

ADVENT CONSPIRACY 2021 Give More

The Christmas Story: Luke 2:1-20 NIV

1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register. 4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you **good news that will cause great joy for all the people**. 11 Today in the town of David **a Savior has been born to you**; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." 15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Today, I want to challenge each of us to let the birth of Christ inspire us to a NEW type of giving in our lives. In contrast to the HECTIC, **SELF-ABSORBED, COMMERCIAL MINDSET** that has infected the Christmas season, I want us to **REFLECT** the **SELF-GIVING SPIRIT** of God. This will mean that you and I must learn to GIVE in a different manner. Our gifts must not be trinkets and toys that are wrapped in shiny paper and bows. **I want us to learn how to give a LIVING gift.**

Give more PRESENCE!

Jesus's birthday is the only birthday in the world that we celebrate by giving gifts to everyone else! [That is FITTING, but it can also become a FAILURE!] It is only fitting to do this when some of our gifts actually reflect the HEART OF CHRIST for PEOPLE IN NEED. Jesus did not come to make us COMFORTABLE. He came to RESCUE US.

Birthdays are all about PRESENTS. We all love presents; gifts that proclaim our love and affection for the one that entered the world on his or her special day. But the birth of Jesus calls for something different. **The birthday of Jesus was itself a GIFT OF PRESENCE. Jesus is EMMANUAL: God WITH us! Christmas is the story of God's gift of HIMSELF to this lost and weary world. Matthew 1:22-23 NIV**

22 All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23 "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").

The greatest gift that God ever gave to us or gives to us now is his PRESENCE! It was why he created us in the first place. **[Adam and Eve in the Garden]**. It is the thing that gave King David (and so many of us in the years since he wrote the Psalms) great comfort as he wrote in **Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd . . . I will fear no evil for thou art with me!"** It was also the last thing Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended to heaven: **"Behold, I am with you ALWAYS."** Nothing is better than the presence of God. No gift can take the place of the presence of God.

SO, WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "GIVE MORE PRESENCE?"

Give your SELF:

Have you noticed that MOST CHRISTMAS SONGS are about the longing to BE WITH one another? "I'll Be Home for Christmas," "All I want for Christmas is You," "Oh, there's no place like HOME for the holidays." I could go on and on! People want to BE WITH YOU more than they want your stuff.

*Giving yourself involves giving others your TIME.

- Instead of a wrapped gift, give your loved one a gift card attached to a DATE!
- This WILL be INCONVENIENT . . . and WAY MORE REWARDING!

*Giving yourself involves giving others your ATTENTION.

- Turn OFF the TV and the PHONE and the VIDEO GAME
- FACE your loved one and LISTEN. Play a GAME that THEY want to play.

Give your SELF with your STUFF: "Where your treasure is, your heart will be!"

*Give stuff to people OUTSIDE of your OWN FAMILY.

- This is the power of going on MISSION!

This does NOT mean that you should not give gifts to your kids; just not only to them. We need to have a BIGGER VISION. **Do not make your kids resent the Gospel because you give all of their presents to Jesus! Let them be a part of learning the JOY OF GIVING. Let them help make the decisions about how to give this Christmas!**

- Many children have no family to care for them.
- Many people do not have an abundance of resources like we do: SHARE.

"Surround yourself with people who are in need, and you will desire to meet needs. Surround yourself with people living in excess, and your desires will become even more excessive. Generous people live in community with people who benefit."

More or Less: Choosing a Lifestyle of Excessive Generosity - Jeff Shinabarger

*Give stuff that YOU would want! [Biggest complaint of Food Pantries: People give canned goods that are either OUT OF DATE or something that NO ONE wants!]

-INSTEAD of turning Christmas into a GET-WHAT-YOU-WANT season, why not make it a GIVE-WHAT-YOU-WANT season?

*Give stuff that GIVES LIFE.

-Food

-Water **[50% of all hospital rooms house people with waterborne illnesses.]**

~These are ALL about PRACTICAL HELP and HOPE.

*Never give stuff without attaching it to the Gospel!

-It demonstrates the practical and real love of Jesus.

-It removes the BARRIERS that some people have toward issues of FAITH.

-The Gospel cannot penetrate a heart if it is not SHARED!

GIVE GOD YOUR PRESENCE.

***Generosity is BORN out of a proper RESPONSE to the ORIGINAL GIFT.**

Let me take a moment to REMIND you of what Oswald Chambers calls the TRAGEDY OF GOD. **The Gospel story is an unexpected story of generosity that defies human comprehension. God – who IS ALL and HAS ALL – GAVE ALL so that we might live.** God “became POOR” by humbling himself and “laying aside” his glory to take on human flesh. Yet, by coming in the flesh, Jesus REVEALED to us the magnificent glory of God – full of grace and truth. As His life unfolded before the very eyes of Joseph and Mary, and then later in front of the disciples, and then before the eyes of all mankind, the astonishing depth of God’s love was forever manifested. There are no excuses. **He IS, and He has chosen to GIVE HIMSELF for us. And now, we must decide what we will do with Him. The Gift has been given.** He has come. He was certainly not what we expected (what did you really expect?). And He is infinitely more than we could ask for or deserve. What a remarkable Gift – the very Son of God . . . in the flesh. **Now, our only proper response to his generosity is to ACCEPT HIM by FAITH and GIVE OURSELVES to him without reserve. Jesus Christ is the GIFT that we GIVE OURSELVES to! Have you given Jesus Christ your heart?**

Today, we are reminded that giving REFLECTS the very heart of God. When we give, we are acting like God. I urge you to give in a way that will not just satisfy you, but will bless and inspire and meet the needs of people around you (maybe even of people that you have not yet met!). This is how we practically love God with all of our heart, and our neighbor as ourself!

Let’s pray.

FACILITATION GUIDE
ADVENT CONSPIRACY – Week 2
Give More

START TALKING:

Name every Christmas song you can think of that talks about being together at Christmas.

START THINKING:

What is the biggest need you ever helped meet through charitable giving?

START SHARING:

Name a gift that you have given to anyone that was a gift of yourself.

Read Psalm 23. Discuss how many ways this Psalm talks about God being present with us. Then, as a group, see how many scriptures you can recall that talk about God being present with us.

How can going on mission be an act of giving yourself? Talk about what excites you about going on mission in 2022.

START DOING:

Write down some creative ways that you can give your presence to your family this year rather than just giving them gifts.

START PRAYING:

Ask God to help us meet every one of our goals in Advent Conspiracy this year:

- Feed the Need **\$30,000**
- Pastor Sponsorship in Zambia **\$5000**
- Pastor Training in Zambia **\$5000**
- Beds for Desoto County **\$5000**
- But God Ministries **\$10,000**
- MissionLab (New Orleans) **\$10,000**

Overages will be directed to the Compassion Center in El Salvador & Backpack Ministry.

