

Learning to recognize God in our world.

Matthew 25:31-46

Advent Conspiracy

Worship Fully

Spend Less

Give More

Love All

Four Significant Aspects of Thankfulness.

- (1) Remembering what God has done,
- (2) Telling others about it,
- (3) Showing God's love to others,
- (4) Offering gifts of self, time, and resources.

NEXT STEPS

Use these study questions to turn a message into a conversation.

Food For Thought

1 Chronicles 16:11-12 (NLT) Search for the LORD and for his strength; continually seek him. Remember the wonders he has performed, his miracles, and the rulings he has given.

As you celebrate Thanksgiving this week, take some time to seek God and to remember what God has done for you, what He has sustained you through, for whom He has put into your life, and for the hope that He gives.

The story of Christ's birth is a miraculous story of love expressed in an unlikely way. It's a story of promise, hope, and a revolutionary love that is still changing the world to this day. What if Christmas became a world-changing event again by turning our focus back to the birth of Christ? What could happen to your family if this focus was celebrated in loud, bold and totally unexpected ways? What if you could actually trade your season of stress for a season of celebration and unbelievable memories with your friends and family? What if all of this could change a life at the same time? It can.

Welcome to Advent Conspiracy

[Worship Fully] It starts with Jesus. It ends with Jesus. This is the holistic approach God had in mind for Christmas. It's a season where we are called to put down our burdens and lift a song up to our God. It's a season where love wins, peace reigns, and a king is celebrated with each breath. It's the party of the year. Entering the story of advent means entering this season with an overwhelming passion to worship Jesus to the fullest.

[Spend Less] Before you think we're getting all Scrooge on you, let us explain what we mean. We like gifts. Our kids really like gifts. But consider this: America spends an average of \$450 billion a year every Christmas.

How often have you spent money on Christmas presents for no other reason than obligation? How many times have you received a gift out of that same obligation?

Thanks, but no thanks, right? We're asking people to consider buying ONE LESS GIFT this Christmas. Just one. Sounds insignificant, yet many who have taken this small sacrifice have experienced something nothing less than a miracle: They have been more available to celebrate Christ during the advent season.

[Give More] God's gift to us was a relationship built on love. So it's no wonder why we're drawn to the idea that Christmas should be a time to love our friends and family in the most memorable ways possible. Time is the real gift Christmas offers us, and no matter how hard we look, it can't be found at the mall. Time to make a gift that turns into the next family heirloom. Time to write mom a letter. Time to take the kids sledding. Time to bake really good cookies and sing really bad Christmas carols. Time to make love visible through relational giving.

[Love All] When Jesus loved, He loved in ways never imagined. Though rich, he became poor to love the poor, the forgotten, the overlooked and the sick. He played to the margins. By spending less at Christmas we have the opportunity to join Him in giving resources to those who need help the most. As we as a community of faith continue to take hold of these simple steps in Advent Conspiracy, we have been able to feed and help and support many individuals and families in our community. One less gift: unbelievable presence in the name of Christ.

Gift Ideas for Relational Giving

Here are a few ideas to get your own creative juices flowing!

The gift of time:

Create a fun certificate stating the gift of time you want to give, for example, help with a project around the house or help with errands. Bring coffee, tea or lunch and flowers when you come, be intentional about really connecting when you are together.

Here are some ideas for spending time together:

- Wrap popcorn, gourmet root beer and a classic DVD for a movie night with a friend
- Host Monday Night Football and make homemade pizzas

- Wrap 2 copies of a used classic book to read with a friend
- Hot cocoa, bundle up and take a walk through the Christmas lit streets downtown with friends or family

Give creative coupons:

- Babysitting for your worn out sister-in-law
- Yard work for an elderly person in your life
- Massage for that person who has been working a bit too hard lately
- Road trip for an out-of-town adventure with your child
- Free point to get together and talk theology and about how God is moving in your lives
- Car maintenance to change the oil in a friend's car (if you know how)
- House project to help them build that shed, clean the garage, closets, etc.

Give a certificate for a day together doing something that person is passionate about:

- A new bat and a trip to the batting cages
- A new guitar strap and a trip to the guitar center to play the guitars together
- A day trip with your cameras for the photographer friend
- A day hike together; you bring lunch

Things to make with the kids:

- Simple scrapbook with pictures of time spent with the person you're giving it to; pictures of the kids for far away family
- A home "published" story, written and illustrated by the kids-the time you spend together is priceless
- A DVD of your life these days for long distance friends and family

Ask yourself, "What can I do?" and give of yourself. "What do they like to do?" and make time to do it with them.

This isn't about creating a bunch of new rules to be legalistic about for Christmas. It's o.k. to spend some money (in fact, sometimes creating something cool can be much more expensive— so be aware of that) don't create a whole separate set of pressures, worry and guilt by feeling like you can't spend a dime. Just step out of the consumerism, be thoughtful and enjoy the celebration!