

14-18

SEASONS OF GIVING 2: Give and Take

The 'Pay It Forward' movement is something that has been going around for years. The true meaning behind this movement is the fact that people are giving to another person knowing the person on the receiving end cannot give them anything in return. We live in a world where people love to receive; we like to get and grab for ourselves. We often forget that giving is a beautiful thing. It's a gift itself to give. The Bible says that. This session will think about why it is more blessed to give than to receive and how we can practise more giving into our everyday life's.

ACTIVITY 1

Think about the best gift you have ever received. Who bought you that gift? Why does it mean so much to you?

If you were offered the cash value for this gift in exchange for that gift, would you take it? Why or why not?

Some of you may well have taken the cash exchange on your gift, but that gift will have meant more to you than the money that was spent. Often when we receive gifts, the best present that we have received may not mean the most expensive present, the largest present, or the most up to date present. But it might be the present that means the most for another reason. Maybe because it was a surprise, because it demonstrated the generosity of someone else, because it shows how well someone knows you, or because there was meaning in the gift itself. Often gifts are

so about so much more than 'stuff' and it's the heart behind the giving and receiving of gifts that we want to think through today not only the gifts that you are given, but particularly the gifts that you give to others.

ACTIVITY 2

Why do we give gifts to each other at Christmas?

Read Matthew 2: 1-11.

The Magi Visit the Messiah

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi¹ from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."

³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

*⁶ "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for out of you will come a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel."⁷*

⁷ Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸ He sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him."

⁹ After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹ On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

We often think that there are three Kings or wise men, but actually there are three gifts, and these gifts are really significant.

1. Why do you think that these wise men chose to give gifts to a baby, what was their motivation behind it?
2. When you think of why we give gifts at Christmas, do you think the reasons are similar? Why or why not?
3. Why do you think people buy gifts for each other today? What are the main motivations and how true is this for you if you're really honest?!
4. Do you have any rules or guidelines that you try to stick to when shopping for people at Christmas?

Not only did the three Kings give gifts at Christmas, but Jesus coming to Earth was God's gift to us, His motivation was simply that he loved us and gave us the best gift possible.

ACTIVITY 3

The bible says that every good gift that we have – everything that we are thankful for – actually comes from God. That means that all of the good things that we have are a gift to us anyway, they aren't actually ours but things that are given to us to look after whilst we are on this earth.

1. How would your attitude towards your stuff change if you realised that everything you had was a gift for you to look after?
2. Where do you think our attitude of wanting to get more than we give comes from?
3. How often, especially at Christmas, do we feel like getting things is our 'right' or the things we have we like to keep to ourselves?

4. When so many people in the world have so little, what is one thing that we could try to give to others more than we receive this Christmas?
5. What is one way that we should live differently if everything belongs to God anyway?

ACTIVITY 4

Make a list of the top five things that you have in your life that you are most grateful for (this might be things, family etc).

Once you have done this, look at your list and grade from 1-5 of how comfortable you would be about using that thing as a gift to someone else, rather to benefit yourself. For example, if you wrote 'my family', how comfortable would you be about opening up your home a little more to share your great family with others.

It is not bad to have nice things or have things in our lives that we are grateful for, however, how we use the things we have really matters to God. Often, when we have things, we think of them as things that we own to make us happier, or to feel better, but as we come up to Christmas, try to think about the things your own a little differently. What if they are Gods things that you're looking after, and the reason you are looking after them isn't to make yourself happy, but to help, encourage and love others?

ACTIVITY 5

Read Romans 6:22-23

²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in ^[a] Christ Jesus our Lord.

At Christmas, we celebrate God giving humanity the gift of Jesus. A part of the reason that this is so incredible is that we receive this gift, knowing that we could never offer anything as valuable in return. That God would give Jesus, who will go on to die so that we can have eternal life and be in relationship with Him now. We just cannot match that kind of generosity. However, when we give generously, expecting nothing in return, we show other people the generosity of God.

1. What do you think giving generously to someone and expecting nothing back says to the person that we are giving to?
2. In what ways can it be difficult when we give and don't get anything back?
3. How do you think God might feel knowing that He gave a gift so generously, that often isn't valued by people? What might we learn from that?

ACTIVITY 6

Read Luke 6: 35-36

³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

God asks us to be generous with our gifts, but the gifts that we are generous with might not always be physical presents or stuff. There are lots of different areas of our lives where we can be generous.

Think of ways to be generous that don't involve stuff

This might include our time, our gifts or our attitudes

Try to be specific. Make a list of who we could be generous with a how. For example, I could be generous with my time by putting aside an hour to spend with my brother or sister without being asked etc.

ACTIVITY 7

Watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXgH8ZlZ9jQ>

PRAY

Thank you God that you gave us the greatest gift of all in Jesus, it is a gift that we could never repay. Help us to share the great gift of Jesus with people we know.

Spend a few minutes in silence and ask God to bring to mind a friend or family member who you could commit to pray for every day over the Christmas period.