

# ATTACK OF THE

# "GIMME BUG"

**L**AST YEAR, as the holidays approached, I read an article detailing a "disease" running wild in America. It's called *affluenza*, a term a sociologist coined to describe our country's insatiable appetite for material consumption. While *affluenza*'s prevalent year round, the "gimme bug" is epidemic as Christmas approaches.

As extravagant Christmas trees emerged in store windows and holiday music cackled from loudspeakers, the threat of *affluenza* weighed on my mind. Surely *my* children—one-year-old Elizabeth and three-year-old Lukas—weren't victims of this disease. "Besides," I said in an effort to ease my mind, "they never seem to have as many toys as the kids next door." The thought brought momentary comfort, but as I looked more closely at my family, I couldn't ignore a nagging feeling I was wrong.

In the corner of my son's room stood an overstuffed toy box. Downstairs in the playroom, many of last year's hottest Christmas gifts gathered dust. Baby toys and rattles discarded by my daughter now were claimed by our new puppy. Horrified, I realized our one-salary, struggling-to-stick-to-our-frugal-budget, average family had fallen prey to the nation's epidemic.

**A**S THE WEEKS PASSED, my mind became a film reel of memories. An embarrassing image of my children on a previous Christmas day shuffled to the forefront. We'd just finished the gift exchange at

## HOW OUR FAMILY WARDS OFF HOLIDAY GREED

by Alicia Bruxvoort

Grandma's. The children were buried beneath brightly colored wrapping paper and shiny metallic bows. Surrounded by towers of flashy new toys, my then two-year-old son had dared to ask, "Is that all?" Oh, yes, *affluenza* had struck before!

Next emerged a picture of my husband standing amidst drifts of snow with an assortment of boxes at his feet. Beads of sweat dripped from his forehead as he attempted to stuff our children's loot into our car. I was crammed between two crabby children in the backseat of our weighted-down car while oversized gifts claimed my rightful spot next to the driver.

Something had to be done! A verse from a recent Bible study ran through my mind, "I came that [you] may have life, and have [it] abundantly" (John 10:10,





**PRIMITIVE NOISES!  
UNTAMED URGES!**

**OBNOXIOUS CRIES!  
UNREASONABLE DEMANDS!**



NAS). Was my family missing out on abundant life because our "stuff" got in the way?

With new resolve, I approached my husband. After some discussion, we decided to sort through our things and find items to donate, then enlist the children's help in choosing some of their belongings to share. While we realized Elizabeth, our one-year-old, was too young to understand our mission, we were certain that three-year-old

Lukas would benefit from our project.

Invigorated, I discovered a local shelter was getting ready to hold its annual "Christmas Store." Every December, the mission sets up a makeshift store. Shortly before Christmas, people who otherwise couldn't afford to give their loved ones gifts are invited to shop for very low-priced, used, but in good condition, presents the community has donated. The store preserves people's dignity, but better yet, it allows the cus-

tomers to experience the joy of giving rather than simply being the recipients of handouts. I immediately was sold.

The next morning, I explained to Lukas that there were kids in our city who didn't have any toys. In my best I-have-a-great-idea voice, I suggested we hunt through our toys and find things to share. I waited in anticipation for my son's equally excited reply. Only silence followed. Finally, Lukas looked up from his cereal bowl and informed me in his no-further-discussion-needed tone, "I like *all* my toys."

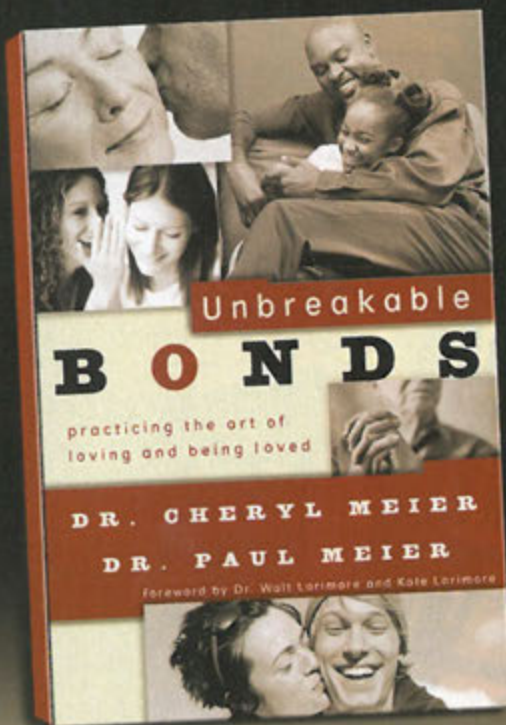
Meanwhile, my husband piled flawless items of clothing on our bed: pants he hadn't worn since college but had hung in his closet "just in case the diet worked." I smiled in approval at his choices and started in on my closet across the room. One look inside, and I realized my beautiful wardrobe of career clothing had sat untouched for the past two years I'd been a stay-at-home mom. I knew the downtown mission served many women trying to get their feet back on the ground and hold down jobs. Without further hesitation, I pulled the suits and dresses out of my closet and added them to my husband's pile. I continued through the house, purging my kitchen of new coffee cups, extra sets of measuring spoons, and random gadgets I'd received as wedding gifts but never used. The more I found to give away, the more I wanted to share. It was exhilarating! As I packaged the donations into boxes, Lukas walked by. I explained our agenda again and prayed once more for a way to entice my son to join our project.

**T**HREE DAYS LATER, my prayer was answered. That evening, Lukas and I watched Winnie the Pooh. During the movie, Pooh made a wish come true for his friend Christopher Robin. My son clapped his hands in glee as the story ended with a dream fulfilled.

"Lukas," I whispered. "You could be a dream-maker just like Pooh!" I saw a sparkle in his eyes. It was an offer too good to refuse.

"Remember those kids I told you about, the ones who don't have any toys?" I asked him.

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"Uh huh."

"Well, they're wishing for someone to bring them a toy this Christmas." I held my breath and waited. Something clicked, and my previously selfish son was transformed.

"I could make those wishes come true!" he boasted with three-year-old confidence. The rest of the evening was a blur. Lukas bolted upstairs, threw open his toy box, and pulled out toys he hadn't used in months. I watched with pride at my son's display of generosity.

My little project was complete. I smiled as I returned to my room and began closing the boxes. Just as I was stacking them in the corner, Lukas trudged in with another armful of toys.

"I really don't play with this much," he said as he handed me his favorite toy. "And I could give those kids my safari animals," he mentioned as he plopped his brand-new birthday gift on top of the sealed boxes.

My simple holiday project was getting out of hand. I was trying to talk Lukas out of such extravagant generosity when God reminded me, *But Alicia, I remember one Christmas when I gave everything away for you.* I stopped, startled at the thought, shocked at the boundaries of my own generosity.

AS WE DROPPED OFF our goods at the mission, I smiled at the way our holiday season had begun, whispering a prayer that Christmas truly would be different this year. While I don't suppose donating gifts to a charity rid our family of the "gimme bug," it began a valiant shift. I knew change was happening when my kids and I were shopping after Thanksgiving, and Lukas picked up a shiny remote-control car gleaming in the toy section. I prepared to give my ritual you-don't-need-more-toys speech, when, with a sudden grin, Lukas waved the toy at me and gushed, "Mom, this car would make the best present for a boy who doesn't have many toys." I smiled at our progress.


While I enjoyed watching my son grow in generosity, I found myself approaching the holidays with a new outlook, too. I offered to baby-sit for my stressed-out neighbor so she could

finish her Christmas shopping; I baked dozens of cookies just to give them away; I planned a birthday party for Jesus as his big day drew near. With the help of 12 preschoolers, some party horns, and a birthday cake, we celebrated God's best Christmas gift ever.

As Christmas passed and the New Year dawned, I was thankful God had been willing to teach me a priceless lesson through an unsuspecting three

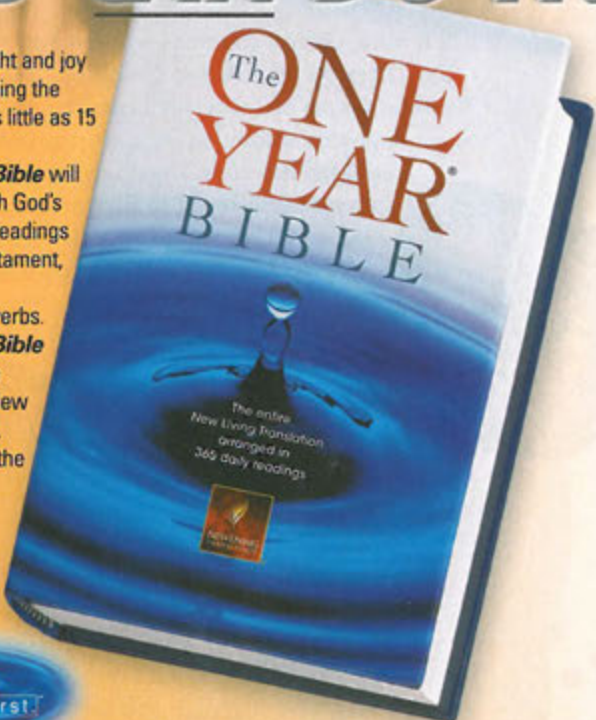
year old. Generosity has no limits. God proved that long ago when he gave his only Son on the very first Christmas so we might have eternal life. We can't outgive him. We can't repay him. We simply can accept the amazing gift of his love and experience Christ's lavish generosity. Now that's a lesson I could learn every year! **tcw**

ALICIA BRUXVOORT, a freelance writer and speaker, lives with her family in Nebraska.




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