

SHRINKING or GROWING?

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The Diminishing Effect of Big Holidays

By Pastor Robert M. Reid

President George W. Bush isn't the man he used to be.

Now, before you conclude that I am making a political statement, let me assure you I am not. I am making a statement about his physical stature. In August 2006 our president had his annual physical check-up. According to White House doctors, the U.S. president is exceedingly fit for a man his age—he's an enthusiastic bicyclist—but they also noted that he is a quarter of an inch shorter than he was just a year ago. Thus he isn't the man he used to be!

It seems that men and women shrink as they age. According to CBS News, "The lubricants in our joints dry up, our bones lose mineral density, and even our brains become physically smaller. And there seems to be no real way of slowing this biological deflation. Not exercise, not diet (though there is some debate here on the calcium front) and certainly not status." One website that claims to monitor the height of public figures reports, "Actor Clint Eastwood and wrestler Hulk Hogan have each lost about three inches since their prime." Are they, too, less than the men they used to be? Now I have an explanation of why my pants seem to be growing!

While this might happen in the physical realm, it certainly should not happen in the spiritual realm for a believer in Jesus Christ. Paul admonished the believers at Thessalonica to keep growing, to not become less than they used to be. He wrote, "You should abound more and more...to please God" and "Concerning brotherly love...that you increase more and more" (1 Thessalonians. 4:1, 9, 10). He did not consider one's walk with Christ as a time for shrinking but as a time for growing "more and more." I suppose we might summarize his challenge this way: In the way you please God, be more than you used to be; in the way you love others, be more than you used to be.

Unfortunately, the upcoming holiday season can be a time of shrinking spiritually rather than growing. The busyness of the season can shrink our relationship with Christ to an afterthought rather than grow it into the consuming passion it should be. Personal, family, and even corporate worship may be neglected because we have to get ready for the holiday at hand. Unconsciously we overlook the reason for Thanksgiving—to give thanks for God's blessings; and the meaning of Christmas—to remember the gift of Christ who came to "save the people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21).

Our focus shifts to feasting on fabulous foods, to family traditions, personal desires, and gathering gifts. In such an environment, pleasing

God may become a shrinking passion in our lives.

The season can also diminish the way we love people. Too often the season generates rudeness to, and from, store clerks; shut-ins or those in non-traditional families get overlooked or intentionally neglected; family feuds resurface at seasonal celebrations; and people are generally looked upon as interruptions rather than persons in need of attention and affirmation. Christ wants us to treat people with "love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us" (Ephesians 5:2). This type of mind will "let each esteem others better than himself" and "let each...look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Philippians 2:3, 4). Love for other people needs to blossom, not wither, in the coming holidays.

As the busy holiday season comes upon us, let us evaluate how we are pleasing God and loving others. If there is

evidence of "shrinkage" in these

areas, make the adjustments necessary to promote growth.

It may require:

- A readjustment of priorities. How important is it to bake fancy cookies rather than spend time reading a book to a child?
- An intentional effort to cut back on activities and traditions to allow time for worshipping God and loving people. Do we really need to watch all the TV specials?
- A Christ-like view of people, with a heart that is "moved with compassion" (Mark 6:34). Is your "people radar" picking up on the needs of others?

Let us grow this holiday season, "more and more," not physically, but spiritually.

