

# The 12 Steps of Christmas

## Overcoming Chaos With Christ

December 12, 2021



Today we're talking about Christmas! And chaos. And how to make a more pleasin' season. But to do that, first we gotta answer this, honestly:



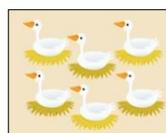
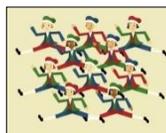
**What do you want for Christmas?** You've got a list. Even if you didn't send it to Santa, your heart has been working one up all year and we should know what's on it, because **what's in your cart is what's in your heart!** And that's okay for us kids, because **longing leads us to learn about love!** It naturally reveals the object of your affection *AND*, the effort you'll expend to attain it (and that's all God needs to get a peek at your true heart!). So what do you want and how you gonna get it? *Well Christmas tells all!*



And I don't know which is uglier: the sweaters or the hearts! Just look at the traffic, the lines, and *each other!* **We can become drastic, desperate, or even despicable just to get foolish, fleeting, and fake things!**

A little boy was finishing a letter to Santa – pleading for a Playstation - when it dawned on him; even ol' 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 all year!" 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 thinking again, he scratched that out, and wrote, "two weeks" ... and then he crossed that out too. He got up from his seat to think, and he wandered over to a small nativity scene. He studied the tiny shepherds and the wise men, and the little baby Jesus (God Himself in the flesh), lying there so pure and holy, with Mary and Joseph so pleased and happy. And then suddenly, 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 ..."

**It is funny how getting and giving gifts plainly lays out whatever you've been hiding in your heart.** Just *thinking* of getting what we want is so exciting that we move it to the top of the list and forget everything else (*goodbye manners, finances, and bathing!*). And the chaos we're left with becomes our culture, **because we'll do whatever it takes to see desire fulfilled!**



You've 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, geese a'laying. **The effort that it must've taken is staggering.** I can't imagine. *My* pipers would be drumming, *my* swans a'milking – and really, who wants to see that?!

Yet we *all* get caught up in the chaos; *it's addictive!* And **we get so captivated and confused by the commercial commotion so that we forget what we want;** what we *really, really* want! When what we really *NEED*, is a little help to ditch the dysfunction! So, forget “The Twelve Days of Christmas” – today we’re working to overcome our addiction by adapting a tried and true recovery program; it’s time for **“THE TWELVE STEPS OF CHRISTMAS”!** Let’s take it from the top:



### Step 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. So, repeat after me: **I can’t control Christmas.** Not even a little.

The other day my kids asked me what I want for Christmas. First, I said “Who, me? Oh nothing”. Then they rolled their eyes and said, “C’mon... *really.*” And I said, “Well, I did see this cool contraption that you put inside shoes and crank – to spread and stretch normal shoes for people with wide feet! That sounds awesome!”... I’ve never been so laughed at. And after these bullies caught their breath and walked away, I realized, I’m not getting it this Christmas. Because, things are dismissed if they’re not on *our* list. And **a world full of different hearts and carts is a recipe for perpetual chaos.** And since we can’t bring ourselves to come together:

### Step 2: I must trust in the highest Power to restore me

Now, the original 12 step program does call for a *higher power.* But we’re aiming higher *still!* I’m a “me” expert and if I’m letting go of the reins and turning over my trust, it’s not going to just *anyone!* It’s gotta be to the *highest* Power! Anything less is an *arguable* authority and I know me – *don’t give me an inch!* It’s gotta be God and I need to *know* it.



So thank heavens **He knew what I needed and gave it as a gift.** Highest Power, in the flesh, wrapped for Christmas as a swaddled baby who would demonstrate the power and proof of a perfect and trustworthy God.

**But a gift is no good while it’s wrapped, the excitement and engagement comes *in and after* its unwrapping.** And 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 24:12 NIV

He was wrapped as a baby, and unwrapped as the risen Savior! And **He’s the gift that keeps on giving!** Because His presence is only part of our present; knowing Jesus as that *highest* power means we must build on that belief and:

### Step 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.** Consider Christmas trees as a painful metaphor. We make them the centerpiece of our celebration, and then

nurse them with water while they slowly, inevitably die. And it's 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; needles falling out, drooping branches, I mean, you look good, you've got your ornaments on, but our season will pass. It's Jesus who offers living water to keep us evergreen. But we can't hand ourselves over, without another critical and courageous step:

#### Step 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 AirPods are all gone, even though the rude clerk condescendingly assured you they had some, over the phone? **How do you speak and act in maddening moments like those?**

That's who 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 what we're made of; warts and all.** Ever tell 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, grace, and self-control. Therefore:

#### Step 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.** *Good news for the likes of us!* 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 mobs, despicable drivers, and jerk clerks.** *They* are the very people He came for — demonstrating the very need *for* Him to come! But, it's not enough to just *admit* our faults and flaws; we need to take action with the old "transformation two-step":

#### Step 6: I must be ready to allow God to transform my defects

#### Step 7: I must humbly ask His Spirit to do the transforming

At this point, we know we're a hot mess, where we went wrong, and who's in control; now **we need to cooperate with the will He's working in our hearts**. And isn't just poetic how He grows you from the inside using people from your outside? It makes sense then, that in a season of heart-revealing stress and Jesus-centered conversation, strained relationships tend to surface. So, to capitalize on the "transformation two-step", we're going to need to think two steps ahead and, in addition to my Christmas card list and my gift list:

**Step 8: I must make a list of all persons I've harmed ... and ...**

**Step 9: I must make amends whenever and wherever possible**

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 the greatest gift.** It's far more meaningful, relational, and powerful than a Hickory Farms cheese box! And those things are great! But humbly taking responsibility for our actions is the best present we can offer to someone we've wounded or offended. But, because reconciliation is a dish best served warm:

**Step 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! But I don't think He's got a return department because, spoiler alert, humility works every time! **It feels good and it makes good; it just doesn't come natural to us humans.** Which is why we need to outsource that motivation and strength, with:



**Step 11: I must pray for knowledge and power to know and do His will**

In the midst of the Christmas chaos, we have to make a deliberate choice if *we want* to be an ambassador for the One we celebrate. It's up to you, because He *likes* using us kids 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 us! Which takes us to the twelfth and final step:



**Step 12: I must carry His message to all who will listen**

If we want to get what He's got, we gotta give what *He* wants! And you know what Dad wants for Christmas? You! Us! And everyone in between! **He wants the whole family home for Christmas so we can all enjoy His presence.** And yes, that means *EVERYBODY*. And yes, just like my shoe-stretchers, you gotta go get 'em, even if *YOU* don't like 'em! But remember, they're all just a few steps from being in your cart and in your heart; just work the program. Remember to reflect His love and grace in the middle of the mayhem – and no matter the wish list – we'll all get what we want for Christmas. What we really, *REALLY* want.