

Simplifying Gift-Giving

(so we don't blow our budget this Christmas buying gifts that don't seem to be appreciated.)
Message 02 of the series "Simple Christmas."

I. We give each other gifts at Christmas to celebrate God's gift of his son.

"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Isaiah 9:6 (NLT)

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (NLT)

Note: Jesus is the best gift ever!

"...anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ." 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (NLT)

"Thank God for his Son--a gift too wonderful for words!" 2 Corinthians 9:15 (NLT)

II. We give each other gifts at Christmas because the wise men brought gifts to baby Jesus.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the reign of King Herod. About that time some wise men from eastern lands arrived in Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the newborn king of the Jews? We saw his star as it rose, and we have come to worship him." King Herod was deeply disturbed when he heard this, as was everyone in Jerusalem. He called a meeting of the leading priests and teachers of religious law and asked, "Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" "In Bethlehem in Judea," they said, "for this is what the prophet wrote: 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'" Then Herod called for a private meeting with the wise men, and he learned from them the time when the star first appeared. Then he told them, "Go to Bethlehem and search carefully for the child. And when you find him, come back and tell me so that I can go and worship him, too!" After this interview the wise men went their way. And the star they had seen in the east guided them to Bethlehem. It went ahead of them and stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. When it was time to leave, they returned to their own country by another route, for God had warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. After the wise men were gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up! Flee to Egypt with the child and his mother," the angel said. "Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." That night Joseph left for Egypt with the child and Mary, his mother, and they stayed there until Herod's death. This fulfilled what the Lord had spoken through the prophet: "I called my Son out of Egypt."

Matthew 2:1-15 (NLT) (see also Micah 5:2 & Hosea 11:1)

Note: Those who truly desire to know God and are willing to seek him will find him.

"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Jeremiah 29:13 (NIV)

Note: The gifts of the wise men providentially provided for Joseph, Mary and Jesus during their time in Egypt.

"So two good things will result from this ministry of giving—the needs of the believers in Jerusalem will be met, and they will joyfully express their thanks to God." 2 Corinthians 9:12 (NLT)

III. Five things we can do to simplify our Christmas gift-giving.

a. We can check our motives.

"...don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

2 Corinthians 9:7 (NLT)

"Give as freely as you have received!" Matthew 10:8 (NLT)

- Pressure to "keep up with the Jones".
- Pressure to "top last year".
- Pressure to give gifts to everyone on our contact lists.
- Pressure to give others gifts simply because they gave gifts to us.

b. We can develop a Christmas budget.

- We can set up a Christmas savings account.

“Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity...shortcuts lead to poverty.” Proverbs 21:5 (NLT)

“...the borrower is servant to the lender.” Proverbs 22:7 (NLT)

- We can get creative and give gifts that don't cost a lot of money.

Schedule a lunch, a walk, or a day together. Exchange good deeds like babysitting, a car wash, or computer assistance instead of store-bought gifts. Give each other “coupons” for specific tasks, which can be redeemed when needed.

c. We can develop gift-giving guidelines.

“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.” Luke 12:15 (NIV)

- We can have discussions with family/coworkers/friends regarding gift-giving expectations and limits.
- The four-gift rule: Something they want, something they need, something to wear, something to read. (The five-gift rule adds something to share like a game that must be played with others.)

d. We can give gifts to people who are poor, needy and can never repay us.

“Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’ “Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ “And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’” Matthew 25:34-40 (NLT)

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e. We can pray.

“Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

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Connect Group Discussion Questions

1. What was the best Christmas gift you ever received? What was the best gift you ever gave someone else? What made these gifts so special?
2. Discuss the following pressures that many of us face when giving gifts at Christmas.
 - Pressure to “keep up with the Jones”.
 - Pressure to “top last year”.
 - Pressure to give gifts to everyone on our contact lists.
 - Pressure to give others gifts simply because they gave gifts to us.

How do you deal with these pressures?

3. A friend calls you because she is very excited about Christmas. “We're doing something different this year,” she says. “As a family we decided not to give gifts to each other. Instead, we are going to use the money we would have spent on each other to go on a mission trip together next summer.” How do you respond? Is this a good idea? Why? Why not?
4. Read the following proverbs and discuss their implications regarding Christmas spending and gift-giving. Proverbs 6:6-8, 21:5, 20 & 22:7.
5. Discuss the four-gift rule: Give them something they want, something they need, something to wear, something to read. What rules/guidelines do you follow for gift-giving?