

The 12 Steps of Christmas

December 24, 2006

DRASTIC HOLIDAY

Christmas is a drastic holiday. People do desperate, desperate things at Christmas.

A little boy was finishing a letter to Santa - pleading for a new bike - when it dawned on him that Saint Nick has to answer to the Lord. So, he scratched out Santa's name wrote: "Dear God". But then he looked at what he'd written: "I've been good for six whole months now!" Hmm ... he figured that God would be a lot harder to fool than Santa! So, he crossed out "six months" and changed it to "three". But that wasn't enough, so he scratched that out and wrote, "two weeks" ... and then he crossed that out too. He got up from the table to think, and he wandered over to a small nativity scene. He studied the tiny Shepherds and the Wise Men, and baby Jesus (God in flesh) lying there so pure and holy, with Mary and Joseph so pleased. And he was struck by a thought. He picked up the figure of Mary and went back to start a new letter: "Dear Jesus ... if You ever want to see your mother again ..."

Our culture seems to be addicted to the *chaos* of Christmas!

Q: Is the amount of angry horn-honking and public yelling and pushing and shoving ever more drastic than at the time of year we celebrate the Prince of Peace.

I imagine you've heard of the Twelve Days of Christmas ... *that* is one organized individual! Twelve elaborately detailed gifts punctually arriving over the course of twelve consecutive days!

Pipers are piping; Lords are leaping; drummers drumming, swans a'swimming, maids a'milking, ladies dancing, geese a'laying.

- Seriously, the *planning* that must have gone into that!

I figure the majority of us are far too dysfunctional for that.

My pipers would be drumming, my swans a'milking ... and really, who would want to see that?! Is that goose leaping or dancing?!

Q: Be honest, how many of you still have gifts to get? You got it bad!

We can get so caught up in the chaos ... so captivated by our culture's commotion and commercialization that I decided to adapt an official recovery program for my message this morning.

RECOVERY PROGRAM



Instead of the “*Twelve Days of Christmas*”, you’re getting the “*Twelve Steps of Christmas*”!

1. I must admit I am powerless over the holiday

As much as we wish we could slow down the mad rush around us just a bit – we can’t. We can only control ourselves. We’ll be back in the same situation again in 365 days. It’s very *rare* to have something go off just as we’ve planned.



Say it with me: I can’t control Christmas.

Good; that’s the first step ... admitting you have a problem! And since I am powerless over it ...

2. I must believe that only the highest Power can restore me

Q: Did you notice that I changed it from the standard “higher” power language?

- I don’t want to bother with *higher* power nonsense.
- There are a *lot* of powers that are *higher* than me.
- I want to put my trust in the *highest* of those!

And He came as a gift, wrapped in swaddling clothes. But it makes no sense to get a gift and not unwrap it. But, do you know when Jesus was *unwrapped*?

In the tomb; when he rose, He left His swaddling clothes behind! The women who saw it first, ran back and told the disciples.

But [the disciples] did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves ... - *Luke 24:11-12 NIV*

It’s not enough to just believe in the highest power ...

3. I must turn my life over to the risen Christ

If you don’t receive Jesus “unwrapped”, you’ll miss out on the purpose of the present and the goal of the giver.

Christmas trees are such an odd but befitting custom. We make them the centerpiece of our celebration, and then nurse them with water while they slowly, inevitably die. It’s always so sad when the tree stops “drinking.”

But, remember the woman at the well?

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." -
John 4:10 NIV



We're like those trees; our needles will fall, our season will pass. But Christ "unwrapped" is the gift of eternal life.

- Jesus offers living water to keep us evergreen.

But, to turn our lives over, requires something courageous ...

4. I must take a fearless moral inventory of myself

What are you like when you do your last-minute shopping, or someone steals your parking space, or company's coming over? Stress will reveal levels within us that need God's touch.

Ever say to someone, "You make me so mad!" People do *not* have the power to *make* you mad. They can only take *advantage* of your willingness to compromise your values.

Therefore ...

5. I must admit my flaws to God, to myself, and to others

A young boy was choosing his first puppy from a litter. All the puppies were jumping up and down except for the runt, which the boy decided was the one he wanted. The owner explained that this particular puppy was crippled, and that the boy would enjoy one of the others puppies much more. The excited young boy lifted his pant leg to expose a chrome leg brace, and said, "That's *why* I want him."



The very thing that disqualified the puppy from being chosen by others is what most-qualified him to be chosen by the boy. Jesus came for the wounded, broken, and unattractive.

Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. - *Matthew 9:12 NIV*

Try to keep that in mind as you're fighting your way through the maddening crowds, and the bad-mannered clerks. But, it's not enough to just admit our faults and flaws ...

6. I must be ready to allow God to transform my defects
7. I must humbly ask His Spirit to do the transforming

Q: Have you noticed how strained-relationships surface during the holiday stress?

So, to go with my Christmas card list and my gift list ...

8. I must make a list of all persons I've harmed
9. I must make amends whenever and wherever possible

We can choose to give something far more powerful in displaying love and reflecting our Savior than any store-bought gift can.



If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift. - Matthew 5:23-24 NIV

- Reconciliation is far greater than gifts.

And, to keep a good thing going all year 'round ...

10. I must continue to promptly admit when I'm wrong

Take God up on this amazing offer: Try to be the first to apologize in the next three conflicts you have over Christmas, and if you're not completely satisfied with the results, He'll gladly refund your misery!

To be consistent in this isn't possible under our own strength ...

11. I must pray for knowledge and power to know and do His will

A father is Christmas shopping, pushing a cart with a screaming, bellowing child in it. He keeps calmly reassuring, "We're almost done, Albert ... don't scream, Albert ... I know you hate this Albert, but try not to throw a fit." A woman next to him says, "You should be commended for your compassion with your son." The man looks at her and says, "Lady ... I'm Albert!"

In the midst of the Christmas crush, we have to make a deliberate choice if we want to be an ambassador for the One we celebrate. And if we do, we will automatically meet step number twelve ...

12. I must carry His message to all who will listen

He faithfully uses us as His ambassadors in spite of our Yule tide dysfunctions. And the reason for this is simple: The people that He has surrounded us with, and is sending us to, have just as big a need for an "unwrapped" Savior as we do!

May God grant you the serenity to accept the gifts you cannot return, the courage to re-gift the ones you can, and the receipts to know the difference.