



Point of View

Dear Marketplace Friend,

I've met Bil Cornelius (*he's a "1-1 Bil"*), and he's a good guy. "The Ultimate Free Gift" was his idea, and he takes all credit/criticism for it.

The national news media lost their calendars late last week, it seems. The word "Easter" was absent most news reporting; if the holiday was no-anchor's-land, the term "Resurrection" didn't have a chance. What would it take to make the news on Christianity's biggest day of the year? Cornelius cracked that code: *he conceived **The Ultimate Free Gift** at Bay Area Fellowship Church.*

People started lining up to get into the Easter weekend services (*19 different services offered at six sites in/ around Corpus Christi, Texas*) long before the doors opened. On their way in, worshipers (?) deposited their entries into the collection boxes. Before the lilies drooped at the end of Sunday, 15 cars - among them were BMWs, an Audi, a Jaguar - as well as 300 bicycles, skateboards, flat-screen televisions... and 15,000 gift bags, each



with an estimated \$300 in goods and services to be distributed to the people who came to congregate. In all, \$2 million in prizes was the "bait" to double the church's "normal" 15,000 attendance for Easter weekend...

There were lines around hundreds of Apple Stores - and, Best Buys - on Saturday morning, as well. Bil Cornelius aspired to see 40,000 people vying for his prizes; Steve Jobs was braced for far more. Conservative projections by outside observers had anticipated 200,000 iPads would find new homes over the weekend. Instead, 700,000 of the category-creating tablet computerettes were adopted by the Faithful. "If Apple sold groceries, I would buy groceries from them," said Matthew Rice, who works for

pharmaceutical giant Merck & Co. *The iPad has landed...*

Some said the frenzy reminded them of the day in June, 2007 when Apple released the iPhone. Anne Geary, an Apple zealot in Charlotte, North Carolina, secured two spots at the front of the iPhone line by paying two people \$100 each to hold them for her. She later sold one of the spots for \$200 to a latecomer from Columbia, South Carolina, who was afraid that the store would run out before she could buy one. *She was at the Apple Store at South Park Mall in Charlotte on Saturday, to do it again...*

Recession? Almost a million Americans decided over the weekend that filling a tech hole in their lives was worth \$500-\$700, sight unseen. What would it do for them? Most didn't know... but they weren't going to miss the chance to find out.

Jesus had an extraordinary view of the value found in a faith allegiance with Him: *"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it."* (Matthew 13:44-45). Was that hype? Hyperbole? Or, was he

giving a credible assessment of what knowing Him was worth?

The folks at Bay Area Fellowship Church know how many people left their Easter with "stuff;" they probably have no way to know how many left with the treasure Jesus was talking about. Whether they snagged a car, or "just" a gift-bag, it lacks comparability with the gift of forgiveness and life that Jesus offers from that Empty Tomb. That was The Ultimate Giveaway that Bil was talking about - after the game show gaga settled down. *How many people will line up around churches next weekend hoping to leave with forgiveness and life, based on the buzz from Easter 2010?*

I hope folks heard that buzz. They won't hear it from CNN or CBS or MSNBC, on Easter, or any other day of the year. *Will they hear it from you?*

Bob Shank

Bob Shank is Founder and Chief Mentoring Officer of The Master's Program (TMP).

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