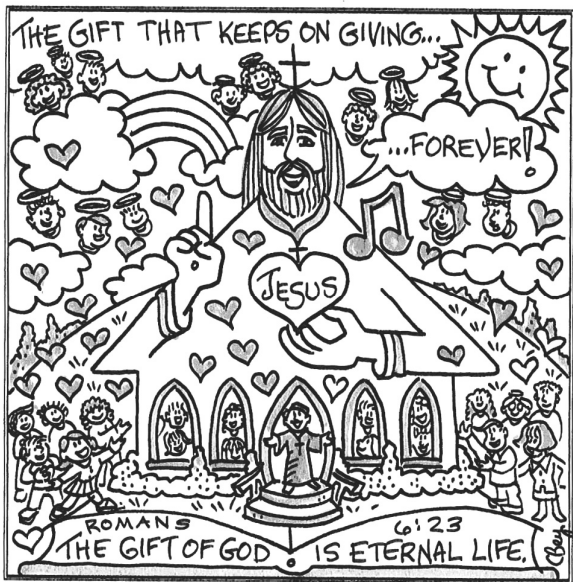

A Gift to Enjoy

*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Romans 6:23*



My first paycheck. \$100! A ONE with two zeroes behind it! It didn't matter that I spent a week pulling weeds with thistles in a 45-acre field. It didn't matter that I sweltered under a hot July sun. It didn't matter that I earned minimum wage. It had my name on it. I earned it. Some people put the first dollar they earned in a frame and hang it on the wall, but mine, mine was going straight into the bank.

There is another paycheck that I'm not so excited to take to the bank or to see hanging over my head. It comes in the form of guilt pricking my conscience far deeper than a thistle could ever penetrate my skin. Sometimes I see it when my temper flares

hotter than the summer sun. I feel it when I know I should be more considerate, more caring and more loving toward others around me. So I work harder to do what's right and try harder to do better than before, but still it never seems to be enough. And it isn't enough, because the Bible tells me the wages of my sin is death—and it's your paycheck, too.

But there is another way, and it doesn't come by earning, but by receiving. It's not a paycheck. It's a gift that has been bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus, earned by his death on the cross and shared freely with you. The Bible says, "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." In Jesus, we are given what we don't deserve: eternal life. We have something that will last forever. It will never run out, be used up or be taken away.

That takes all the pressure off, doesn't it? Instead of the failures of our past, we can look to Jesus' perfect life of love. Instead of the pressures of tomorrow, we can look to the promise of eternal life that is already won for us by Jesus' dying and rising from the dead. As a result, life is not a burden, but a gift to enjoy always.