

Merry Christmas everyone! I really glad you've joined us this Christmas Eve.

There's just something special about Christmas Eve....so much anticipation, so much excitement...maybe even a little positive anxiety about what you and your family have planned for the next couple days. I felt it as a kid and I confess, I still feel it as a big kid.

There is so much promise at Christmas:

- It promises some badly needed time off work.
- It promises some extra sleep or down time for that coveted nap.
- It promises extra time of lingering with family and friends. (Or for you introverts...maybe it's a time for you to start that spiritual discipline of Silence and solitude)
- Christmas is full of promise from the anticipation of gifts you've planned, purchased, wrapped...and soon will give.
- There's anticipation for the joy of those you'll give to
- There's anticipation for what you will get.
- And right next to Christmas is the promise of a New Year...the promise of a better year than this past one was for you.

These promising hopes are all elements that play into the anticipation and excitement of Christmas.

[Transition] - Here's a question; "Does God gets excited at Christmas time? Have you ever wondered this? Do you think he might?"

I think he does. Think about it with me:

The Bible tells us that you and I are made in God's image. That means we reflect characteristics of God. For example, the Bible shows us that God

has intellect, emotion and will. In other words, God thinks thoughts, feels emotion, and makes choices about what he is going to do. And since we are made in God's image, our intellect, emotion and will are a reflection of God's. So, I think God gets excited at Christmas time for many of the same reasons we do. I might argue God gets even more excited about Christmas than you ever have.

I say this because the Bible reveals that God looked forward to the first Christmas since the beginning of time. He demonstrated oceans of anticipation of Christmas (And Easter- they're joined at the hip) by dropping hints starting in Genesis at the beginning of the Bible, continuing with the Jewish forefathers, and then sprinkled throughout the Prophets.

God's long-anticipated hope of Christmas is what we have been looking at together as a church all this month. God was so excited it was hard for him to hold it in. This past month we have been looking at different verses in the Old Testament where God...like any excited gift giver...could barely hold the surprise in.

- We looked at times when God gave hints about the gift he had in mind for humankind—*like he did at creation, telling us God's gift is going to crush the head of our worst enemy.*
- There were times where he would illustrate his heavenly plan through a real-life event—*like he did with Abraham and Isaac. Asking Abraham...give your only son to me.*
- Through the prophets he would give clues about the gift...and how to know when the gift was going to be coming...and how to make sure we didn't miss it.
 - *"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."*¹

¹ Micah 5:2.

- *"And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope."²*
- *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."³*

All of this tells me that God was excited about Christmas! He dreamed it up, he thought it through, he planned every detail, and he executed it with precision. So, yes! God was very excited for Christmas.

Then that first Christmas, the gift, centuries anticipated and hoped for, finally arrived and was finally born. The Bible tells us that an angel appeared and proclaimed the promise of God's gift, *"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the messiah, the Lord."* Then a whole huge company of Angels appeared in the sky celebrating and singing, *"Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*

The son born at Christmas was the perfect gift for you and for me.

[Illustration] - There's something special about giving the perfect gift. You know when you come up with the perfect idea for a gift...and you plan...and you strategize...and you prepare and at Christmas when the gift is finally unwrapped, it's a huge hit. The person you gave the gift to is totally psyched, and you the giver are beaming because you gave the perfect gift.

Here's a couple things that go into giving the perfect gift:

² Romans 15:12.

³ Isaiah 9:6.

1. You gave the gift out of love and thoughtfulness.

[Illustrate] - The best gifts are gifts that reveal your love and care for the person. They are gifts that show you know this person well. And you know what they really value and appreciate. The best gifts are those that show you put thought into it. You considered the person, know their likes, their dislikes, and the things that they really love to do, or wear or whatever. Perfect gifts are given out of love and thoughtfulness.

My family is pretty good at this. My middle daughter Kaley gives some of the most thoughtful gifts. My kids know I'm a weather freak. I love to watch the weather. I love to look at radar. I love to measure things like wind and rain and temperatures. I'm just a freak about it. I have a buddy up in Chico, his name is Brad, he's a weather freak too. And we text each other periodically throughout the year. But when winter comes...and storms begin to roll off the pacific...the texts start flying. So, a few years ago, my daughter Kaley got me a really cool Bluetooth rain gauge with a monitor device I keep on my counter. And she made a wooden sign to mount it on to stick in my yard that says, RAIN on it. Super cool. So, when storms roll in, first thing I do in the morning AFTER I get my morning coffee is I go check the rain gauge. And of course, I text totals up to my Chico buddy.

[Transition] - It was the perfect gift for me because she knew me, knew what I loved, and knew what would bring me joy. I know...I'm a simple guy... pretty easy to please. It's a rain gauge. But it was perfect for me. Loving and thoughtful.

[Transition] - Perfect gifts are usually also something...

2. The person really needs it but would never or could never get it for themselves.

Don't you love getting a gift that you wanted but couldn't afford yourself? That's the greatest. You've seen it...thought it would be great to have it but didn't have the resources to get it yourself. Then someone surprises you with it. That's a such a rush. It's totally fun to give those sorts of gifts

too. There's nothing like surprising someone with something they would really enjoy when there is no way they could afford it themselves. That is exciting stuff.

[Illustration] - It was the day after Christmas at a church in San Francisco. The pastor of the church was looking over the nativity scene set up when he noticed that the baby Jesus was missing from among the figures. He hurried outside and saw a little boy with a red wagon, and in the wagon was the figure of the little infant Jesus. So he walked up to the boy and said, "Well, where did you get your passenger, my fine friend?"

The little boy replied, "I got Him at church."

"And why did you take Him?"

The boy explained, "Well, about a week before Christmas I prayed to the little Lord Jesus and I told Him if He would bring me a red wagon for Christmas I would give Him a ride around the block in it." That kid was dang excited because he could never have gotten that wagon by himself.

[Transition] - Perfect gifts are thoughtful, and special because you could never or would never get it for yourself. Thirdly, gifts that are perfect and get everyone psyched up are gifts that change a person's life somehow.

3. The gift is something that changes their life in some way.

[Illustrate] - When I was in Graduate school, I got a three-volume set of Bible Word Study books and it changed how I studied and prepared to serve the church.

-I have a friend today who gives me gifts that I could never afford myself. He gives me things that have changed his life and how he does things, and they have made huge difference in my life too.

-I've heard of girls getting engagement rings for Christmas. Now, there's a gift that will change your life. 😊

Gifts that are born out of love and thoughtfulness...

Gifts that we can't afford ourselves...

Gifts that change our lives...are the kinds of gifts that generate a ton of excitement for the giver and the receiver. And this is why I believe that God is more excited at Christmas than you and I could ever imagine. Because God's gift of his son Jesus meets these three "perfect gift" criteria.

Think with me...

JESUS BORN AT CHRISTMAS REVEALS GODS GREAT LOVE FOR YOU.

God planned and prepared for generations and at the perfect time delivered the gift of his son.

John 3:16, probably the most popular verse in the Bible says, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his One and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

1 John 4:9 says, *"This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him."*

Jesus, whose birth is celebrated at Christmas, is a perfect gift because it reveals God's great love for you. Some people feel that God is angry with them, disappointed with them, or just always frustrated with them. The gift of his one and only Son, Jesus, proves he loves you.

[Transition] - Remember I suggested was the second thing that makes a perfect gift? It's a gift we need but can't get on our own.

JESUS BORN AT CHRISTMAS WAS A GIFT YOU AND I REALLY NEED BUT COULD NOT GET ON OUR OWN.

Every one of us needs the gift of Jesus. Our proneness to avoid God, or ignore him, and rebel against God have resulted in estrangement in our relationship with Him.

For that relationship to be reconciled, a holy and righteous God needed to punish that sin and rebellion. But rather than make you pay the penalty for sin yourself; God chose to give you the gift of his son to pay the penalty for you. He gave you a pardon because his Son Jesus died in your place.

This is what occurred at Easter. As I mentioned earlier, Christmas and Easter are joined at the hip. Talk about a gift you really needed and couldn't get on your own. It's a perfect gift! It's a gracious gift.

Paul clearly helps us understand how important this is for you in Colossians 1:21-22, *"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But not he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation."*

Ephesians 2:8-9 says, *"For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is **the gift of God**—not by works, so that no one can boast."*

[Transition] - Finally, the third thing we said makes the perfect gift is the gift that improves your life in some way.

JESUS IS A GIFT THAT CAN IMPROVE YOUR LIFE.

When you accept the gift of Jesus as God's gift to you personally, he can radically improve your life.

- He can change your **past** by offering his forgiveness for all the cruddy, foolish things you've done, thought, and said in your life.
- He can change your **present** by empowering you, guarding you and guiding you through the principles in his Word and through the presence of his Spirit in you.
- He can change your **eternity** with his promise of heaven. No more fear factor with death. No more anxiety about what happens when you die. Only anticipation of a perfect connection with your creator. Jesus can

improve your life, and your afterlife. This is the promising hope of Christmas.

Now, tomorrow at Christmas, there's going to be a ton of fun and excitement over the next 24-48 hours because of the gifts you're giving and the ones you'll be receiving. But this Christmas Eve...before all that gets started, I want to invite you to just stop for a moment...take a big breath...and give you a chance to open your heart to the gift God is most excited to give you...His Son Jesus.

Jesus says in the Bible, I'm standing right here...I'm standing at the door of your heart and I'm knocking. If you will open your heart to me, I will come in and we'll have close relationship, like close friends sharing a meal together.⁴ Will you open your heart to him? Maybe this prayer reflects your heart...

Dear Jesus, thank you for coming to us and taking on flesh at Christmas. And thank you for dying for me on the cross at Easter. I want to open my heart to you this Christmas eve and ask you to forgive my sin and become the leader my life. I want to get to know you, learn to love you, and choose to follow you today. Amen.

⁴ Revelation 3:20 paraphrased. "Here I am! I **stand at the door** and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens **the door**, I will come in and eat with that person, and **they** with me."