

My Final Christmas List



By Dr. Mike Murphy

As a child, I started making my Christmas list before the leaves even began to turn. And as the days to Christmas became shorter, my list grew longer. With each commercial came another toy I just had to have. My list read each year like a novel, far more resembling Tolstoy than cliff notes. With each Batman and Superman episode, my list grew. As I watched the Saturday morning cartoons, I sat with pencil and paper in hand. From Erector sets that I quickly lost the pieces of, to electronic football games that vibrated the players all over the field, each were toys that Santa just had to find a way to make fit in his bag.

As I grew, my list greatly changed. Although my list became much shorter, the toys I added to the list became much more expensive. Televisions, stereos, and video gaming systems soon replaced Legos and Battleship. I wanted Santa's bag no less full, just filled with items that required a lot more space.

It took me years to figure out what was really important enough to add to my list. Years to realize that what I wanted the most could not fit in Santa's bag, but could easily fit in my heart and in my soul. That true happiness could not be found in the presents left for me under the tree, but could only be seen in the eyes of the One who gave me the only present I will ever need.

Although the words and the purpose of my list has changed, I still make the time to fill out my list each year. As I sit here today, I find myself again with pencil and paper, ready to make out my list. But as I pick up my pencil, I realize this will probably be the last time I do so. The reality and current state of my health, tells me that I am close to permanently placing my pencil down and no longer being able to reach for the paper. The cancer that attacks my body has spread to the point that I realize my time is greater measured in terms of days, than it is by years.

But as I make out my final Christmas list, I find myself today just as eager to pick up my pencil as I was when I was a child so many years ago. Just as anxious for the items I place on my list, as I was watching the commercials of those Saturday morning cartoons that filled my childhood. A list this year that is more a prayer than a request. A list that can not be filled by Santa, but only be seen in the prayers that I offer to the Lord above. Prayers that my eyes long to see for this Church. Prayers that I long to hear in the words of my fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. And prayers that my heart desires for each of you that are reading this today.

I pray for this Church, that we will remember again what it means to be the Church. A Church that is not defined by what this world sees as our calling, but will again become what the Lord has always been calling us to be. I pray the Lord will open our doors to hear His words being taught. Not hearing words from our pulpits that make excuses for us, but words that bring growth and maturity to us. Words that echo the voice of Paul as he told us, "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and

blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.?(Ephesians 4:14).

I pray that He will again find this Church as a place of fellowship. A fellowship that encourages us. A fellowship that instructs us. A fellowship that commits us. A fellowship that brings out every ounce of true compassion that is in us. A fellowship that is seen in the reflection of love that Christ has placed in each of us.

I pray the Lord will again be able to describe this Church by the blessings that flow out of us, not by the elaborate structures that so often holds us. A place where God's glory is honored, and a place where the Cross stands tall. A place where bread is not just broke, but shared. A place so filled with the Spirit that it forces us out of the doors, and into the communities that surround us.

I pray the Lord will not find this Church cowering in a corner, but proudly and powerfully on our knees before the only One who can ever lead us. Fully armored, and ready for battle. Realizing this battle cannot be won through appeasement to this world, but can only be fought and won with our heads bowed, and His Word in hand. A place where prayer is not just taught, but practiced. Where our battle cries are proclaimed with our eyes closed, and our hands raised in praise.

I pray the Lord will find this Church again giving a clear message of salvation, not heard in us repeating the whispers of this world's desires. A place where faith is not just heard in our voice, but seen in our deeds. A place that shines in the darkness as bright as the light that Christ has placed in all of us. A place that again is not just Christ-like, but a place where the hinges of the doors are removed so we can be Christ following.

I pray for my brothers and sisters in Christ. That Christ will not just be heard in our needs, but will heard in every word of our wants and in each syllable of our desires. I pray that our words will not just speak of Christ, but that each word will call us into action for Christ. For too long, the Lord has seen us as the observers, not as the doers. We have becomes those that slow down when they see a wreck on the side of the road. Starring from a distance at what we see, eyes wide and mouth opened in shock. But never finding it in our hearts to stop our cars, rushing out to help in the tragedy we see. So sadly, we have become more attracted to the dramatic than to the need. A need Christ has called us to.

I pray that we will again understand what it means to be the Body of Christ. A Body that never forgets that Christ is our Head. A Body that follows the lead of the Head, and is enjoined in His glory. A Body that reflects Christ, and allows the world to see Christ. A Body that is always Spirit filled, and is always Spirit driven. And a Body that knows the importance of each part, knowing that if each part works as it was created, the Body as a whole is capable of astonishing this world. A Body that does not just speak, hear, see, and feel His love, but would never think to let a day go by when we do not demonstrate that love.

And I pray for each of you. I pray that each of you will realize what Paul meant when he told us, ?I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.?(Philippians 4:13). I pray these words will not be limited to the pages you read, but will be words that leap from the pages, calling you to action each and every day. Christ told us that nothing is impossible with God(Matthew 19:26), and a part of that nothing includes each of you. Place no limitations on God, and expect no limitations on what the Lord can do through a willing heart. Never wait until tomorrow, what He is calling you to do today. Each day, He lays so many opportunities at our feet. Opportunities that allow His hands to use each of you in the most incredible of ways. Opportunities to change the lives of those around you. Opportunities to bring endless glory to His name. Never feel these opportunities are to great for you to handle, nothing is too big when you have God by your side. And never feel each opportunity He gives you is too small to really matter. With the smallest of sparks can come the greatest of fires. That single spark you start today, may be the flames He calls others to fan tomorrow. That single spark you set, my create a fire so bright all the world can see the Light from it. Never let these opportunities pass you by. I have so often said, the opportunity you let slip by today, may be the blessing you will never know tomorrow.

As I finish my final Christmas list, I do so not with a tear, but with a smile. A smile of hope, Hope that I hear in the voices, and see on the faces of so many of you. God has incredible plans for so many of your lives. Plans that will lead you in the most amazing of directions, touching the lives of the most remarkable people, bringing glory to His name in the most wondrous of ways. There is no item I could write on my list that I wish I could see more. No words I could place on the paper than would ever mean more. Items on

my list that I know the Lord is going to fulfill through so many of you. Although I may not be here to see my list delivered, I have faith that each prayer on my list will be answered. Answered by God through each of you in the most amazing of ways.

I pray that my final Christmas list will serve as the smallest of sparks, a spark that the Lord will use so many of you to turn into a flame. A flame that will burn so bright that I will see it in the heavens. A flame that will fill your life with the most amazing stories of what God is doing through you each day.. Stories that will have me awaiting your arrival, so I can hear for an eternity all the amazing things the Lord has accomplished through each of you.

Praying each of you will be a part of my final Christmas list.

Dr MW Murphy