

## OUT OF THE HURRY, IN WITH THE SACRED

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So tonight, we're talking about getting out of the hurry and into the sacred for Christmas. So, are you ready? Yes! We want to learn about that, right?

First, I thought I would share what comedian -- does anyone remember George Burns? Comedian George Burns? Yeah, I mean, if you're 55 or older maybe. [Congregants laugh] So, comedian George Burns once said this about the Christmas season; holiday season. He said, *"Happiness is having a large, loving, close-knit family in another city."* [Congregants laugh]

Then I went back to another oldie but goodie: Milton Berle. Milton Berle said, *"There are a lot of things money can't buy. Not one of them is on my son's list."* [Congregants laugh]

And then from Larry Wright. He says, *"Christmas is the season when people run out of money before they run out of friends."* [Congregants laugh]

So, the Christmas season is here, and don't we get wrapped up in it? Pun intended. Right? We get so wrapped up in it. We start to hurry from store to store. We fight off other people for the "it" toy of the season or "it" gift of the season. We stress out about our finances. We stress out: do we send out the holiday cards? We don't send out the holiday cards? Or we have guilt about not sending out the holiday cards ... We can really get ourselves wound up around it.

So, I'm here to remind all of us – myself included – that Christmas is not about rushing around and checking things off of our list, the items on our list. Because I started to think about it. If I'm giving a gift to somebody, it's like, *"Here's your gift. I cussed out a driver in the parking lot. I was annoyed standing in line for 20 minutes. I was stressed about my finances buying this gift. But here you go."* [Congregants laugh] Yeah? Like, what kind of energy do we want to give in that gift?

So, let's, this Christmas, all agree that we're going to return to the sacredness of the season. And so how do we do that? I have three – kind of 3.5 – ways. One is to serve others. Not to add something else to your list, but to refocus on the reason for the season, and also to reduce stress. Serving others.

The other is to refocus, re-center, and breathe. In other words, get back to our mindfulness practice or start a mindfulness practice.

And the third is to return to your childlike wonder. And, with that, allowing – and just hold on for a moment here – but to allow death to guide us back to living in the present moment. This goes back to Robert Brumet. We spoke about his book, *"Living Originally,"* a couple months ago, and his chapter titled *"Death as Your Advisor."* And so, going back to allowing death to guide us back to actually life.

So the first is **SERVING OTHERS**. To serve others, to help another person, to give your time away.

Here's a really interesting study from 2024. It was a study of workplace interventions to reduce stress. They introduced 90 – 90! -- different stress-reducing strategies were tested, including meditation, massage and breathing exercises. There was only one that consistently mitigated the negative effects of stress. Do you know what it was? It was serving others.

The number one way to reduce negative effects of stress: serving others. More so than the meditation and the breathing exercises.

And it reminded me of an article I read this last fall. It was written by a woman by the name of Rebecca Heiss. She had flown from the mainland of the U.S. to Hawaii because she was going to be the keynote

speaker at a conference 24 hours after she landed, except her luggage didn't come with her. So, all she had on to speak in would have been what she had on on that flight.

So, she went to the concierge at the hotel, who noticed that she was in distress, not having luggage. She mentioned, *"I'm the keynote speaker at this big conference."* Without hesitation, he got a car to come and pick her up to take her to some shops in the area. Well, after three shops of just Hawaiian shirts [congregants laugh], she almost started crying, she said, in the corner of the store. When the woman at that store noticed, and she explained – Rebecca explained her predicament – and the woman said, *"Oh, sweetie, you aren't going to find what you need here. Here."* And handed her the keys ... the woman handed her keys to her personal car, which was a brand new convertible BMW.

She said, *"Take my car. There's a store 40 minutes away. Here's the address. Bring the car back when you're done."*

Well, she was flabbergasted, but she took the car. She got what she needed. She came back, and she thanked the woman. She said, *"Why did you do this?"*

And she said, *"Well, that's just how we take care of people around here."* And she said, *"If I'm to be honest, I've been really anxious about my daughter moving back to the mainland. And I just hope that someone will do something similar for her."*

So, she gets back to the hotel, and the concierge asks how it went, and she explains the day. And as she's explaining what had unfolded, he gets tears in his eyes, hearing her story. Well, she goes back to her room, and a couple of minutes later, she gets a box of chocolates with a note – a two -page note. And it's him explaining how he was so nervous about his family moving to Hawaii from the mainland, but her story really helped reassure him that it was going to be okay.

And so, Rebecca writes, these individuals were responding to their own anxiety by extending kindness to another person. And here's the irony: this is actually what she studies. This is what she was going to speak about at the conference – was how humans handle pressure!

And this is what she realized. She says, quote, *"Instead of turning inward with bespoke wellness practices, we do best when we turn outward; when we turn toward the needs of others."* She said, *"When channeled properly, stress can point us toward opportunities to serve."*

So, if what, this Christmas season, instead of thinking about buying for others, you shifted your thoughts and actions to serving others? Maybe helping someone do their Christmas shopping; giving them a ride. Maybe someone needs a cooked meal. Maybe someone needs a ride to a doctor appointment, because everyone else is busy shopping.

I remember one Christmas, my mother – we went to a nursing home in our neighborhood, and she went and said, *"Do you have anyone here who has no family? Because we'd like to adopt them for Christmas."* So, we adopted this woman for Christmas that year. And then, actually throughout the year, we'd stop by and visit her throughout the year. Inviting a stranger into our home who then became part of our family.

But there are multiple studies – not just the 2024 study – but multiple studies that find that, when we extend kindness and we help another person, then we actually reduce our own anxiety and our gratitude grows. In other words, helping others helps ourselves.

My second recommendation is to **KEEP REFOCUSING**. Keep focusing yourself back to -- when you're in the midst of the hurry and the scurry and the overwhelm of the holiday season – refocus yourself/your attention back to your breath and your attention: your mindfulness practice. Or, maybe as of today, your new mindfulness practice. Stick to your meditation and your inspirational readings. This is something a lot of times when we get really busy, we let go, right? *"I don't have time for it."* But it's exactly when you

hear yourself think, I'm too busy for this, or I've got too much to do today. That's when you need to sit and meditate. That's when you need to get quiet.

There was a past Unity Worldwide Ministries CEO, and he used to say the longer his "to do" list – the more things on his calendar – the longer his meditation. He didn't cut it shorter. He made it longer, because he knew that's what he needed at the beginning of that day: more time in meditation.

So, instead of focusing on, you know, *"Oh, my gosh, all this; I don't have time,"* shifting it into, *"Oh, okay, let that be my notice – my little notice. I'm on notice that now I need to sit and have even more time in meditation."* And you can meditate anywhere! So, I have a simple little meditation practice I taught in my meditation class. I mean, we did a lot more meditations than just this. But here's an easy one.

So, when you're in the car driving or you've got the shopping cart and you're with everyone else in the stores. Ready? We're all going to take our hand. Give me your hand, everyone! And we're going to go one finger at a time. Ready? Peace. Begins. With. Me. And you take a breath and you do it again. Peace. Begins. With. Me. Take a breath.

You can also do this: I. Am. Loving. Presence. That was loving awareness. Ready? I. Am. Loving. Awareness. And you take a breath.

You can do that anywhere at any time to remind yourself that peace begins with you and that you are loving awareness.

So, again, instead of focusing on the "to do" list or worrying about the cost of things, just let your breath breathe you and place your attention on: *"I get to do this, and I get to choose how I do this."* Instead of an obligation, shifting it to, *"Ooh! I get to do this and I get to choose how I do this."*

So, we do that by staying centered and remembering: What is the season really about? The season really is about the love for our family and our friends. It's also about the birth of Christ, right? So metaphysically meaning we let that Christ consciousness be born anew within us. *"Let me remember that Christ consciousness -- that divine consciousness within -- let me give birth to that again."*

So, when you catch yourself saying, *"I have to,"* stop and shift to, *"I get to,"* or, *"I have this opportunity to,"* or, *"I am so blessed that I have the opportunity to,"* or, *"I'm so blessed I have the resources to ..."* and bring your Christ light to that activity. Bring your Christ light and Christ consciousness to the people around you. That's how we get into the sacredness of the Christmas spirit, so we don't stress about gifts.

And I know this year money is tight for a lot of people right now. And I have to say, we ... my husband's here. We had some Christmases, money was tight. And, you know, I remember one year my parents had given me their breadmaker that they were all done with. And so, I made different loaves of bread. I made sourdough. I made a herb focaccia. I made a sun-dried tomato. And I wrapped it up and I put a lovely note about how much I appreciated that person.

There was a year I made soap. You know, I could get a big batch of different soap supplies and I made a different scent for each person – thinking about them and what I think that they would enjoy – and a handmade Christmas card. Again, explaining how much they mean to me throughout the year.

I've made cookies. You can easily make cookies. But letting people know you care about them.

Or we're here in Phoenix! In December/January, go for a hike; go for a walk; have coffee together so you can spend quality time together. Make tea, bring it to the park; have a chat in the park in nature. That's one of the benefits of living in such fabulous weather, right? Having this time in nature and doing quality activities together that don't really cost much money, if anything at all.

And repeat as many times as you need to and return to the thought: *“Christmas itself is a gift to me.”* Christmas itself is a gift to me. Just whisper that to yourself: *“Christmas itself is a gift to me. It's a time to breathe; a time to remember how fortunate I am; a time to share time with those I love; to find gratitude, to find the miracles all around me.”*

Better yet, Christmas reminds us that we can renew our minds and our souls at any time and be born again in a Christ consciousness: divine consciousness.

And then lastly, to keep the sacredness, **RETURN TO CHILDLIKE WONDER AND APPRECIATION.**

What if you looked at the lights on the Christmas tree and felt the excitement of Santa's arrival like you did when you were a child? Can you remember that feeling? Just really sit for a moment in that feeling. Can you remember when you were little – the excitement of Santa's arrival? What would be under the tree? Do you remember the lights – and putting the lights and maybe the ornaments up on the tree? Tapping back into that excitement of childhood around Christmas time.

And then to aid us – this is my 3.5 as far as the points into sacredness – to aid us in appreciation of and the sacredness of Christmas, again: What if we return to Robert Brumet's book, “Living Originally,” in which he had that whole chapter about death as my advisor ... meaning: not to view death as depressing or scary, but to **ALLOW DEATH TO GUIDE US IN HOW WE LIVE THE PRESENT MOMENT TO THE FULLEST.**

To allow the finite time that we have guide us and inspire us in the life we're currently living so that we can live life to the fullest.

So, when viewing Christmas through this lens, we can ask a couple questions like: If this was my last Christmas, where would my focus be? If this was my last Christmas, what would be important to me? It changes the feeling around it, doesn't it?

Because if this was your last Christmas, how many of you would be running from store to store? How many of you would be stressing out about buying gifts? Anyone fighting crowds? Stressing about parking? Getting overwhelmed and anxious about the prices and the budget? No! If you knew this was your last Christmas, what would you be doing?

Just consider it for a moment. If this was my last Christmas, what would I be doing? And then change how you approach this Christmas and this Christmas season. “Let me live in the present moment so deeply – as if it's my last – but to infuse it with life. And what's really, really, really important: make it meaningful. Make it full of cherished moments and memories.

You know, for our sons now – and they're in their 20s – but now what I really do is: their main gift is a trip. Because I want to have that time as a family together. I want to create memories together and have that connection. Have even more to talk about.

You know, for my mom: I've been buying her crafty gifts. So, for her birthday and Mother's Day, we created this lantern together. And there was lip balm that we made. And so, she gets so much joy out of these crafty gifts. And then she wants to do them with me, and then I get excited that we do them together. And so, then I buy our more crafty gifts! [Congregants laugh]

If this was my last Christmas, I'd be gathering with friends and family. And I'd be sitting down with each person and laughing and connecting heart-to-heart and sharing my love and how much I love them, how much I appreciate them, how much I'm so grateful they're in my life.

I can guarantee you I would not be stressed out about Christmas shopping. I would absolutely carry on our family tradition of playing Christmas music in the car and going out and looking at all the different Christmas lights in all the different neighborhoods – “oohing” and “awing” together, getting back to that

childlike appreciation and wonder. I would return to what has given me Christmas joy since I was a child: family, togetherness.

Adjust your plans for full sacredness and appreciation for life.

And here's what Charles Schultz said: *"Christmas is a box of tree ornaments that have become part of the family."* And isn't that true? When we start taking out our ornaments to decorate the tree, all the stories start. Remember, we got this in Austin and that trip to Austin? Or here's mom ...

Okay, we still have – I don't know, you guys. Like, from 1975 when I was in kindergarten, I made a clay snowman ornament, and how it's not disintegrated, I don't know. I guess they made clay differently in 1975 than 2025. And the boys always tease me, because they're not quite sure if it's a scary or a cute snowman. [Congregants laugh] But it's there! It's on that tree.

And then my boys always ... because we have a photo of each of them at their first Christmas. A framed ornament – one of each son at their first Christmas. So, one son will put his baby picture front and center on the tree and his brother is in the back of the tree. [Congregants laugh] And then the next brother comes along and switches it. But now it's become a game – right? – and a traditional fun activity as part of the tree decorating.

But my point is: it's the time with family and friends. It's making these memories. That's the gift. That's the gift!

So, here's what I want you to consider. If Mary could give birth in a barn and make it sacred, just imagine what you can do. As you go about this Christmas season, ask yourself: Instead of feeling obligated – this feeling of obligation – what can I do to infuse sacredness into this moment?

You have divine wisdom within you. So, you just get quiet and you ask: Instead of a feeling of obligation, how can I infuse sacredness into this moment? And then you listen to your inner guidance and you make the adjustments.

And if you find yourself feeling overwhelmed and stressed about Christmas, you notice; you stop; you turn to mindfulness. You take a breath. You take your hand and you say: *"Peace. Begins. With. Me."* You say, *"I. Am. Loving. Awareness."*

You change the focus: How can I make my gift list more about serving others? Spending time with others vs. buying? And remembering: *"I get to choose how I experience the Christmas season. I choose to infuse it with sacredness."*

And bring your love from Christmases past into your heart. Find new ways to keep that childlike excitement and wonder of Christmas alive.

And you can ask: *"If I knew it was my last Christmas, is this what I would be doing?"* And if the answer is, *"No,"* make the adjustment. Each present moment is sacred and is the gift of life.

And, finally, Christmas is about peace. And it's about remembering that peace within you. It's about knowing that there's a divine spark in you. Shine it! Be like the Christmas star; shine your light for everyone to see!

Move from the hurry to the sacred, because you're a creative being and you co-create your life. So, manifest – with your emotions, with your intentions and with your actions – the Christmas you want to experience.

Norman Vincent Peale said, *"Christmas waves the magic wand over this world and, behold: everything is softer and more beautiful."* So, allow Christmas to be softer and more beautiful this year. Better yet, BE

the magic wand. Be softer. Be more beautiful. Be more intentional as you go through this season, shining your light, sharing your magic that you are. Be the Christmas spirit and the Divine on earth.

That's how we infuse sacredness into the Christmas season, everyone!

So happy, happy Christmas season! Blessings ...

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