

WHAT DO YOU WANT FOR CHRISTMAS

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So, how many people in here love Christmas and love everything about it, and it's an uplifting, fabulous time of the year for you? Christmas lovers? Okay. And how many people *like* Christmas, and you get into it, and you do most of this stuff, but because it's a little bit commercial, sometimes you feel like it leaves you a little bit empty, exhausted, and unfulfilled? Anybody? And how many people have ever had or have a hard time with Christmas, because maybe you've lost a loved one and you're going through some grief, or you feel alone? Or it maybe is so commercialized you really can't stand it? Anybody have a hard time with Christmas?

Some people love Christmas; some people like Christmas; and some people have a hard time with Christmas. And I think there are several reasons, but I think part is that we have two very different ways of celebrating Christmas at the same time.

One centers around Santa Claus: making his list and checking it twice; ho-ho-ho-ing his way down your chimney delivering gifts. It features reindeer and trees and lights and decorations and candy canes and mistletoe and eggnog and baking cookies! And your favorite Christmas movie, caroling, gift giving, shopping, buying. And don't forget the elves, because they're working hard at the North Pole, because we're all year spending making our Christmas list.

Before Christmas, the question we get asked the most is: What do you want for Christmas? After Christmas it's: What did you get for Christmas? Because the focus is so much on Santa and giving gifts and getting gifts.

The other Christmas celebration is centered around the birth of Baby Jesus: the birth of the Christ Child. Beginning with the visit of Mary by an angel; and then Mary and Joseph's trek from Nazareth to Bethlehem; and then being turned down because there was no room in the inn, so they had to go to a quiet place that was out in the open air. And that is where the birth of the Christ Child happened.

Two very different celebrations and experiences! But each one is valuable and hugely important. You know, I think Christmas -- with focusing on Santa -- is great even without the other, because human beings absolutely need to have celebrations. We need festivals; you know, we need rituals and traditions. They are ways that we break the routine of our lives and focus on something special, something different and unique; something where we focus on the good; something that brings us together to celebrate it. You know, that Christmas is a very renewing and invigorating and wonderful experience that brings us together. And Santa really represents this spirit of love, the spirit of generosity, the spirit of giving and caring.

Ever since I was a kid, I've always loved Christmas. I love celebrating with the family. I love that spirit of giving and celebration. But for my first seven Christmases, there was no Santa. I think I've mentioned I was born in Trinidad. There was no Santa in Trinidad. So when I moved to Canada at seven years old, it was the first time I ever heard of Santa. And the whole idea of a guy in a red suit with a beard coming down a chimney we'd never had was a little different. [Congregants laugh] And then going to a mall and sitting on a stranger's lap, telling him what kind of gifts I want was weird!

But I've always loved Christmas, because it is -- even centered around Santa -- is it about a spirit of love, a spirit of giving, and a spirit of caring and celebrating our lives.

The biblical celebration of the birth of the Christ Child is not material, but it is spiritual. It's not anything to do about the outer, but it is totally about the inner. It is about connecting -- our spiritual connection

to that spirit and power of God within us ... symbolized as a child. Symbolized as the light of the Christ being born into this world, echoing Paul's words when he said, "*Christ in you, your hope of glory.*" It is the celebration of the Spirit. It is a celebration of the light of God within us and that is available to all of us.

You know, while both celebrations are important, they can be very, very different based on the focus. Because when we focus too much on the outer celebration, sometimes we miss some of the inner connection within ourselves. And I truly believe that, to have the best Christmas ever, it behooves us to balance the inner and the outer by utilizing the power of intention.

Wayne Dyer said intention is not just something we do; it is something we connect to. It is something that we are already a part of. Intention is the power that allows the act of creation to take place. Intention is a force in the universe that created the world and everything in it. God intended the world. God also intended you to be here. You are God's intention, and every single one of us has the power of intention.

But the question is: Are we using that creative power of intention in our lives?

How many people woke up today had an intention of the kind of day you were going to have? A few of us, yes. But most of us, when we wake up, we sometimes just go on autopilot. Just start going, doing whatever needs to be done, taking care of the kids, getting ourselves ready to go to work and do all of our responsibilities. Sometimes we don't pause to set an intention for the kind of day we're going to have. An intention for how we are going to show up.

And especially with Christmas, it comes so fast! Most of us are just chasing, trying to keep up to get everything done in time, let alone pausing to set an intention for how we are going to show up in Christmas; in the preparations. An intention for what we want to feel and experience. An intention for what it's going to feel like at the end, and we look back at Christmas and we think, "*Ah! This was a fabulous Christmas!*"

What is your Christmas intention?

I want you to think of the general feelings you have at the end of Christmas currently in your life and ask yourself: What would you need to change in your intention to have that be more joyful? To be more positive? To be more meaningful? And to be more fulfilling?

See, we can ask Santa for anything that we want. But the question is: Spiritually, what do you need for Christmas to be more meaningful, and to be have a deeper, more personal experience of it?

So, this morning I want to share with you three spiritual intentions that I think we need for all of us to have a deeper and richer experience of Christmas.

And the first one is **INTENTION FOR SILENCE**. You know, in a busy world with a fast pace, silence can be elusive ... especially at Christmas. We are so busy getting things done, the possibility of silence isn't there. And another reason is that sometimes I don't think we value or truly understand the power and the importance of silence in our lives.

The underlying message in the Bible and of so many of the Christmas hymns truly illustrate the power and the importance of silence. The hymn: "*Silent "Night; holy night. All is calm; all is bright."* "*O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by.*"

So much of the Christmas Story and the birth of the Christ Child points to the value and the importance of silence in making that happen. In silence and making it come forth. And in silence in making it awaken

and come through each and every one of us. It is in the quietness that we find peace; that we find calm; that we find clarity. It is in the quietness and silence that we are renewed and feel a sense of oneness.

Silence is more than just the absence of noise. It is a space, a sacred space that we create where we connect more consciously and with the living Spirit of God; with our true nature; with that divine essence within ourselves. Silence is that secret place where we immerse our hearts and minds in the fullness and the goodness and the allness of God. Silence is the way that we stay centered. Silence is the way we still grounded. Silence is the way that we stay connected.

Mother Teresa said, *"In the silence of the heart God speaks."* And so the practice I am suggesting -- the intention for silence -- is to take a minute and draw yourself away from the busyness and just take a deep breath. And just open your heart to feel the presence of God. Or to take a deep breath and just allow God's peace to wash over you. And that, with every exhaled breath -- take a deep breath -- with every exhale, you feel more relaxed, more calm, and more centered.

You know, most of us sometimes think 20 minutes is a long time to meditate. How many people have ever said at the end of the day, *"Oh, I was just too busy to meditate today."* Anybody ever have that experience? I love Deepak's answers to that. He said, *"If you're too busy to pray once a day, pray twice a day."*

But the thing about it is that everybody's got a minute. That, no matter how busy you are, you could just pause and take a deep breath and just open your heart to feel the presence of God.

So, take a deep breath and allow God's peace to wash over you. I would suggest pausing for one minute of meditation throughout the day is one of the greatest things you could do to bring more silence into your life, especially at this busy season. You are in the waiting room of a doctor's appointment; take a breath and connect. You know, you're preparing yourself for a party to go to; take a breath. Even *at* the party, you can take a breath! I mean, there are so many opportunities and times just for one minute.

You know, I always say in my prosperity class, don't put the pressure on yourself to have a 20-minute meditation. Then it's like 24 hours before you get the next one. The thing about the one-minute ones: it helps us remember regularly and keep turning back to Spirit. That is how we take advantage of the silence ... is by visiting it more often and more consistently to stay more centered.

The first thing we need to do to have a great Christmas is to set our intention to have silence through this holiday season. And take silence.

The second one is to set an **INTENTION FOR SELF-CARE**. You know, at Christmas we always are talking about giving: giving to our family; giving to our partners; giving to our children; giving to our friends; our neighbors; our co-workers. I mean, we're giving into our hairstylist; we're giving to the cleaners. We're giving to everybody!

But the hardest area of giving is giving to *ourselves*. Sometimes we don't even think about giving to ... we don't even make our own Christmas list of gifts that we are going to get. And just the thought of it -- making self-care a priority at Christmas -- sometimes can feel like it's egotistical and selfish. You know, sometimes we have a hard time with self-care.

You know, somebody once said that self-care is not a luxury, it is a necessity. How many people would say you could do a better job with self-care? You don't always take care of yourself as well as you could?

And so, so to me, it's an important thing for us to do some self-care in three ways. Number one is with your body temple: with your health. Make sure you're eating well, and exercising well, and getting enough sleep. So often the first thing we will give up is ourselves and our own health and well-being. Sometimes we'll say stuff like, *"Oh, sleep; I don't need sleep; I can sleep when I'm dead."* [Congregants

laugh] If you don't keep sleeping, you may end up being dead! But I mean ... sooner than you want! Or we'll give up eating good food. Sometimes we'll give up meals. This is ... our body's the temple of the Living God! That we absolutely have to make it a priority of taking good care of our bodies, because it is the vehicle through which we experience life. It is the vehicle through which we help others. It is the vehicle through which we create and manifest. And we need to keep it as healthy and make it a priority.

And sometimes it's just little ways of feeding ourselves and being healthy: make sure we exercise; make sure we get enough sleep. So I've made a commitment to -- through the holidays -- I'm going to make sure that two days a week I eat only veggies. And so, the other day I made myself this yellow squash with sweet potatoes and banana peppers, lettuce, roasted red peppers, avocados, onions, and olives with blue cheese in it. It was delicious! It was fabulous! I did that a couple days in a row. I'm going to do it, you know, every single week. I've only done it for one week, but it's a good start. [Congregants laugh]

And it sounds simple, but what are some ways that you're going to express some more self-care to yourself during the holidays? And really wish to do it *all the time*. It is your body temple. It is the greatest gift God has given us to experience life. Take care of it and make it an intention, especially through the busyness of the holidays.

The second one is for emotional healing. You know, sometimes I think we like to pretend everything's good and we're all happy when we're not, particularly through the holidays. But many people are hurting. Sometimes some people are going through grief or loss. Or it triggers traumatic memories from our childhood of rejection or abandonment. Sometimes there's some family dysfunction or levels of anger that we're still holding onto inside ourselves.

Instead of pretending that everything's okay during Christmas, maybe make Christmas a time of healing this year. Maybe a time of getting help and talking to a therapist. Or doing some journaling. Or joining a program. The truth is: we are waiting for permission from ourselves to be more supportive of ourselves and to allow ourselves to be able to heal and take care of ourselves.

Rumi said, *"The wound is the place where the light enters you."* One of the most important gifts we could ever give ourselves is to take time to heal; take time to be supportive of ourselves and ask ourselves, *"Where in my life do I need to heal? Where in my life am I hurting? What is it that I'm holding on to that it's time for me to let go and to get some support and help in releasing this, and freeing myself from this pain and this hurt?"*

And the third one is about setting boundaries. Sometimes we think we need to do everything and say, "Yes" to everyone and go everywhere and try to fit it all in. How many people have ever tried to do two or three events -- Christmas parties -- in the same night? Anybody ever do that? I mean, it is amazing! How many people have ever been exhausted at the end of Christmas? Anybody ever? We do that because we think we've got to do everything. We think we have to go everywhere. We think we've got to eat everything. We think we got to ... you know, drink it and suck it all in. I mean, it is amazing!

Christmas is crammed into December. There's not even enough December for Christmas, there's so many activities! [Congregants laugh] Some companies are actually having the Christmas party in January, because there's not enough space and time in December. It is just absolutely amazing and crazy!

And there's all kinds of pressures. Tell me if you ever felt this stress: Have you ever had someone buy a gift for you, but you didn't buy a gift for them? And you felt bad about it, and you were obligated and you wanted to go buy them a gift? Anybody ever felt that stress? Or even worse -- even worse! -- is if you bought something for someone else, but they didn't buy it for you. [Congregants laugh] And you're like wondering, *"Why didn't they buy that for me?"* It is absolutely incredible!

But there is so much stress and pressure in Christmas. Anybody ever see *Christmas with the Kranks*? Is that what it's called? Tim Allen and I think, what's her name? Jamie Lee Curtis. And what they're doing is: they want to go on a cruise, because their daughter went to college. And instead of Christmas, they want to go on a cruise. So they didn't put up their Christmas trees that year. And you see them being ostracized and pressured into doing this.

And it sounds silly, but we would not ... I don't think we realize how much pressure we put on each other. And expectations. Sometimes we have this expectation: *"You should be happy. It's Christmas!"* And we're asking ourselves, *"What's wrong with me? Why am I not happy at the most wonderful time of the year?"*

And what we need to do is take charge and set some boundaries and understand and be more supportive to ourselves. A valuable and important part of self-care is setting boundaries and expectations, and being good and supportive to ourselves. When it comes down to it, self-care is about self-love. It's about self-worth. It's about self-respect. And we need love and support and care, and we especially need it from ourselves. The greatest way we can support our family and our partners and our children is to take care of ourselves so we can be a greater channel of love and light and support and care for themselves and for ourselves.

And the last one is an **INTENTION FOR CONNECTION**. Intention for a *deeper* connection. I bet every single one of us has somebody in our lives that we're a little distant from, that we would love to feel a bit closer to. I bet everyone has someone in our lives where we feel disconnected or have some conflict, and we want to reconcile. That we want to feel closer; that we want to feel a more intimate connection.

You know, giving gifts is one way to express one's love, but it is not a substitute and it is not as good as when we give of ourselves: give our attention; open up our heart and share where we are and what's going on; to be vulnerable and authentic with the most important people in our lives -- those that we want to be closer to and to have a greater connection with. I bet every one of us has people we love that we would love to be closer to. People we love that we would like to open our hearts to more, and share more of ourselves, and feel more of their sharing of themselves, and feel that sense of oneness and closeness and intimacy.

Someone in my life that I love dearly, I felt a bit disconnected and at some distance recently. And we haven't been communicating as much or talking as much or being as playful as much. And it was kind of weighing on my heart. You know, it was bothering me. And I thought, *"Well, maybe leave it alone, and it'll get better by itself."* [Congregants laugh] You know, we do that kind of stuff. We *know* we should talk and share, but we just keep it to ourselves, hoping it'll just go away.

In prayer, I knew it was time for me to say something, so I decided to share. I said, *"You know, I could feel a little disconnect with us. You know, I absolutely love you and I don't like this, and I apologize if I said or did anything that caused this distance."* And we ended up sharing with each other. And it was really cool and so powerful. We felt so close == and maybe even closer than before -- you know, by just being open-hearted and honest about where we were. It was so healing and so transforming. And I have to say, I've been feeling lighter and brighter.

You ever have your life and you're going on with it and everything's good, but there's just a little bit of energy that's a little heavy and a little closed off? And you're still functioning and you're still fine. And then that energy is released and it's like, *"Wow!"* You didn't realize how much that thing you thought was a little thing in the background was weighing you down.

And the question is: Are we willing to open our hearts and share with at least one person this Christmas that you want to feel closer to? To let them know what's really going on inside with you? To open up yourself more fully and just be vulnerable with them to feel a greater sense of intimacy and closeness?

Gandhi said, *"Where there is love, there is life."* Because the more we open our hearts in love -- the more we're willing to share and care and give of ourselves -- the more alive we will feel. And the most important thing we all seek, whether we're aware of it or not, is love. We want to feel cherished; we want to feel cared for; we want to feel heard; we want to feel seen. We want to be accepted for who we are with all our warts and all.

So, the intention for connection: you know, it's a connection of the heart; you know, the connection of our soul; the connection of sharing what's really going on with ourselves.

The day after Christmas at a church in California, the pastor was walking around the church and he noticed in the nativity that the little figurine of Baby Jesus was missing. So, he opened the door and he saw out the door, and he saw little Johnny with his red wagon and the figurine of little Baby Jesus in his red wagon. The pastor went up to him and said, *"Little Johnny, where did you get your little friend?"*

He said, *"Pastor, I took it from the church."*

He said, *"Why did you take him?"*

He said, *"Well, about a week before Christmas, I prayed to Baby Jesus, and I told him if he would bring me a red wagon for Christmas, I would take him for a ride around the block."* [Congregants laugh]

Taking Baby Jesus for a ride. You've got to love that!

Little Johnny was clear about his intention! [Congregants laugh] And what I'm saying is we should all set a Christmas intention. And if the intention is to enjoy Santa and the celebration and the gifts, that's wonderful and to set an intention to go deeper and to experience the spiritual aspect of Christmas.

And let us deepen our holiday experience by setting our intention for silence; our intention for self-care; and our intention for connection. You can ask Santa for anything you want, but I would suggest what we all need is silence, self-care, and connection this Christmas. God bless you all.\