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Rethinking Christmas: Rethinking A Holiday That Has Lost Its Meaning
“Spending Less In Order To Experience More”
(Part 2)

Intro: What do most people experience during the holidays? Let’s be honest. Is it really a time to experience peace / joy / love / relaxed times with loved ones? OR, do many people experience something else? According to national surveys...the number one experience seems to be stress! (Share statistics) It is amazing to me as I did this research that not one person suggested we rethink Christmas. Maybe we have so much stress because our focus is off.

- Maybe our focus should be off of spending and on to experiencing what Christmas should be all about. This is going to require us to rethink Christmas. Let’s choose to spend less in order to experience more. (Since much of the stress is connected with money, let’s change the focus) Experience more what? 5 Christmas experiences...

I. Spend Less In Order To Experience More Peace

- Didn’t the angels announce “peace on earth” to the shepherds? Where’s it at then? Is peace the typical emotion we observe in most people’s lives around the holiday? Hardly! The angels’ announcement didn’t cause the shepherds to stress out because they had no gifts. They didn’t feel like they had to run to Wal-Mart. (Let’s rethink this!)
- A. Spending less avoids holiday stress
- Where does the stress come from?
 1. Debt: Many people simply pay for Christmas presents using their credit cards and then they are paying it off 5-6 months (average) to a year later. (4 million)
 2. Expectations: How many gifts are purchased simply because there is an expectation of gift giving? “This is what we’ve always done.” It doesn’t matter if you can’t afford it. There is the pressure of the expectation. (40% feel pressure)
 3. Busyness: Our lives are already busy. Now, instead of changing the amount of things in our busy lives, we’re going to add Christmas activities . (Hours shopping / getting the tree / putting the lights up/ multiple family gatherings / company Christmas party / Christmas baking / Christmas cards) I didn’t say these things are wrong. We just didn’t delete anything else!

- This is why so many of us are glad when it's over! Jesus talked about the busyness to 2 sisters one day (explain context) "Lord, don't you care...!"

Luke 10:41-42 "But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her." (NLT)

- Wouldn't it be great if we could discover and embrace that one thing this year instead of the holiday stress? Choose to be like Mary not Martha.

B. Spending less allows us to embrace Jesus' peace

John 14:27 "I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid." (NLT)

1. What would happen if instead of spending so much time and energy buying gifts for people this year, we decided to unwrap Jesus' gift of peace to us? "I am leaving you with a gift". What if we wanted to experience this gift this Christmas? How many of us are leaving that gift unopened? How do I experience it?
2. Decide not to go into debt this year in order to buy presents.
 - Let go of you expectations about spending money on gifts this year. How many gifts do you purchase where the main reason is expectations? Maybe it's time to tell family members you will not be doing it this year.
 - Slow down. If you continue to add Christmas activities to an already overloaded schedule, peace will not be your reality. You're too busy for it! Where can you temporarily delete some things?
 - Unwrap Jesus' gift of peace. Jesus' gift of peace is something the world cannot give you. Can't buy it / it's not found in a Mall.
 - Ask Him for it. He wants you to experience it. It's His gift to you. Peace will result as you continue to rethink Christmas and embrace more of what Jesus would have you experience this year. Like what?

II. Spend Less In Order To Experience More Relationships

A. Spend time with people rather than pursuing presents

1. What would happen if you added up all the time you spent looking for presents? How much time was invested in stores / Malls / online / etc... Now, what would happen if we spent that time with the people we love?
2. Average shopper spends approx. 11 hours looking for presents. 20% spend over 21 hours looking for presents! This is actual shopping time. It doesn't include the commute to and from the stores.
3. It's easy to get caught up in our culture and simply pursue the wrong things. It's so normal to live this way nobody stops and asks if we should? The Bible makes it very clear that people are the priority not presents / stuff.

1 Cor. 13:3 "If I give everything I own to the poor... but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without

love.” (Message)

4. Is buying a present really a relational thing? Does spending money on a gift make our relationships better? / knit our hearts with someone? Has any physical gift you received ever changed your relationship with anyone? Of course not! Then why do we focus so much on them?

B. Christmas is all about relationships

1. It was God who set the relational standard for Christmas. It was God who so loved the word that He sent His one and only Son on a relational mission to save the world. Christmas is the most radical relational love story the universe has ever seen. The All-Powerful God becoming a man in order to rescue the people He loves?

- It was Jesus who modeled how to value people.

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.” (NLT) The birth of Jesus represents God’s rescue mission for the human race!

2. How then could we not make Christmas not only a celebration of Jesus but also the priority for which He stands for...Relationships! Christmas is a relational event not just a physical event of a baby born. We must rethink Christmas and celebrate why Jesus came not just the fact that He did!

3. Therefore, instead of spending so much time looking for presents / gifts, (11 hours), how could you invest those hours in the ones you love? Instead of spending time in a Mall, how about spending meaningful time with people?

- 87% of Americans say Christmas should be about family and caring for others!

4. Lisa and her sisters started something a few years ago (Share about making lefsa) What physical gift can compare with this?

- Are you making some Christmas memories? What do you want those memories to be...opening gifts, or creating relational memories? The truth is no one really remembers what they got last year. I don’t! But I treasure the memories of relationships!

III. Spend Less In Order To Experience More Meaning

A. Stop associating meaning with money

1. You could have the most prosperous Christmas ever and have the most meaningless one at the same time. Meaning and money are not synonymous!

Ecc. 5:10 “Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!” (NLT)

Luke 12:15 “Beware, and be on guard against every form of greed; for not when one even has an abundance, does his life consist of his possessions.” (NASB)

2. I know we would all say, “Of course, I know that!” Yet it is so easy to find ourselves focusing on experiencing the right present / gift instead of making sure our Christmas is meaningful. They are not one and the same.
3. Check out this Best Buy commercial and the message it sends. (play clip) Is this

true? The best gifts get the best reactions? Is the best gift some material object? Is this what equals a meaningful Christmas? Of course not. Let's pursue something different.

B. Pursue meaning not materialism

1. If you could describe what the most meaningful Christmas would look like, how would you describe it? Would you describe it with presents / holiday glitter / with all the material things? OR would you describe it more with experiencing more internal qualities? (peace / fulfillment / satisfaction / joy)
2. What we pursue will determine whether or not we will have a meaningful Christmas. We really do have a choice between materialism and meaning. With Americans spending \$450 billion on Christmas, I think we've sacrificed meaning.

Prov. 21:21 "Whoever pursues righteousness and unfailing love will find life..." (NLT)

Rom. 14:19 "So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." (NASB) Notice what things the Bible says are worth pursuing.

3. How can we make sure we pursue meaning this Christmas and not get caught up in the materialism?
4. Have you ever sat down with your spouse (if married) and simply discussed what a meaningful Christmas looks like without the materialism? What activities are meaningful? / What relationships should we focus on? / What type of gifts reflect meaning? / How do we come away from this Christmas and say, "That was the most meaningful Christmas ever!" What are we really pursuing? (Let's spend less in order to experience more meaning.)

IV. Spend Less In Order To Experience More Generosity

A. Be more generous meeting needs

1. By choosing to spend less on buying presents, we just may have money left over to do something more significant with it...like meeting the needs of others.

Prov. 28:27 "Whoever gives to the poor will lack nothing, but those who close their eyes to poverty will be cursed." (NLT)

Matt. 19:21 "Jesus said to him, "If you wish to be complete, go and sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (NASB)

2. Isn't Christmas all about meeting needs? Isn't this why Jesus left His throne and humbled Himself as a man and was born in a manger was because our need was so great? Therefore, He came to meet our need. (die on a cross)
 3. If we truly want to embrace the spirit of Christmas, then we should embrace generosity directed at meeting the needs of others. It's so easy to feel the pressure to purchase gifts so that we have nothing left to be generous with.
 4. One of the ways we can rethink Christmas is to simply spend less on gifts in order to have some to give away. Give away where? To Who?
- To our Resource Center (gave money – or took your kids and went to the grocery outlet

- To the Christmas Food Box / Toy drive
- To your church. Over the years, some people have approached me and just asked, “Does the church have needs (or particular ministry) that it doesn’t have the money for?”
- To a specific family (maybe you know of a family who is hurting...)

Are we willing to spend less on gifts in order to give more away?

Why is this so significant?

B. Generosity reflects the heart of God

1. As His people, shouldn’t we be the ones who reflect the heart of God to our culture?

I John 3:17 “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (NIV) (This doesn’t reflect His heart!)

II Cor. 9:13 “As a result of your ministry,(of generosity) they will give glory to God...” (NLT)

2. When people are impacted by our generosity, they experience the heart of God through us and give God glory. Our generosity impacts other people’s relationship with God.

3. It was God’s generosity that sent Jesus to us and changed our lives. Christmas is all about generosity. (Not to Wal-Mart / or a department store / or for a gift / but to reflect the heart of the Father by meeting needs)

4. How may God want you to spend less on material gifts this year in order to meet a need that God brings to you. We can be so focused on buying gifts that we don’t see that God wants to use us to be a gift to someone in need and reflect His heart.

- How often have you thought or said, “I’d like to help, but I just don’t have the resources to do that this year?” Maybe the reason is we’ve spent it all on being generous to those who don’t need it so now we have nothing left for those who do.

V. Spend Less In Order To Experience More Transformation

- Christmas is all about transformation. Jesus didn’t come so that the world could stay the same. He came to change the world!

A. By spending less we are not conforming to the world

Rom. 12:2 “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.” (NLT)

- As believers in Christ, we of all people should live Christmas differently. Not embrace a worldly perspective, but rather, grow up in our thinking about this holiday.

I Cor. 14:20 “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking...but in your thinking be mature.” (NASB) Grow up!

1. I believe by choosing to spend less on material things, we are growing up in our thinking. It’s like when you were a kid, and you had to eventually move past believing in Santa Claus. (When I was in 1st grade – Teacher called my parents)
2. As adults, there are beliefs we need to let go of. We need to eventually let go of the belief that we need to spend so much on the gifts. Stop allowing the world to define

Christmas for us. Stop being conformed to the world.

B. By spending less we are allowing God to work

“but let God transform you...” (NLT)

1. Jesus wasn't born in a manger just to give us a cute nativity scene. He was born in a manger to radically transform our lives. Look what Jesus Himself said.

John 10:10 “...I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” (NLT)

2. The way we can experience life to the full is by cooperating with what God wants to do in our lives. We can either let God transform us or resist what God wants to do.

3. All Jesus ever wanted to do was to give us a life we could never experience without Him. Life to the full! Now there is a Christmas gift I can get excited about.

4. Will you let Jesus give you this gift? Will you allow Him to transform your life? HOW? Jesus only transforms what is given to Him. As long as you hang on to your life, He can't give you this gift. You must give Him your life. This is the gift Jesus waits to receive from you.

5. How about rethinking Christmas this year by allowing Jesus to change your life? Let's take our focus off of spending so much on gifts and embrace the gifts Jesus so desperately wants you to unwrap

- Peace / Relationships / Meaning / Generosity / Transformation
- What gifts do you need to experience this Christmas?