve never met, and some days I feel God puts specific encouragements and words on my mind to share. We’ve had a great response to the show and people are being reached and blessed all over South Australia!

RISE: What is most significant about your radio show ‘Celebrate’?

LIZ: The thing I love the most about worship is that God is accessible to ANYONE! After Jesus died for us on the cross, He made a way for us to enter God’s throne room just as we are. Completely ourselves with nothing to prove through rituals or ceremonies. By doing ‘Celebrate’ on Life FM we are making another way for anyone to come to Jesus and simply worship. The songs are especially chosen by Helen Cooper and myself, a

December 2009

RISE people

Liz Tobias on Jazz, Music and Worship (continued)

lot of prayer and thought goes into each show. We minister to those people who are homebound or searching for meaning in their lives, to those who are simply lazy and haven't gotten out of bed yet to make it to church in time, and those who are devoted to hearing the Word of God and sharing the same passion for Him as we at Life FM have! Everyone's invited to the party!!

You can hear Liz on Life FM, Sunday mornings from 7.00 am, or look out for her as she ministers and entertains around South Australia. Info on Life FM can be found here www.life.on.net. More on Liz Tobias at www.mamajazz.com.au

smart living

Managing Money Over the Christmas - New Year Period



Christopher Moore from Optimum Lifefocus provides some timely advice on managing our money, based on Biblical principles.

How do you manage your money now?

Unfortunately from my experience (over 40 years in banking and finance) over 95% of people don't have a plan for their money or a way to manage it.

Should we change the way we manage our money over the Christmas New Year period?

If we are managing our money properly there should be no need to alter how we manage our money.

But if we don't have a management system what should we do?

Where do we start? Do we set our priorities, set a budget, do what everyone else is doing? NO - Let's start with God's word and see what it has to say about our money

1. First Love God, Others, Self (Mark 12:29-31)
2. Then let us all be like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), that is, check God's word to confirm what I am saying is correct
3. Third make sure we seek Godly Wisdom (1Cor 1:18 – 2:16) i.e. flee from worldly wisdom to Godly Wisdom
4. Then use the Word of God as Our Money Manual (Heb 4:12)
5. Believe God – don't worry. He is our provider. (Luke 12 22-34)
6. Act on what God says (Luke 12: 13-21)
7. And you will have peace. (John 14 25-30 and John 16-33)

AND NOW LET'S LOOK AT Money and Possessions and see what God has to say about them. It is a lot actually. His Word speaks more (twice as many times) about money and possessions than faith and prayer combined.

Some of the issues are: **We cannot serve both God and Money**

Notice what this statement is not:

- It's not about Advisability i.e. a priority choice or a 'should not'
- It's not about Accountability i.e. a moral choice or a 'must not'

But this is a statement that is:

- An impossibility we have no choice i.e. IT IS A CANNOT
- You either serve one or the other
- You are a slave to God or to Money

This reminds us of Ecclesiastes 5:10: "Whoever loves money never has enough. Whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income."

So money is intoxicating and enslaves man.

Whose money is it? God's or ours?

We are stewards over all his creation (Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 8 6-7). A steward's primary goal is to be found faithful by his master as the steward uses his master's resources to accomplish the tasks delegated to him. (1 Cor 4:2).

So it is with our money and possessions, we are stewards answerable to the owner – God.

God's Ownership: You are not your own, you were bought with a price:

Deut 10:14; Lev 25:23; Chron 29:11-12; Job 41:11; Ps 24:1-2; Ps 50: 10-12; Haggai 2:8; and 1 Cor 6: 19-20 .

How do I spend God's Money?

John Wesley posed four questions that will help us decide how to spend money. Notice how the last three flow directly from the first one.

1. In spending this money, am I acting as if I owned it or am I acting as the Lord's trustee?
2. What scripture requires me to spend this money in this way?
3. Can I offer up this purchase as a sacrifice to the Lord?
4. Will God reward me for this expenditure at the resurrection of the just?1

So if we really believe that God is the owner of all that has been entrusted to us shouldn't we regularly be asking him "What do you want me to do with your money and possessions?"

How do I teach my Children about Money and Possessions?

Our children learn in the main by their experiences, both good and bad.

1. Help them learn wisdom through life experiences and NOT always bailing them out
2. Learn the value of money and discipline through saving
3. Learn the most fundamental lesson anyone can learn about

December 2009

smart living

**Managing Money Over the Christmas -
New Year Period (continued)**

finance is the lesson of giving. At Optimum Lifefocus the three principles of money in order are GIVE – SAVE - SPEND

4. And especially in today's world we need to teach them self control with their spending
5. Leaving a Legacy- Our greatest legacy for our children is to help them develop inner lives, their spiritual lives, their hearts for God.

**Some practical ways to manage money over Christmas
New Year**

1. Do you really need to spend \$X amount on presents for children? Even if you are able to afford it do you really need to spend it in the light of being God's steward?
2. Plan ahead. Put funds aside on a regular basis to help meet the cost of Christmas.
3. Remember that buying presents is not a substitute for spending time with your children/family. Most children would prefer to spend time with their family than to receive lots of gifts. It's much more fun to play with dad than with the new toy.
4. When choosing a gift think about the impact on the child/family – e.g. do you really want your son/daughter to spend all day in front of the TV playing the 10 new Wii or Playstation games they were given?
5. Do not over-spend. Is it worth going into so much debt that it will take you up to 12 months to pay for the Christmas gifts?
6. Remember some families may not be in the same position as you are so think about who you may like to help out over the festive season.
7. Set limits for gifts and stick to it.
8. Start early - think about who you will be buying gifts for and what amount of money you would like to spend. It may also help to have ideas about what you would like to buy. This may help to reduce the "impulse" buying and help you to stick to your limits.
9. What gift could you and your family give Jesus on His birthday?

May the Lord bless you and your family as you remember His gift this Christmas time.

1 John Wesley quoted by Charles Edward White "Four lessons on money from one of the World's Richest Preachers" Christian History 19 (Summer 1988) :23

Christopher Moore is a financial planner who specialises in life - his passion is to help people to live life to the full. Chris is CEO of Optimum Lifefocus Pty Ltd, which produces unique financial life plans based around their client's beliefs and values. For more information on Optimum Lifefocus go to: www.optimumlifefocus.com.au

December 2009

Inside Out

Shine for Jesus this Christmas



By regular RISE contributor and children's author Julie Flatt.

Christmas has become so

commercial and secular. Most children think that Christmas is about Santa, presents, Rudolph the red-nosed reindeer, and summer holidays.

Some parents remind their children of the importance of sharing, giving and generosity and take advantage of the wishing trees at shopping centres to buy a present for someone less fortunate.

But we know that Christmas is about so much more.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6 TNIV

So, let's bring the focus back to the birth of our Saviour.

A lovely idea that I will be doing with my girls this year is making candles for the Christmas table. We will be using wrapping paper or serviettes with Christian Christmas symbols and sticking them on pillar candles. There are a number of useful websites showing how to do this, for example, <http://www.craftideas.info/html/candle.html>

You can buy cheap pillar candles at the discount stores. The wrapping paper design can be whatever you choose: bells, candles, Christmas trees, stars, churches, angels, the manger scene. Talk about the picture choice with your children. Bells remind us that the bells ring out in churches throughout the world on Christmas morning. Candles remind us that Jesus is the light of the world. Stars remind us of the story of the wise kings following the star to Bethlehem to worship the eternal king.

Another idea is to read from the Bible as you decorate the Christmas tree. Here are some useful Bible verses to share together:

Matthew 2:1-2

Read this before decorating the tree with wise kings.

Matthew 2:9-10

Read this before decorating the tree with stars.

Luke 2:8-12

Read this before decorating the tree with shepherds and angels.

Matthew 2:11

Read this before decorating the tree with gifts.

Luke 2:13

Read this verse before decorating the tree with musical instruments and/or Christmas choir singers.

Matthew 19:14

Read this verse before decorating the tree with any "Baby's First Christmas" decorations or any precious home-made decorations that your children have made.

Luke 19:37-38

Read this before decorating the tree with bells and/or churches.

Luke 2:14

Read this before decorating the tree with any ornaments that say "PEACE" or with doves as a symbol of peace.

Isaiah 9:6-7

Read this before placing the final decoration on the top of your tree.

End the decorating with a prayer of thanksgiving for the birth and life of Jesus and for his love for each member of your family. May the Lord bless you and keep you in love, grace and peace. May the true reason for celebrating Christmas shine through you and your family as you share with others.

Julie Flatt is the author of a number of children's materials, including *My Faith Journey Through The Bible*, a *Bible Journal for Children*, *My First Bible Journal* and *The Gospel Activity Book*, all designed to help children in their walk with the Lord. These and other resource materials are available through her website www.growingfaithseeds.com. The website also provides a variety of free resources for kids, parents and children's ministry workers.

Julie lives with her husband and two young daughters on the beautiful central coast of NSW. She is involved in worship ministry and a girls youth group. She is also currently undertaking theological studies.

December 2009

Spotlight on the Nations

The Other Side of the Door

The International Centre for Prison Studies in London reports that over 9.8 million people are held in penal institutions throughout the world. Almost half of these are in the United States (2.9m), China (1.57m sentenced) or Russia (.89m). And prison populations continue to grow in many parts of the world, increasing in 71% of countries in

the past 12 months. One in every 31 adults in the US is either behind bars, on parole or on probation. 95% of prisoners will be released at some stage – with or without rehabilitation.

“I was in prison, and you came to visit me,” Jesus said. He followed on by saying: “Whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” How many of us consider Jesus’ words as a literal call to enter penal institutions and sit alongside the convicted and their families? ‘Chuck’ Colson did, but it took a stint in prison to realise the pressing need to serve the prison population.

In 1974 the Watergate scandal sent White House special counsel Chuck Colson to federal prison. A new Christian, he faced challenges and adversities that tested his faith and self respect. Paroled in 1975, Chuck could easily have opted to close the book on that dark time and move on with his life as inconspicuously as possible. But Chuck knew that God wanted him to hold onto his ties to prison and continue to identify with his fellow prisoners-despite the scepticism and scorn of Chuck’s critics. So in 1976, with little more than a vision and the support of a few friends, Chuck began Prison Fellowship (PF) to proclaim to inmates the love and the power of Jesus Christ. At first - through the support of the director of the Federal Bureau of Prisons-PF began transporting dozens of Christian prisoners out of prison for intensive training through Washington Discipleship Seminars (WDS) held in the nation’s capital. Those prisoners then returned to prison to evangelize and teach their “colleagues.” But in 1977, PF ran into a hurdle when a warden from Wisconsin refused to allow one of his prisoners to attend the WDS. Instead, he challenged: “If your program is so good, why don’t you bring it inside the prison?” Chuck and his team were up for the task, and three weeks later, 93 inmates attended PF’s first ever in-prison seminar in Oxford, Wisconsin.

In 1979 Britain caught the vision of Prison Fellowship and a branch was established in England. This launched a movement to reach prisoners worldwide and 30 years later Prison Fellowship International is active in over 100 countries.

Prison Fellowship Australia was formed in 1981 and is now one of the 114 national affiliates that make up Prison Fellowship International. Their purpose is to reach out to prisoners, ex-prisoners, their families and those affected by crime, and demonstrate the love of Jesus Christ for all people.

PFI is now the world’s largest and most extensive association of national Christian ministries working within the criminal justice field.

December 2009

Spotlight on the Nations

The Angel Tree Blessing



The same year that Chuck Colson started Prison Fellowship, a former bank robber named Mary Kay Beard was released from prison in Alabama. She never forgot the faces of the children who would visit their mothers in prison. At Christmas time, their mothers would wrap small toiletry items, such as soap or toothpaste, to give to the children, since they had no other gifts for them. She found that people were eager to help these often forgotten victims of crime, and so the Angel Tree project was born in 1982. The concept quickly took root in Prison Fellowship ministries all over the world,

and now more than 700,000 children are touched by Angel Tree in more than 45 countries.

Helen Glanville, Executive Director of Prison Fellowship SA asks "Can you remember when you were a child waiting for Christmas morning to arrive so you could open your presents to see what was in them? 'Did mum and dad get me what I wished for? Is there a special surprise for me?'"

For most of us that special morning could not come quickly enough. Overwhelming, mounting excitement builds up for days. 'I'm so excited, I just can't wait till Christmas'. Do you remember saying that?

"Hopefully", says Helen, "you were not disappointed, forgotten, overlooked or missed out on your presents. If you did, you would understand the sadness some children feel when their hopes and dreams are shattered when their Christmas present turns out to be very little or second hand. It can be very hard especially when their friends at school might be getting exactly what they asked for and more."

"This is where Prison Fellowship steps in."

Every Christmas, through the Angel Tree program, Prison Fellowship blesses the children of prisoners by ensuring each child personally receives two beautifully selected and wrapped brand new gifts from their imprisoned parent at prison visiting times. These go into six prisons so the whole family can share the joy. Over 500 presents were supplied to six prisons through South Australia in 2008.

Angel Tree gives churches an opportunity to share Christ's love by helping to meet the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of the families of prisoners. Many churches make an annual commitment to this highly rewarding program, and recognize it as a way to care for some of the most overlooked members of our communities.

Helen says "Children of prisoners are probably some of the loneliest children in Australia. They feel isolated, rejected, abandoned and ashamed. There are more than 38,000 children in Australia who are affected by having a parent in prison. And while the children are blameless, they live in a kind of prison too."

'It was the worst time of my life when dad was in prison. Things were really tough. I felt shame and embarrassment. Even at school some kids put me down. I will never forget how good it felt to get those presents every Christmas while he was away.' James

Many people who are in prison, or have been in prison, worry about their children taking the same path. The good news is - we can do something today to help stop children going to prison tomorrow by providing a gift to a special child through an Angel Tree.

This Christmas why not make a decision to have an authentic impact on some of the most vulnerable children in South Australia by being part of the Angel Tree program.

For security reasons, Angel Tree Christmas presents are selected and wrapped by an independent warehouse approved by the Department for Correctional Services. If you would like to participate you can sponsor one or more children for just \$30 per child.

More information on Prison Fellowship SA and Angel Tree available at: www.pfi.org.au, email sa.office@prisonfellowship.org.au or call 8272 0323. Sources: www.prisonfellowship.org; www.pfi.org and Prison Fellowship Australia – SA at www.pfi.org.au, International Centre for Prison Studies, Kings College, London.