

Outline

Christmas Last! Perspective

Do you have problems with Christmas? I don't really. I actually love Christmas more the older that I get. One thing is for sure with me, though. I love it for entirely different reasons than I did as a kid. Christmas was wonderful as a kid for I loved to live in the expectation of it. I loved how my mom would make it a wonderful full month celebration that began shortly after Thanksgiving ended. She would begin cooking all manner of sundries from Yule Logs to this wonderful "fudgy" chocolate log that had multicolored marshmallows in it that tasted every bit as wonderful as it looked. She made Christmas sugar cookies that were in the shape of Santa and stockings and candy canes and covered them with various colored frostings that were quite festive in appearance and quite fun in chomping on Santa's head. Decapitated Santa gave me wonderfully psychotic thrills for hours at a time. I digress.

Then there was always the presents, the hiding of the presents, the revealing of the presents under the tree, the guessing of what the presents were. A whole month of hoping that mom and dad (and Santa, of course), would get it right and place under the tree that wonderful "light up Monday Night Football game with real to life Howard Cosell voice calling the plays" that I so wanted. Christmas for me also included a journey from Colorado to South Carolina to visit my relatives and a stay in my wonderful Grandmother's house that was full of love and biscuits and molasses and Fruit Loops (the cereal, not my cousins).

And then the blessed day would come and my Grandmother's living room would be full of presents - a mountain of presents. And I knew buried beneath the heap would be some for me. There would always be a flurry of activity and "oohs" and "ahhs" as people would either fake like they loved what they got or there was genuine satisfaction with a gift well struck. I usually got to start with something like "underwear" (minus the ooh and ah, mind you). Then got to move onto shirts and jeans – snooze city. Until finally I got to the good stuff, like a model "Hess gasoline truck with real working headlights" or football cards, and even one year, an awesome bold red, really tricked out "8 Track Tape Player" complete with Glen Campbell's *Rhinestone Cowboy* 8 Track Tape. Good Times.

Yeah Christmas as a kid was fun – but also anticlimactic, for I would get depressed when all the gift stuff was over and I had no more surprises. Then the only thing to do was to eat the Christmas feast. Then the next day was just an ordinary day - and the next one and the next one and the next one. All that build up and it was over super quick!

As I said, as an adult, and with each year that passes, I am coming to enjoy Christmas more and more. And it is not because of the gifts, for I get fewer of them and they are not as fun as "light up Monday Night Football game with real-to-life Howard Cosell voice calling the plays." (Which I did get that one cool Christmas – and my dad and I played it for hours together – my greatest Christmas memory – not the gift of the toy, but the gift of my Dad's time!) But I love having an excuse to just spend time with my family. I love the time that Christmas seems to give me at some point (for me usually on Christmas day or on that very boring day as a kid, the day after Christmas) to stop and really focus on the important things in my life – my wife, my kids, my relationship with God, my friends. I go really internal in a cool way. I love Christmas for it seems to remind me of the things in my life that are really important and I stop to enjoy them. I love Christmas because I stop!... I realize that I am a blessed man. I stop... and enjoy making Chex Mix with my son... I stop... and soak in the Christmas songs that ARE about joy and Santa giving and God loving the world... I stop... and focus on what is real and good and loving and **I try to enjoy it on purpose.**

Do you struggle with that? I don't really. Do you struggle enjoying Christmas? Maybe it is simply a matter of perspective. Yeah, I know Christmas is supposed to be the most depressing time of year for a lot of people and there are a lot of reasons that it is supposed to be a depressing time of year. It is a time of year that causes us to remember those loved ones that we have lost. It is a time of year that causes us to focus on the marriage that failed. It is the time of year that causes us to stress over the right gift, the right party, the political exchange of tokens of appreciation that are appropriate and approximately equal in value. It is hurly burly running to and fro making sure that we get everyone what they want and have the right "fixins" for a proper Christmas dinner. Then there is the obligatory party

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hopping that we must debate attendance, yet often have no choice in the matter. We know we are going to come up against those people that make our life hard, that have offended us or betrayed us this last year or in years past and we are going to have to try and make nice, but will be tried to the last bit of our ability, for they are so obnoxious and they know just how to push our buttons. Christmas seems to bring out the worst in them and us for that hatchet that we buried in each other's soul so many years ago begins to fester and bleed its poisonous ooze. We must re-engage damaged friendships, renew hurt and abused family histories or even share forced Christmas confrontation with divorced spouses. Christmas can be very trying in the relationship department. Dad treats us like a 12-year-old still. My brother never grew up. My sister is such a loser in her testy marriage and her bratty kids. Christmas can evoke hostile and charged feelings.

But what if we just tweaked our focus just a bit? What if we set a new perspective that might just change the way we think about that loss, those hurting and damaged relationships, that stress? What if this Christmas Season you simply made a small change of Perspective and decided to approach the season and life a bit differently? I want to try and challenge you to do just that over this Holiday. I wonder if you would engage in a little experiment with me. I want to challenge you to view Christmas and maybe your life in just a little bit of a different way and see if it changes Christmas for you – see if it might just change life for you. Are you willing to go there with me? I hope so.

Can I ask you to [Live this Christmas as if it is your Last Christmas](#). You heard me right. How would you approach this Christmas if God came to visit you and told you that this was **Christmas Last**? Would you approach it with the same feelings, the same ideas, the same thoughts that you approach all your Christmases? Or would you attack it with a new import? How would you live your last Christmas if you got a sneak peak into the fact that December 26 you would be summoned home officially and your Divine appointment with Death would call with surety? Really, in all reality, I hate to be a Christmas Scrooge and bum you all out and everything, but, how do you know this is not Christmas Last for you? The Bible gives us some counsel in this area in the book of James:

Christmas Last Perspective Realizes “I’m just mist.”

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. [What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.](#) Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

[James 4:13-17 NIV](#)

We really are guaranteed nothing in life, yet we live like we have all the time in the world ignoring the wonderful relationships that we have, the fantastic friendships God has blessed us with. We plan to apologize to that family member and renew that friendship. We know someday we will relax and enjoy the world a little more. Someday, when I have time, I will pursue God. And in the meantime, like it says in the passage from James, we sin by living a boastful life that in the living says “I have all the time in the world to enjoy God's blessings and make things right that are wrong in my life.” A Christmas Last Perspective shifts this and says, “I may not have all the time in the World. What must I get done now if this is Christmas Last for me?”

As a matter of fact, I want you to think about that over the next few moments and I am going to stop speaking. And to inspire you, I am going to ask the band to play a song that will help you think about how your perspective might shift if you lived out a James 4 Christmas Last Lifestyle over the next two weeks. This is a song originally performed by a man who had to confront the impending death of his father, whom he found out was in stage four cancer with only months to live. The dying man decided to live in those months rather than die in those months and it inspired the living son to live his life like he was dying in the same example of his father. The performer I am talking about is Tim McGraw who performed the song *Live Like You Were Dying* in honor of his dying father Tug McGraw. As you listen to his counsel, think about how you would change your thoughts this Christmas Season just for the next couple of weeks if you took the advice of this song.

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Insert Live Like You Were Dying

Did you think about how your perspective in life would shift if you chose to live out your life – that mist that it is – with a Christmas Last perspective? Would your activities change? Would your relationships change? Would your priorities shift? I suspect that they would. Would you hurry and take care of that unfinished business that creeps around the back of your thoughts as a nagging emotional ache in your spirit? The paycheck, though still necessary would pale in priority, which would make the essentiality of huge amounts of overtime vastly underrated. The cleared desk would shrink in comparison to the cleared conscience of relationship issues that have been bothering us forever. That which is true priority would come clearly into perspective allowing those fuzzy decisions over what is most important and what is least important to be quite crystal clear. The Bible gives us a couple of great **Christmas Last! Hints** if we are truly going to try and change our perspective to a Christmas Last perspective:

Christmas Last Hints

The end of all things is near. Therefore be clear-minded and self-controlled so that you can pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. I Peter 4:7-11 NIV

Start Each Christmas Last! Day with Prayer. I am incapable of living a Christmas Last! Perspective. If I could, Christmas and Life would not stress me out the way it does and I would find the joy in living. So I need help. Therefore, every day that I choose to live a Christmas Last Perspective in my life, I will ask God to clear my mind of my stresses and allow him to control my emotions. It's as simple as that – one short prayer where I will give my day and my emotions and my stresses to him to control and I commit to obey His thoughts and directions.

Love those around you deeply. A Christmas Last Perspective chooses to love rather than hate. That starts with those who I first encounter as I move from bed to breakfast table, and then extends to being a true friend to my friends. It expands to my neighborhood and reaching out in love with no strings attached to my neighbors. You know those cats at work that drive you crazy and you can't stand? Christmas Last! Perspective will allow me to view them in a different light. As I think that this may be the last encounter I have with them, I may need to seek forgiveness, make things right that are wrong between us, live with an attitude of grace and love even as they treat me poorly. After all, I have no idea where they are coming from or what they are going through in their lives. They are good people if I will just try to take the time to see the world from their perspective. If you need a hint on how to love those around you deeply, go to the love chapter of the Bible, I Corinthians 13 and operate exactly in the manner of the manual.

Choose to be Hospitable. Hospitality is simply offering whatever you have to others in the name of Jesus. A Christmas Last! Perspective will open up my home for others to enjoy no matter how big it is. I will share a meal with others and listen to them and get to know them and let them know I care. Hospitality means I will simply enjoy people. Hey, Scrooges, get out of the cave or at least invite others into your cave and get to know your neighbors, your church members, your co-workers, the homeless guy on the street, the single gal that lives near. Be hospitable. Share a meal, a cookie, a conversation.

Be Generous. A Christmas Last! Perspective shifts demands that I am become generous with my time, my talent, and my treasure. You want to know the quickest way to become cynical and hate life – hold onto your possessions as tight as you can. The Bible speaks constantly on the subject of Generosity and encouraging us to be very generous. We get so tight that all we can see is our own bad selves and the more we focus on ourselves rather than serving and giving to others generously, the more "Scrooged" we get. That's why this passage encourages us to give and give generously. Give as God has given to you and in His strength. That's why we started each Christmas Last! Day with prayer. Allow

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Him to direct your heart toward whom and what you should give generously to. As a matter of fact, we are doing just that on Christmas Sunday at Ni River! Many of you have already positively given to this financially, which is cool but there is an opportunity for us all to give of our time to this as well and make an impact for God!

Insert Christmas Last! Impact video

So, go with me here. Today, as we consider this being Christmas Last, let's examine what priorities would shift as a new Paradigm is discovered in **Christmas Last!** Will you commit to living from now to December 26 with a Christmas Last! Perspective? Is there some shift in your perspective that you need to do in order to make this Christmas and your life come alive in a new way? Will you join us in living out a Christmas Last! Perspective over the next two weeks till December 26? If so, while the band plays their last song in a moment, why not take one of our Christmas Last! ornaments from our Christmas Last! Trees and take it home with you as a representative of your commitment. Hang it in a prominent place to remind you that you are going to live your life over the next two weeks with a different perspective – A Christmas Last! Perspective. Then, using the A Day By Day Guide from your program , follow the daily instructions to aid you in this. Happy Christmas Last!

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