

## Generational Influence

Over the years, Christmas has changed for me. In my younger years, I was focused on the materialistic side of Christmas, like shopping for presents for loved ones. When my husband and I were first married over 30 years ago, we spent Christmas visiting either of our families. As our family grew, with us having a son, three nieces and a nephew, the focus of our Christmas changed.

As I ponder how I am connecting and influencing others in my family for the Gospel during the Christmas season, I am reminded of my days being the one influenced and the one looking to be connected. Early in our marriage, my mother-in-law started to have a huge impact over my life. She has always been very grounded in her faith. She has always pointed us to Jesus with her actions, words, Christmas cards, presents, but most all, her love for us.

Like many families when our children were small, we had Christmas traditions filled with baking cookies, going to see neighborhood decorations, serving the less fortunate, sending Christmas cards, parties and more. My mother-in-law was always in the heart of each tradition. She and I would spend time together, either in the kitchen or at some sort of craft-type class. We would paint or decorate ceramics, which would be gifts for others. No matter where we were, her favorite topic of discussion was her faith.

In our early years of marriage, I created homemade Christmas presents for friends and family members. This was mostly because of financial necessity. Over the years, however, I have grown to enjoy creating gifts for folks. My mother-in-law especially has always enjoyed my homemade presents and even a couple of them continue to hang on the walls of her home. One example is last year's presents were empty recipe books and cards that were faith-based with scripture. I hand wrote the cards and included recipes from my mother-in-law, as well as their favorites from my collection. My heart just skips a beat to receive a picture from any of them of a dish they have made with the book in the background!

Today, the baton of influencing the next generation for the Gospel has been passed on from my mother-in-law to me. Our family has spread from South Carolina to New York, Arkansas, Louisiana and here in Georgia. Two of my nieces have married and we now have added three great nieces, two great nephews and one on the way. Being so scattered, we don't always get everyone together at Christmas. Technology helps through Skype, but it's just not the same. Nevertheless, showing the love of Jesus through my actions, my words, my Christmas cards, my presents, but above all, my love for them is my way of influencing each of them for the Gospel. Jesus says, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35 NIV).

*Written by Becky Skelton*

*The Skelton Family*

