

TRADITIONS Part 2 - A Theology of Gift Giving

TEXT: Gen. 1, Mat. 2, John 3

OPENING: Last week we talked about the power of tradition to move your family toward the vision God has given you for a preferable future. The first tradition we looked at was that of **A MEAL**. Today I want to look at the second Christmas tradition that we can leverage for a preferable future - **A GIFT**.

Proverbs 19:6 (ESV)

⁶ Many seek the favor of a generous man, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts.

In other words, gifts and generosity can magnify and multiply one's influence for good or bad.

ILLUSTRATION: I was born into a very poor family. We lived in a single wide trailer. My father had dropped out of high school and worked construction. But around 1981 my father was laid off and he began to hang around my mother's florist and gift shop. Turns out Dad was a natural entrepreneur. He began running the business and mom did the design work. The business grew exponentially.

The first place I saw the change was at Christmas. Suddenly, Santa was reaaaaly nice to me. I was getting 4-wheelers, every toy you can imagine, it really was a little ridiculous. But I noticed my cousins who lived down the street still got the same cheap toys, used bicycles, that we got before.

One year I remember them asking, "so why does Santa bring you so much more than us?". I said, "well isn't that obvious, you are naughty and I am nice". Santa knows!

Well one year we had heard a **rumor about St. Nick**. So I decided to find out for myself. So I went to see Santa. And you know the drill... "what do you want for Christmas little boy?" I said, "Santa, I want all of the G.I. Joe action figures, and all of their tanks, jets, etc."... I get down and dad says, "What did you tell Santa you wanted?" I said, "I told Santa I want all He-Man Action Figures and Castle Greyskull.

So, I wake up on Christmas morning.... You know what I saw. I was disappointed... but I couldn't wait to tell my cousins... the mystery has been solved!!! I rode to their house on my 4-wheeler.... I said guys I've figured it out... you guys aren't naughty after all!!! You are just poor.

From that point on, I never looked at gifts the same way again. I knew who they were from. I knew what had to be sacrificed to provide them and I knew the joy that it brought to the giver.

Why is gift giving such an intricate part of, not only our culture, but literally every culture?

1. We Give as a Reflection of God

When a secular psychologist looks at a phenomenon like gift giving, which is found throughout history and in every culture - they explain it through the lens of **atheistic evolution**. We give, they would say, because for 100's of thousands of years we evolved in hunter gatherer communities of 100-200 people. We were dependent on others contributing to the survival of the tribe. So, today, while we live in small units we still have tendency written into our DNA of giving to others.

Or they may say - it's nothing more than **reciprocal altruism**. We give in order to get and when the getting stops the giving stops. For some that may be true. While the atheist looks to evolution to explain culture, the Christian looks to **Genesis**.

In Genesis 1:26–28 (ESV) we read...

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.

So there we see what is called in Latin, the **Imago Dea** - the Image of God imprinted onto humanity. We describe that around here like a mirror. As a mirror reflects the image of man, so man reflects the image of God. We also say that sin has broken the mirror. It has shattered into hundreds of pieces.

The Gospel, starts to remake the mirror and through **sanctification**, we gradually improve in our ability to reflect God's nature better.

But even apart from the Gospel, the most godless sinner, to some degree reflects God's image, thus giving his life a measure of Sanctity and Honor.

- No matter what Christian you look at, you still see evidence of the Fall.
- No matter which Non Believer you look at, you still see evidence of the Image of God.

Look at the first words out of God's mouth after He created man.

26b. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

He GAVE them dominion. It was God's and God gave it to man. He said, "look around - all of this is your's it's for you to honor me".

Someone has said, "**We are never more like God than when we GIVE**". I believe that to be true. We reflect God's nature best when we give generously.

THREE WAYS WE REFLECT GOD IN GIVING

- a. **God is a Giver**
- b. **God is a Cheerful Giver**
- c. **God is a Gracious Giver**

1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)

¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who *richly gives us everything to enjoy.*

Why does God give you things? So that you will enjoy them. It's not a sin to enjoy the gifts of God. As a matter of fact quite the opposite. How do you feel if you give you child a gift and he or she doesn't enjoy it? Doesn't feel good does it?

- If God gave you a home, He expects you to ENJOY your home.
- If God gave you a vehicle, He expects you to ENJOY your vehicle.

Some of you need to repent of living too fast to enjoy anything. But not only does God give us all of the things we are too enjoy...God give **Spiritual Gifts.**

Ephesians 4:7–8 (ESV)

⁷ But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he **gave gifts to men.**"

Every believer has a spiritual gift that they are to use in serving the body fo Christ. Now Spiritual gifts are different that the other gifts. Your home is for YOU to enjoy. But YOUR spiritual gift is for ME to enjoy. My GIFT is for you to ENJOY.

I EMPLOY the gift so that you can ENJOY the gift.

My gift is teaching. God gave me that gift because he knew you need to understand his Word.

Not only do we give as a Reflection of God...

2. Give as a Example of Grasp

In other words - a gift communicates that we "GET you", we Understand you. We grasp who you are as a person.

In Matthew 2:11–13 (ESV) the Magi brought Jesus three gifts... what were they?

¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Now, Julie and I have three children. At their birth, nobody brought us Gold, frankincense, or myrrh. The closest we got was when someone gave us essential oils to help Caitlyn sleep.

Why these gifts? Well first of all you probably have the wrong idea about the Manger Scene.

ILLUSTRATION: What does a typical nativity scene look like? A stable, a bunch of animals, three wise men, Mary and Joseph, and baby Jesus right in the center... right?

Well according to scripture, the wise men didn't arrive in Bethlehem until Jesus was around 18 months old. They no longer were in a stable, Jesus didn't sleep in a manger anymore. He was able to walk and talk a little. Changes the picture doesn't it? So if you want to be biblical put the wise men in the Kitchen and Jesus in the Manger.

But consider this... in light of WHO Jesus was and WHAT he was about to endure... the gift made sense.

a. The Gifts were Costly

Whatever else the wise men were.. they were not poor. These gifts were hard to come by. They paid a great deal for these gifts.

b. The Gifts were Practical

What would a toddler do with Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh? Well look at verse 12...

12 And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way. 13 Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him."

Practically, the Gold, Frankincense, and Myrrh would have been used to finance the arduous journey to Egypt and to make the trip a little more bearable for a young family.

c. The Gifts were Symbolic

The Gold pointed to the Kingship of Jesus, the Frankincense pointed to the Priesthood of Jesus, and the Myrrh was used to embalm those who died.

So the gifts were costly, they were practical, and they were Symbolic.

What do we say? It's the thought that counts? That's normally what we say when they didn't think about it too much.

This shirt doesn't fit - but it's the thought that counts.

This tie is too ugly to wear - but it's the thought that counts.

Give in such a way that you take into account the person you are giving it to. What would be a blessing to THEM? What would help them on their journey?

Nothing can express love better than a well thought out gift.

ILLUSTRATION: When Julie and I first got married we didn't know each other very well. For our first Christmas I bought her curtains. Why? Because at some point she said, "this house could use some curtains". I thought that was a hint! I learned pretty quick that curtains aren't a great gift for my wife.

Now, I start thinking about her gift in October.

We give as a Reflection of God... We give as an example of grasp...

3. Give as an Expression of Gospel

You all know it, the most familiar verse in all the Bible. The Bible is a nutshell...

John 3:16–17 (ESV)

16 "For God so loved the world, that he **gave** his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Christmas really is about a gift... the gift of God... the King of Glory. The second person of the trinity... God gave his First and His Best.

- What did we have to do to earn the gift? Nothing
- What strings were attached to the gift? None

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: Tim Keller tells the story of when in 1961 Russian Cosmonaut **Yuri Gagarin** circled the earth for the first time. Nikita Khrushchev the Premier of Russia went on national television and said, "*We as communist are officially Atheists and we now have even more evidence for Atheism because we sent a man into space and discovered there is no God there*".

CS Lewis was still alive at that time and he heard what Nikita Khrushchev said and so he wrote a little essay called "**the seeing eye**" and he said, "think about it...if there is a God, you wouldn't relate to God the way a person who was on the **first floor** relates to a person who is on the **second floor**. You would relate to him the way **Shakespeare** relates to **Hamlet**. You see Shakespeare created Hamlet and the only way Hamlet can know anything about Shakespeare is if Shakespeare writes himself into the play. T

Dorothy Sayers was a woman who lived some years ago and she was the first one of the one of the first woman who ever graduated from Oxford and she was a writer of mystery detective stories and her most famous character was **Lord Peter Wimsey** who was an aristocrat who solved mysteries. In the middle of all these novels and short stories about **Lord Peter Wimsey** who was a single man for most of you know for a big period of time suddenly a woman character appears in the novels her name is **Harriet Vane**. She's not very particularly good-looking she's one of the first woman who ever

graduated from Oxford she's a writer of detective fiction. She and Peter meet and they solve a couple of mysteries and then they fall in love and live happily ever after.

Many people have said that Dorothy Sayers looked into the world she created and looked into the man that she created and fell in love with him. She then wrote herself into the story because she saw he was lonely and he needed someone to save him and so she wrote herself in the story.

While that is a moving idea... that is what Christmas is really all about. God knew the gift we needed we could never afford... it was Him. **So he wrote himself into our story.**

You being here today is not an accident, it's part of the story. And it is here that God has written Himself into your story. He wants to be your gift this Christmas.