

THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTMAS

Part 2 - Giving

Christmas is wonderful! I love this time of year! I do sometimes get accused of being a bit grinchy, which I always was concerned about. But what I've realised is that I really like seeing how other people enjoy Christmas. There's something seeing people at peace, celebrating with one another that is lovely.

We do look at things differently at this time. Why is that?

A quick google of 'characteristics of Australians' results in: Mateship, Egalitarianism, Authenticity, Optimism, Humility, Informality, Easy-going, Common sense, Humour. Australia is cited as the 4th most generous nation in the world when it comes to supporting charities.

Generosity, looking out for one another, giving of ourselves, is part of our DNA back to the earliest settlers in this area.

But, and I think this might be true of a wider demographic than just here, when the tides turn, when there's wholesale pressure on society, it can change the way we see each other and how we live out our core values.

The Spirit of Christmas

At the heart of Christmas is the person of Jesus. And maybe why the 'spirit' of Christmas doesn't last past boxing day is that the Spirit that came to us because of Christmas – Holy spirit – the Spirit of Jesus – is the real reason people live in peace and harmony with one another. This only comes from Jesus, through His Spirit, who is available all year 'round, but came to us because of that first Christmas.

The First Noël

When Joseph and Mary experienced the miracle of the birth of Jesus on that first Christmas night, something really significant happened. This was the culmination of centuries, actually millennia, of prophecies and promises that God had given to His people, that one would come that would set everything right.

But here's another thing that makes this a significant moment: God wasn't expecting something from humanity. In the ancient world, gods and kings expected a lot from their people. There was an expectation that the people would work and produce for the overlords – be it human or divine.

When Yahweh shows up to Abraham, and without any expectation materially, says He'll bless him to be a blessing to everyone – this is radical! This introduces a concept that, in the ancient world, was unheard of: generosity.

When all the other gods and kings wanted for themselves, and took from their people, there shows up God, who says, 'Here, I am giving you something... Be blessed...'

... And Justice for All - Isaiah 9:6-7

Let's just pay attention to some of this language:

- + For *to* us a child is born
- + A son is *given*
- + Wonderful *counsellor*
- + *Mighty* God
- + Everlasting *Father*
- + Prince of *Peace*
- + He will govern with *justice* and *righteousness*

If the Spirit of Christmas reflects the Spirit of God who comes to us, then this nature, this foundational character trait of God, of giving and generosity, comes to us...

Upside Down (and Inside Out)

We have to take this upward, inward and outward journey in our relationship with Jesus.

John 3:16

God is a giving God, Jesus is the gift that keeps on giving. I think that our struggles with generosity sit mainly in this section – in the unresolved internal journey of allowing God to be generous to us, and us being generous to ourselves.

Something is worth what someone was willing to pay for it. If our inward journey of giving doesn't start to acknowledge our worth as a child of God, paid for by the priceless blood of Jesus, then we will ALWAYS struggle to express the generosity of God in our lives.

"I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live." – John 14:18-19 (ESV)

Until we leave behind our orphan mentality, our pauper glasses that we see the world with, we will always struggle to express the generosity of God.

Last Christmas, I Gave You My Heart

The outward journey.

It is significant that our salvation is not based on our efforts, but on the giving nature of God.

“...while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” – Romans 5:8 (ESV)

When the Spirit of Giving fills us, we can't help but give!

Just like when the spirit of peace fills us, we become agents of peace in the world around us, so too we become agents of generosity to the world around us.

If you gave Him your life last year, then this year, you'll most likely look a little more like Him!

You can check your closeness to Him by how you do the things He does:

- + Does Jesus forgive quickly and fully? Do I?
- + Does Jesus give generously of His time and affections to people who don't deserve it? Do I?
- + Was money a symbol of status or a means to see the kingdom realised for Jesus? What about me?

The first Christmas reminds us that there is a new variable in the world, that it's not a closed system any more. God steps into His creation, and changes the rules of play. Now, five loaves and two fish can feed thousands.

We know about wealth creation; about a creative economy that creates new things in order to create wealth, not just financial wealth. And maybe, just maybe, we've become so clever at creating for ourselves that we've forgotten that, ultimately, it all comes from God – He's the one who opened the system, and we've turned our backs to Him?

Maybe, just maybe, He's inviting us to welcome Him back into our midst, to our life and work and endeavours, because He's the one who feeds the multitudes with a boy's afternoon tea.

2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Matthew 25:31-40

This Christmas, what does it look like for you and me to live this out – to live the life of generosity that reflects the life of Jesus, and His spirit of giving?

Note: One stumbling block in financial giving is knowing where and how to give towards the work of the Kingdom. We encourage everyone who calls Riverlife their church home to give financially through tithes and offerings. This is a biblical way that God has given us to resource kingdom work. Then as a church community, we use these finances to resource the work of the kingdom through our people and programs, in our discipleship programs, as well as in reaching out to those who don't know the good news of Jesus, and providing materially to those in need both locally and around the world.

If you want to know more about giving, and about the biblical foundation of giving, you can read this article: <https://riverlifecyclechurch.org.au/a-generous-heart/>

If you want to know how to give, you can go to <https://riverlifecyclechurch.org.au/give/>

Discussion and Reflection Questions

1. What does John 3:16 reveal about the giving nature of God, and how does it relate to the Spirit of Christmas?
2. How can you exemplify sacrificial love and the Spirit of Christmas in your daily interactions with others?
3. How does walking with Jesus transform us into agents of generosity?
4. What specific habits or actions can you adopt to walk more closely with Jesus and extend His generosity to others?
5. Why is recognising our worth as children of God important to living a life of giving and generosity?
6. What steps can you take to remind yourself of your worth and identity in Christ?
7. What is the true essence of the Christmas season and how is it different from just giving and receiving gifts?
8. How can you focus more on the true spirit of Christmas in your own celebrations this year?