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Do You See What I See? (Jesus Goes Christmas Shopping)

BY DEACON PHIL

The following is adapted from the Forward and Chapter One of my book, *If Jesus Were a Therapist: Modern Parables for Emotional and Spiritual Health*.

Jesus was at the mall with his friends, doing some Christmas shopping. He felt a bit conflicted about the whole thing. Jesus liked the giving part, but he was getting a bit irritated with all the commercialism and profiteering. It seemed clear to him that a number of shoppers were poor people, who were most likely going into debt, a debt that would be compounded by the high interest rates they would be paying after the holidays. It didn't seem right that people, who were already poor, would be seduced into making their problem worse, so that others might profit from their misery.

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Jesus' friends had to restrain him from turning over the sales counters and throwing the cash registers to the floor. (He had done something like this before, and had made a lot of enemies. It had something to do with moneylenders in the temple at Jerusalem... but that was a long time ago.)

Once he had calmed down, Jesus tried to explain to his friends what was going on in his mind and heart. Realizing that American men and women of the twenty first century had trouble grasping complex, philosophical concepts like justice, peace and love, he racked his brain for some way to help them understand. Maybe if he used an analogy, employing something that was familiar to his friends, he could get his point across.

His eyes searched the crowded store, and he noticed that many people in the mall doing their Christmas shopping wore glasses. They were mostly good people...Jesus knew this... he had this knack for knowing what was in people's hearts. In fact, he thought that they were all basically good people. That was another one of his quirks...he saw the good in everybody. But they just didn't **see** the commercial trap they had all fallen into!

How could he help them understand that things were not as they appeared to be? Jesus said, **"Look at all those people wearing glasses. I bet you guys think they all have visual problems, and that their glasses help them see things clearly."**

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Consider a Pair of Glasses...

Glass is everywhere. Our homes, schools, stores and businesses have glass windows. We drink from glasses every day. And many of us wear glasses. I suppose that a good number of those who are reading this are wearing 'eye-glasses'. Some of you have worn them since you were a kid. Others, like me, began using reading glasses in my forties. In my sixty seventh year I now need glasses to see up close, mid-range, and far away. Even those with perfect vision wear sunglasses. So almost everybody, at some time, has worn a pair of glasses. (Don't be fooled by those folks who walk around without them, and don't trip or bump into things...they probably have contact lenses.)

There's a Lesson to Be Learned from a Pair of Glasses

Glasses have several functions. Sometimes glasses are used to protect the eye, as is the case with plastic safety glasses, or sunglasses that filter out harmful UV waves. But the primary reason for wearing glasses is to see more clearly. Those of you who are my age or older who wear reading glasses may remember the experience of being in a restaurant, and for the first time having difficulty reading the menu.

For months I complained to my wife, Mary, that restaurants these days were too dimly lit...it was never that dark before! I was also convinced that the menus were being printed in smaller type. Mary, who had worn glasses and contact lenses since childhood, suggested that I might need reading glasses. Me? The guy who took pride in his better-than-perfect vision! There was nothing wrong with my eyes. It was the poor lighting and lousy menus...that was the problem!

After mistakenly ordering food I didn't want, and eating out of the salad plate of the person next to me on several occasions, I bit the bullet and got a pair of reading glasses from the drug store. It

was amazing to see how quickly the restaurant industry decided to turn up the lights and provide decent sized menus for its customers.

When Jesus said, "You have eyes, but you do not see," he was not referring to blind people. He was commenting on perception.

Glasses help a person see more clearly. But there's something even more important than visual acuity. There's perception. We have all heard the saying about looking at the world through rose-colored glasses. There are tinted sunglasses that make the sky look pink, or yellow, or red. The sky remains blue, but it seems to be a different color when viewed through colored lenses.



When Jesus said, "You have eyes, but you do not see," he was not referring to blind people. He was commenting on perception. Two people who see a homeless person on the street see the same man. But one sees a raggedy, smelly person to be avoided at all costs, while the other sees a child of God and is moved with pity. It's all about perception.

When I see you, I see more than a person of a certain age, race, gender, size and shape. I see you through my eyes, and so I am seeing you in terms of what you might mean to me. And I will react accordingly, for good or for bad. This is true whether you are a stranger, and even if you are familiar to me. If you are a stranger, I may like or dislike you, fear you or not, based not only on your appearance, but based on my

perception of you. If you are a man or a woman of my race or not, I may react differently to you. The same is true if you are older, or younger, a male or female.

So it's not really just about you, who you really are, it's also about me and my perceptions. This is even true with people I know and love. How many times have we misjudged the motives of a husband or wife, parent or child, or a good friend who has hurt our feelings or made us angry? It is not just what I see you do (or hear you say), it is the meaning I give to it. It is what my perception tells me.

Christmas Reflections

As you wind down the harried, commercial pre-Christmas rush, take a moment to notice people who are wearing glasses. Then think of how all of us see everything through our own figurative glasses, our perception. If your reaction to persons and events is positive, be thankful. If your reaction is negative, pause and consider your eyeglasses, (Your metaphoric way of looking at things). Go deeper into your mind and your spirit, asking God for guidance in this inner exploration. Ask yourself the following questions about how you “see” things, especially during this Christmas season.

Am I “seeing” Christmas mostly through the lenses of commerce, buying and selling? Is it mostly about giving and receiving “stuff”? If so, can I go deeper and see things as Jesus would? Consider the theme from the Christmas Carol, Little Drummer Boy. The poor boy had nothing to give to the even poorer Baby Jesus, so he “played my best for him...me and my drum.” What do I give and receive this Christmas that comes from my deepest “best” and not just from my wallet or purse?

Am I “seeing” the individuals who make up the crowds of people who congregate in the malls and clog the parking lots and highways as they make their final preparations for Christmas, or do I just see a crowd of people who are basically in my way, irritating the heck out of me? Can I go deeper and consider that each one of them has their

own lives, their own joys and sorrows, their own challenges? If I could only “see” each of these persons as “made in the image and likeness of God” would I be so irritated with them when they “get in my way”?

Am I “seeing” Christmas with all its activities as the culmination of Black Friday, Cyber Monday and Green

Tuesday? Have I sufficiently “celebrated” those minor Christmas “holidays” by over-spending, over-shopping and wearing myself out running from store to store, trying to get “a deal”. Can I go deeper and reflect on the “true meaning of Christmas”, a phrase that has been so overused that it has lost its meaning. Consider how Ebenezer Scrooge in The Christmas Carol learned “to keep Christmas everyday” in his heart after “seeing” what his life was, and could be, after his encounters with the ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future. Consult your own “ghosts” of Christmas Past, Present and Future (your personal history and your truest dreams and aspirations) and “see” what lessons you might learn to “keep Christmas” in your heart all the year long.

Do you see what I see? Do you see what Jesus sees?





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