

# The 12 Steps of Christmas

December 20, 2009

Christmas is a drastic holiday! The traffic, the lines, the *people!* We do drastic, 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 and 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 that out and changed it to “three Months”. 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 happy. 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 is addicted to the chaos of Christmas. Is the amount of angry horn-honking, public yelling and pushing and shoving ever more drastic than at the time of year when we celebrate the Prince of Peace?!

You’ve certainly heard of The Twelve Days of Christmas ... that’s 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. The planning that must’ve gone into such a thing is *staggering*. I can’t imagine. My pipers would be drumming, my swans a’milking ... and really, who wants to see that?! That’s just gross.

How many of you still have gifts to get? You’re among friends!



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. Instead of “The Twelve Days of Christmas”, we’re going to look at “The Twelve Steps of Christmas”!



Those well-known twelve steps have been adapted to just about every addiction and dysfunction – so why not the holidays?! And the first step is ...

1. I must admit I am powerless over the madness



As much as we wish we could slow down and control the mad rush and the crush around us – we can't. We can only control ourselves. And even then, things often don't turn out the way we mean them to. And 365 days from now we'll be right back in the same situation. So, say this with me: I can't control Christmas.

That's good. The first step is admitting you have a problem! And since we're powerless over it ...

2. I must trust in the highest Power to restore me

I changed it from the standard "higher" power language. I don't want to bother with just any old "higher power". I want to put my trust in the higher-power's Higher Power! I don't want to settle for the higher; I want the *highest!*

And He came to earth as a Christmas *gift*. He was even wrapped (in swaddling clothes). But it makes no sense to *keep* a gift wrapped; the excitement is in the unwrapping - the unveiling. Do you know when Jesus was unwrapped? In the tomb; when he rose, He left the gift-wrapping behind!

[Peter] got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves ... - *Luke 24:12a NIV*

He was wrapped as a baby, and unwrapped as the risen Savior! It is 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."

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 branches are drooping, I mean, you look good, you've got your ornaments on, but our season will pass. 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're rushing to get that last-minute gift and someone steals the last parking space, and the item you want is gone, even though the rude clerk condescendingly assured you it was there, over the phone? How do you speak and act in maddening moments like those?



This offers a glimpse of what God's really working with! We like to say, "I'm not acting like myself today." But, we should say, "I'm acting too much like myself today!" Stress reveals our parts 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 test the strength of your values, your grace, and your self-control. Therefore ...

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

One Christmas, a young boy got to choose a puppy for his gift. All the puppies in the litter were jumping up and down except for the runt, which the boy immediately chose. The owner explained that this particular puppy was crippled. But, the excited young boy simply lifted his pant leg to expose a metal brace, and said, "That's why I want him."

The very thing that disqualified the puppy from being chosen by others, *most-qualified* him to be chosen by the boy. He sympathized and identified with the puppy's situation.



For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet was without sin. - *Hebrews 4:15 NIV*

Jesus came for the wounded, broken, and unattractive. And that should embolden us to be open about our weaknesses. He gave His life for us *because* we are broken and unattractive. And, we should keep this in mind as we're fighting our way through the maddening crowds, and the bad-mannered clerks. Those are the very people he *came* for, exposing the very need *for* Him!

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

Have you noticed how strained-relationships tend to surface during the stress of the holidays? Well, to go with my Christmas card list and my gift list ...

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

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



Reconciliation is the greatest gift. It's far more meaningful, relational, and powerful than a Hickory Farms cheese box!

Humbly taking responsibility for our actions is the best present we can offer to someone we've wounded or offended.

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

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. 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!

Which brings us to the twelfth and final step:

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

When we reflect His love and grace in the midst of the chaos, those who witness will know they have been touched by a power greater than the human spirit.

This concludes our twelve step Christmas recovery program.

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.