

Gratitude & Generosity

Part 3: Christmas Offering

ICEBREAKER |

What are your plans for Christmas?

INTRODUCTION |

All of us have some kind of plans for Christmas. They may be a big blow out with a houseful of family, or just a few quiet nights at home. You may be looking forward to seeing old friends or making new ones at a company party. There is one thing we can all be planning for, and that's how we'll be giving in this year's Christmas Offering. This week, Pastor Dave shared some of the ways our donations will go to help those closest to us and around the world. Not only did he tell us what we are giving to, he also showed us why we are giving. Let's dig a bit further into those two questions.

READ I

Christmas is a time of light. That doesn't just mean the twinkling ones you hang on your house and around your tree. There is a greater light at Christmas, Jesus. Pastor Dave encouraged us to see the light of Jesus shining in dark areas around the world. We can all expect some dark days in life. There is confusion and conflict, disappointment and loss. You may be suffering from grief, anxiety, stress or fear. Whatever that darkness is, Jesus is the light. Take a look at this promise from the Old Testament:

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. For a child is born to us, a Son is given to us. The government will rest on His shoulders. And He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:2, 6 (NLT)

In the middle of a huge conflict, God reassured His people that light was coming. And the answer would be the one born on that first Christmas – Jesus Christ Himself. He is a Wonderful Counselor in our time of need. He is a Mighty God who answers our prayers. He is Everlasting Father, the same yesterday, today, and forever. And He is our Prince of Peace, calming our fears no matter what.

Each of these names of Jesus give us hope, but also make us grateful. When we see just what Jesus is doing in our lives, we will respond with generosity.

Which of those four names for Jesus means the most to you right now? Why is that?

READ |

Pastor Dave shared a few passages of scripture with us. Let's take a closer look at a couple of them here.

First, in Matthew 25 Jesus told us a story about how we will all be rewarded when He returns. God will separate those who followed Him from those who did not. What's the one deciding factor? How they treated others. He will tell us, *"You saw that I was hungry, and gave me something to eat. You saw that I was lonely, and you visited me."* How can that be? He tells us:

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for Me."
Matthew 25:40 (NIV)

What happens when we see a need and we don't respond, though? John tells us this:

If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God's love be in that person?
1 John 3:17-18 (NLT)

Giving will always begin with seeing. We first have to see the needs around us. That may be difficult sometimes, but it is what God calls us to do.

What are some reasons you fail to see the needs around you? (Example, too busy to take the time to look, afraid you won't know what to do, you might be thinking to yourself there's always a next time). How can you overcome those blinders to see Jesus behind every need?

READ I

The Lord has shown us in His Word what to look for in the world. God is shining in the darkness, but we need eyes to see. Read the following passages. Can you identify the needs that we should focus on in each one?

Jesus heard them and answered, "Healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I didn't come to invite good people to be my followers. I came to invite sinners."

Mark 2:17 (CEV)

Caring for the poor is lending to the LORD, and you will be well repaid.

Proverbs 19:17 (CEV)

"Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:19-20 (NLT)

In these three passages, we hear a call to reach the sick, the poor, and the lost. These aren't the only needs we need to see, but it's a great starting point.

How have you personally responded to one – or two, or all three – of these needs in your own life? How has God “repaid” you with a blessing because of it?

READ |

Let's look at a few of the ways we are giving this holiday season. Here are just some of the ministries, projects, and needs that your Christmas Offering will go towards.

Ho`ōla Nā Pua ("New Life for Our Children") is a ministry committed to the prevention of child sex trafficking and helping underage kids who have been victims. Last year, your giving helped them complete the **Pearl Haven Special Treatment Facility** on the North Shore, which opened in the Spring.

We partner with two Christian residential treatment centers, **Hope Center** in Kailua and the **Salvation Army's Family Treatment Services**. Both of these facilities help people recovering from addiction, which unfortunately we've seen increase during the pandemic.

The **Foursquare Disaster Relief** fund will help those impacted by natural disasters all over the world.

We support **101 Full-time missionaries** who are making disciples in **147 countries** through churches and orphanages, like this one. This year alone, you've helped plant **11 new churches**.

Which of these projects that you've already helped with your giving touches you the most and why? What are you most excited about seeing in the new year?

WHAT WILL YOU DO?

This week, as you gave in the Christmas Offering, just think about what you gave to.

- Those afflicted with illness and addiction are being mended.
- Those in prison or lonely are being visited.
- Those in need are seeing a miracle happen.
- Those who are lost are being reached.

And it's all because of you. Continue to respond with gratitude and generosity.

ADDITIONAL ACTION STEPS (Optional):

- Do at least one (1) SOAP Devotions this week
- Share with your group one of your SOAP Devotions from this past week
- Invite a friend to join your small group next week.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father God, we are always thankful to You, because it's from You that we receive everything we have. And now, we return to You a small portion of that. And we ask You to multiple it throughout the world as Your hope spreads to every corner of the globe. Help us to be reminded that when we give to the least of these brothers and sisters, we are ultimately giving to You. May we continue to be your instruments where your blessings flow through. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

SCRIPTURES FOR S.O.A.P.

Day 1:

Then Jesus said, "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."
Matthew 11:28 (NLT)

Day 2:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.
Revelation 22:1-2 (NIV)

Day 3:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."
Luke 4:18-19 (NIV)

Day 4:

Each of you must make up your own mind about how much to give. But don't feel sorry that you must give and don't feel that you are forced to give. God loves people who love to give. God can bless you with everything you need, and you will always have more than enough to do all kinds of good things for others.
2 Corinthians 9:7-8 (CEV)

Day 5:

Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God. Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy, for you have been my partners in spreading the Good News about Christ from the time you first heard it until now.
Philippians 1:3-5 (NLT)