

## One Pilgrim's Progress

December 2007

Present money was tight for us this year. Our family had a change of jobs and some unexpected home repairs. My husband made me promise to stay within a fixed budget that has not grown for almost four years. Each year, my presents get smaller and smaller. Each year, one more friend on my list is forgotten, one more teacher doesn't get this year's homemade gift. But I was determined to keep my promise, enjoy the giving season, and start the year right.

So, when we met some friends in Target a week before Christmas and my daughter's friend mentioned that she would like to give my daughter a friendly gift, you can imagine how I winced. We discreetly said goodbye and skirted down another aisle, looking for yet, another present. We juggled a few presents in the cart, put back some unnecessary impulse buy, and headed for the check out stand before we ran into, yet, another friend.

I got in line behind a man who didn't have much in his basket. I figured he would help me exit the store quickly. And at the last minute, he grabbed three gift cards, the ones of the cute dog, with the dark spot on one ear. He threw down the plastic cards and said to his companion, "How much do you think? \$500.?" It was the second time I visibly winced within a half hour. Any moment, and I could feel my eyelid beginning to twitch.

He explained to the clerk that he was adopting three families this Christmas season, and this was just the last thing he wanted to do for them. The clerk called the credit card service for an approval code, since all the cards were over the store limit. I thought about how wonderful it would feel for our church to adopt a family or two, especially at this

time of year. Then, the clerk informed him that his card was “locked” due to all his recent purchases. He explained that all those were for the families, so, she said, he would have to wait for a supervisor in order to unlock his card.

I pulled my checkbook from my purse and began entering all my holiday purchases. I estimated the total of my gifts on the conveyor belt and looked at my bank balance. Yep. I was within my budget, and I still had money for the last couple of family presents I had not been able to find.

The gentleman ahead of me talked with the supervisor, the clerk loaded his gift cards, and only then, did I notice that his companion had been watching me. He apologized for their purchase taking so long.

But I was elated. That small acknowledgement was a gift for me. I replied to both these kings of generosity that I didn’t mind the delay in the least. I said, “Thank you for taking care of so many people. I only wish I could do the same. God bless you both. I mean it. God bless you!”

Needless to say, upon hearing my speech, the men, the clerk, and everyone around looked at me like I was out of my mind. But God was there, and I had to speak his name.

Questions to elicit comments:

When was the last time you heard anyone say God Bless You without a sneeze involved?

Would you like to see our church adopt a family? Adopt a child from Darfur? Brighton?