

Buying Christmas

Are We Spending Less this Year? Is that a Good Thing?

By Paul Asay

What Happened:

The Christmas shopping season is in full swing, and merchants want you to spend more of your money than ever before. Lots of companies offered huge discounts during Black Friday, and many opened their doors on Thanksgiving, as well.

It's all designed to keep consumers spending like crazy, but experts say that despite the big sales and long hours, sales are actually down slightly this year. "You can try to get the consumer to spend earlier," says Marshal Cohen, an industry analyst for the NPD Group, which researches consumer trends, "but that doesn't mean there's more money in their pockets."

While it's still really early in the Christmas buying season, figures such as these are a little discouraging for retailers. It's expected that Americans will spend more than \$600 million for Christmas gifts. Adult shoppers say they're expecting to spend around \$781 each, and that doesn't count money spent on trees, cards, decorations or eggnog.

Maybe the news isn't so bad for Americans themselves. While most of us like to have a good bounty of gifts waiting for us under the tree, it's easy for us to get distracted by all the holiday's bells and whistles. While we're not at risk of missing the true meaning of Christmas—we're in church, after all—Christians still can be a little overwhelmed by all the bright lights and shiny packages.

It's always important to remember that long after our presents get lost in our closets and all the lights have been taken down, the most precious gifts we have are those with whom we spend Christmas—and why we celebrate Christmas in the first place.

Talk About It:

How much are you planning to spend on Christmas this year? Is it more or less than last year? Do you plan to give a present that doesn't cost anything at all (e.g., a coupon to cut the lawn for a year or three free babysitting certificates)? Do you or does your family try to give to charity this time of year?

What's the most memorable present you've ever received? What's the most memorable you've ever given? Besides the presents, what makes Christmas special for you? What do you especially like about this time of year?

Do you think people spend too much for Christmas? Has it become too commercialized? If you had your way, how would you change how people celebrate the holiday? How would you change how your family spends it?

What the Bible Says:

"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God" (Heb. 13:16).

"Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver" (2 Cor. 9:7).

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6).