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exciting. It is worth mentioning, however, that we don't have a television, so she may not understand the degree of her impoverishment. This holiday idea may sound modest. It is modest. And yet at the same time, it is pretty radical. Christmas, it turns out, is a bulwark of the nation's economy. Many businesses do a third of their volume in the months just before Dec. 25. And so it hits a nerve to question whether we should celebrate the birth of a man who said we should give all that we have to the poor by showering one another with motorized tie racks. When we began the \$100 campaign, merchants writing to the local newspapers made it clear to us what a threatening idea it was. Newspaper columnists thought it was pretty extreme, too. One said that while our message had merit, it would do too much damage to business. And he was right, or at least not wrong. If we all backed out of Christmas excess, we would sink many a gift shop. If we threw less lavish office parties, caterers would suffer and florists and liquor wholesalers and so on down the feeding chain. But we have to start somewhere if we are to climb down from the unsustainable heights we have reached, and Christmas might as well be it. When we began to spread our idea about celebrating Christmas in a new way, we were earnest and sober. Big-time Christmas was an environmental disgrace all that wrapping paper and all those batteries. The money could be so much better spent: The price of one silk necktie could feed a village for a day. And struggling to create a proper Christmas drives poor families into debt. Here in New York, January finds many people cutting back on heat to pay off their Christmas bills. Those were all good reasons to scale back.

But as we continued our campaign, we found we really weren't interested in changing Christmas because we wanted fewer batteries. We wanted more joy. We felt cheated by the Christmases we were having so rushed, so busy and so full of hype that we couldn't relax and enjoy the season. You may be too late for this Christmas. You already may have bought your pile of stuff. In fact, turning the focus of Christmas back to Christ is a long and patient effort. But to judge from our family's holidays in recent years, it is well worth the effort.

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