



TAKEAWAY THOUGHT: God chose to love you and give everything, just so He could have a relationship with you.

SCRIPTURE: Luke 2:1-7, Luke 2:11, Isaiah 9:6, Romans 3:10, Romans 3:23, John 3:16, Hebrews 10:6

INTRO

[Author Note: I begin by sharing a story about my wife and how she makes Christmas special for everyone else in the family despite not enjoying the holiday herself. The point is to share a story about doing something with love without regard for oneself.]

I love Christmas. It is my favorite holiday. It is also my sons' favorite holiday. Who doesn't love Christmas? My wife Sarah. That's who. Over time, she shifted from liking it to feeling indifferent about it to downright disliking it. You wouldn't know that she hates it, though, because she's all in on Christmas. She is the fun parent when it comes to Christmas, and basically any other time a parent could do fun things with their kids. She bakes cookies with our sons. She decorates around the house. She's the one who decorates the tree with the boys. She joins us for our annual trip to Bronner's Christmas Wonderland, which is a year-round Christmas store that looks like you'd imagine Kris Kringle's home looks like. She does it all willingly and makes sure everyone's having a great time. Sometimes, she even watches a Christmas movie or two with the three of us.

Why would she do that? Why would someone who legitimately hates celebrating Christmas celebrate so hard? Love. She loves me and our sons. Our kids' joy matters more to her than just about anything. She cares about their hearts, their needs, their desires, and their enjoyment far more than she's ever cared for her own. She loves well, and she loves selflessly. She provides an unforgettable experience and holiday for them every year, because she loves them.

TENSION

When we love someone, there may be a tension between what we would choose for ourselves and what we might choose to do for that person. Love

is selfless, meaning it causes us to put aside wants, desires, and sometimes even needs to care for the object of our love. Some of you love like this so well. You readily help around the house, even though it's unlikely that you love the chores you do. Maybe you willingly watch a younger sibling to give your parents a break or an opportunity to go out, even though you'd probably rather be out with friends. Some of you are really awesome at loving people whom others find difficult to love. You put yourself into difficult positions to speak up for the marginalized or the outcasts. I'm grateful that our student ministry is filled with students and leaders who love well.

Perhaps you love well, because you recognize that you have been on the receiving end of this type of love. **Maybe a parent has taken you to a concert for an artist you love, but you know they do not like the artist.** You may notice that you get new clothes and shoes as often as you need them, but your parents continue to wear the same old things. Maybe you wonder why parents tend to go out of fashion, or maybe you've realized it's because there's only enough money for one of you to get new clothes, and they keep choosing you. Maybe you've experienced a teacher who goes above and beyond for you, because they care for you and believe in you. They stay late, they respond to any question you have, and/or they see you and take a genuine interest in you. Few things in life beat a great teacher, who often shows up at the hardest moments in our lives like no one else ever could.

I also recognize that when I describe these forms of love, there are people thinking, *"I wish I experienced love like that."* You feel like no one loves you this way — not your parents, not your siblings, not your friends, nobody. First, I'm so sorry. I'm not going to spend one second trying to convince you that your feelings are overblown or illegitimate. Feelings can be tricky, but it's important to feel them and process them in a healthy way, not have them dismissed. I want you to know that I do love you and that your leaders love you, and we will do our best to love you well if you tell us what that looks like for you. But I recognize that having a group of adults outside of your family love you may not fulfill the void you feel if you feel like people your own age or in your own family do not. And I recognize that holidays tend to amplify those feelings.

TRUTH

But I would hold another tension: what you feel is valid and real, but at the same time, you really are loved beyond measure — far beyond what you can imagine. And I don't just mean by me or your other leaders. Even though you cannot see Him, I assure you that God loves you. Christmas is one of the greatest expressions of His love. It marks the celebration of His choosing to love us when we were unlovable. We celebrate that He would come rescue people unfit for His presence and bring them lovingly into His family. I want to take a few moments to read and reflect on that moment.

Luke 2:1-7 (NLT)

1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. **2** (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. **4** And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. **5** He took with him Mary, his fiancée, who was now obviously pregnant. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. **7** She gave birth to her first child, a son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

This is the moment when Heaven broke into earth in one of grandest fashions, when a King left His throne for us, was born as a Jewish baby, and humbly laid in a manger. People will sometimes quibble over whether or not Jesus was ever recognized as God in the Bible. There are many who believe He was not. That's both incorrect and devastating, as it's having faith in His being God that gives us life and entry into His kingdom. Make no mistake: Jesus is God. Not only did He make these claims Himself, but the Bible told us that the Messiah would be and that Jesus is. In this very chapter, when the hosts of Heaven announced His arrival, they also recognized His being God.

Luke 2:11 (NLT)

11 The Savior — yes, the Messiah, the Lord — has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!



TAKEAWAY THOUGHT: When we understand what God has given us with love, we should want to give back to Him with love.

SCRIPTURE: 1 John 4:19, Matthew 2:1-11, Isaiah 53:4-6, 2 Corinthians 9:6-7, Matthew 5:14-16, Romans 12:1

Surface

What is the best Christmas gift you've ever given someone? What made it so special to you and them?

Do you prefer giving or receiving gifts? Why?

Serious

What makes a gift special to you?

How do you show someone you love them?

Spiritual

The wise men gave Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh. In the message, those were explained as financial, religious, and sacrificial. Which gift is the easiest type for you to give to God? Why is that?

Which type of gift is the hardest for you to give back to God? Why?

What is one way you feel you are being called to give back to God going forward from today?

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