

Christmas 365 Days a Year

by Jack Hyles

The true meaning of Christmas is living for others and finding happiness in serving and giving.

Scripture: Proverbs 11:25, Matthew 10:39, Matthew 25:40, Luke 6:38, Acts 20:35, Romans 12:10, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 2:4, James 1:27, 1 John 3:17

Topics: "Selfless Service", "Sacrificial Love"

Description

Jack Hyles preaches about the true essence of Christmas, emphasizing the joy and fulfillment found in selflessly serving and giving to others. He shares heartwarming stories of individuals from his congregation who exemplified this spirit of generosity and compassion during the holiday season. Hyles challenges his listeners to embrace a lifestyle of living for others, not just during Christmas but every day of the year, drawing inspiration from the teachings of Jesus on selflessness and sacrificial love.

Transcript

Matthew 10:39, "He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."

Christmas is a wonderful time of the year. I thank God that there is a season of the year when people turn their attention on others. Christmas is the season when firemen repair toys and make them well for little children. The service station attendant is more friendly than any other time of the year. The clerks are extra careful to say "Merry Christmas." People share one with the other. We give to others. Christmas is the season when we take baskets of fruit and toys to the underprivileged. Christmas is the season when we take turkey and dressing to those who are hungry. Christmas is the season when we wish folks happiness. People are kinder than usual. Suddenly the blind man down the street becomes the object of our attention. During the Christmas season the hospitals are visited more than perhaps any other season of the year, the deaf are not forgotten, the poor are not overlooked, the shut-ins are visited with a little more care and attention, the rest homes are visited, and people, in general, are nice and courteous.

This week I got a letter from the manager of all the Burger Kings in this area. It was a wonderful letter! He said, "Dear Reverend Hyles: Fifty-five to sixty of your young people stopped by to eat at Burger King recently. I just wanted to tell you how they acted. I've never seen any young people order with more propriety. I've never seen them eat with more courtesy. I've never seen young people clean up their mess as carefully. Although I'm not a member of First Baptist Church of Hammond, and I do not live in your city, I thank God for the work you are doing. That's the finest group of young people that has ever come to our place."

I received a letter recently from a lady who said, "I was backing out of my drive in Schererville and I had a flat tire. A young man came by, stopped and helped me change the tire. I asked him, 'What can I pay you?' and he said, 'You can pay me by attending the First Baptist Church of Hammond, where I go to church.' Although I am not able to attend the church services, I do want you to take this \$5 bill as an offering."

I received a letter this week from one of our fine ladies. She said, "Pastor, thank you for teaching us to live for others." Then she proceeded to tell about some wonderful things that she and others were doing for somebody else during the Christmas season.

Right over here, across the railroad tracks, there is a little blind lady who is an invalid and a shut-in. I received a wonderful letter this week from her husband, thanking the First Baptist Church of Hammond for all that we had done for her.

As your pastor, I want to exhort you this morning, and just love you a little while. I want to talk to you about life. Tonight I'll preach to you a little harder. I'll get mad at you tonight, but this morning I want to sort of rub on some salve. I will "pussy-foot" while I preach this morning.

When David was a little boy about three years old I'd say, "Son, what are you going to be when you grow up?" He'd say, "A PREACHER!"

"What kind of preacher will you be? An old fashioned, hell-fire and brimstone preacher or a pussy footer?" He'd say, "A foosty-footser."

I am going to be a "foosty-footser" this morning. I wish I had time to tell you of all the wonderful things our dear people are doing. Folks don't know. If I had the time, and if I were disposed to do so, I could talk until midnight tonight, and never repeat a story of what our people are doing for others during this holiday season.

Those of you who have been in our church for years know that I have stressed one word over and over again—"others."

Lord, let me live from day to day In such a self-forgetful way

That even when I kneel to pray My prayer shall be for others.

Others, Lord, yes, others, Let this my motto be.

Help me to live for others That I may live like Thee.

This Christmas season has been marked with some wonderful stories. I could tell you about one of our teenage boys who had no Christmas at all so that a poor family could have Christmas. I could tell you about a college student who was having a hard time making it. He works most of the night to pay his tuition. He found another college student who was about to drop out of school, and he gave up his Christmas so that another college student could stay in school. I could tell you story after story, unbelievable stories, that would make headlines in any decent newspaper and be a blessing to unconverted people.

Christmas is so special. On Christmas Eve night you put tab "A" into slot "B." You have a nervous breakdown, you lose your religion and you fall from grace because you are trying to assembly the electric

train with the instructions that were meant for assembling an electric razor. About three o'clock in the morning you want to curse Santa Claus and die.

Then on Christmas morning, the little tots are so wide-eyed. They are so excited. They had left cookies and cakes for old Saint Nicholas to devour, but they never stop to wonder why Father and Mother have gained weight through the night. There's the opening of the presents, the gluttony, the turkey, the dressing, the ballgame (where the Cowboys win in the last few seconds-thank you for your prayers!) and the activities of the day. Everyone enjoys the playing of a new game and trying to find the one part that is missing. Then there is the nibbling in the afternoon. You think when you have finished the Christmas meal that you will never eat again as long as you live; and you don't . . . for fifteen minutes!

Then there comes the hard part of Christmas. Anybody who has ever enjoyed a Christmas Day knows that melancholy, empty feeling that comes on Christmas night. The beautiful tree that last night was banked with gifts is all of a sudden forgotten, with nothing but a few old pieces of paper lying around. The tree where once people had gathered, is now forsaken. Each one has gone alone to his own room. That melancholy, lonely feeling comes over you. That is the time when some nut on the radio has some symphony orchestra playing an opera. I love symphony music and I love opera, but it adds to the melancholy. The most melancholy thing of all is when you scan the pages of your checkbook!

Late on Christmas night you realize it is all over! What happened? Here it is. For a few days, you found the answer to life. For a few days, you really found the answer to what life is all about. You spent the entire year trying to be happy, and you were miserable, but for five or six days, you thought about the blind lady across the tracks. For awhile you thought about the deaf fellow who lives down the street. Though shopping is often a fallacy and materialistic and secular, nevertheless you did think of somebody. You said, "What shall I buy Uncle George?" or better still, "Which color socks shall I buy Uncle George this year? What shall I get Aunt Susie? What shall I get my little boy, Johnnie? What shall I get Mary?" Your mind was on somebody else besides yourself. You found the secret. You were happy for awhile, but all of a sudden you got melancholy. Do you know why? You got back to receiving again. It is a strange thing. The buying of all the presents made you happy, and thinking of somebody else made you happy, but opening your own presents left you melancholy! What really happened is that for a few days you found the answer, but then you lapsed back into what is not the answer. For one day you lapsed back into selfishness: "What will I get? What will I eat? How will I feel? What will it mean to me?" For a few days you had lived in the real answer to what life is all about.

Then comes the day after Christmas. The boxes are all carried out, and the dog scatters the garbage all over the yard, and as is the case at our house, all over several yards. The garbage collector wishes that he had been a plumber.

Wait a minute! On December 26, folks, that blind lady will still be across the tracks; forgotten, but she is still there. She will be as blind Tuesday as she is today. She will be as much in need as she is today. On Tuesday little bodies will wake up hungry. Tuesday night men will walk the streets of this area. They will be friendless, without their families and loved ones; they will be just as lonely as they are today. The hungry people are still there; the troubled people are still with us.

Listen! I used to be a poor little boy. I remember sitting in the room when suddenly somebody would knock on the door and say, "Thanksgiving basket from the church!" My mother would go to the door and get the Thanksgiving basket, I well recall. I would not have had shoes to wear had it not been for the church. I

would have had no food to eat for Thanksgiving or Christmas had it not been for the church. As a little boy, looking up to the people who gave me that basket and those toys, I wondered if they were happier than I was about it. Oh, I was glad to get it! I loved to wear shoes, and I loved to eat. As a boy, I loved to open Christmas presents, but I used to look at those people and think, "Maybe they look happier than I look."

Listen to me! Happiness is not wrapped up in unwrapping presents. Happiness is found in wrapping presents! Our Lord put it this way, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." We glibly quote it, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," but ladies and gentlemen, it IS more blessed to give than to receive! It is a thousand times more blessed!

For years I have made it my habit not to read a Christmas card until Christmas night. Then I get them together in a big old bundle and read every word of every Christmas card. As I do that, I pray for each person who sent me a Christmas card.

One Christmas night several years ago, I had that empty feeling. As I sat alone I thought, "What causes this feeling?" Then I learned something. I had come to the end of the real way to live! So I decided to make every day of my life a Christmas. I decided to help the poor every day. If I could be happy one week a year by living for others, I could be happy 52 weeks a year by living for others. If giving makes me happy one week a year, I can give and be happy 52 weeks a year.

You remember when you were in school, the teacher said, "Let's make a Christmas card for our mamas." You got a piece of construction paper, drew all over it, and wrote, "MERRY CHRISTMAS, MOMMY!" You wrapped it all up. You brought it and said, "Mommy, I've got something for you!" (I can still recall!) Mother would open it and you would wonder, "Is she going to like it?"

My mother was a very good woman, a very kind woman, and she would say, "Oh, isn't that beautiful!" (I wonder if God's going to forgive you, Mother, for all those lies you told all through those years I) Then I'd say, "Do you really like it?"

"Son, you are going to be an artist when you grow up."

Then I'd sing, "Merry Christmas to you!"

"Maybe you'll be a singer when you grow up!" (I'm not grown yet if that's the case.)

I would watch Mother's eyes. I looked for a twinkle. I wanted to see if she really liked it. All the joys of life were wrapped up in one twinkle in the eyes of my mother. Put together all the ice cream cones, the candy bars, the all-day suckers, the ball games, all the popcorn and all of the excitement, but all of that joy cannot compare to that one moment when my mother was pleased because I gave her something all by myself.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could find out that that is really what makes folks happy after all? That is what it's all about. I decided to make for my friends every day a Christmas day. I decided that I was going to try to capture 365 days a year what I had captured for one week.

Now listen to me. It is almost over for many of you this year. . You cannot wait to see the eyes of the children Christmas morning! You can't wait to see the face of someone for whom you bought something. You want to see if that is what he really wanted and if he likes it. You wonder if he will say, "Oh, it's just what I wanted!" or "Oh, that is really something! What is it?"

What is Christmas to you? Is Christmas unwrapping presents? You will have Christmas only one day a year. If Christmas is wrapping presents, you can have Christmas 365 days a year. What is Christmas to you? Is it "being served"? Then you can have Christmas only when folks decide to serve you. If Christmas to you is "serving," then you can have Christmas just any time you decide to serve. What is Christmas to you? Is it receiving? Is it simply, "What am I going to get for Christmas?"

In a shopping center in Pennsylvania I saw one of the sweetest things I ever saw in my life. I was walking down the indoor mall, and Santa Claus was there. A little black girl was on his knee. "What do you want for Christmas, sweetheart?" he asked her. "I want my mommy to get a new iron."

I think she knew what Christmas is all about! If Santa Claus will bring a new iron to her mommy, that little girl will be happier than if she got everything she thought she wanted.

What is Christmas to you? Is Christmas receiving or giving? If Christmas to me is only when you get me something, then I can have Christmas only when you decide to give me something. If Christmas to me is when I get you something, then I can have Christmas any time I want to have Christmas.

I thought last night, isn't it too bad for Christmas to have to end? It does not have to end! December 26 can still be Christmas. December 27, March 31, April 2, June 3, July 17, August 24 and every day of the year can be Christmas if you will forget yourself. Forget being served; just serve! Forget receiving; give! Forget unwrapping; wrap! Forget being pampered; pamper! Forget being loved; love. Forget being cared for; care! That is what Christmas is all about.

It was late last night when I drove home. I walked around out in the yard and just thought for awhile. Where is happiness found? We think it is found in department stores with all of their glitter and lights, but it is really found in one of the rooms in St. Margaret Hospital when you walk in and take a flower to one who is sick and pray with them and encourage their hearts. I dare you to try it!

Where is happiness found? We think happiness is found in a restaurant with a head table and all the decorations, A T-bone steak being served, a gala occasion, merriment and laughter. No, happiness is found out in the slum section of town where you forget your own gala life and your own wants for awhile and think of somebody else.

Where is happiness found? We think happiness is found on a merry-go-round, or a loopy-loop or a roller coaster (we called it "the lightning" when I was a kid). No, 10,000 times, NO! Happiness is found in knocking on a door and when somebody says, "Come in," you notice a wheel chair in the corner; you walk over and say, "Hello, I came by to spend some time with you and to wish you Merry Christmas." That dear person, whose entire world is that one little room, whose only scenery is a window, and whose only automobile is a wheel chair, sees a little sunshine leak in as you open the door. When you walk away, they feel better, but you feel 10,000 times better.

What is happiness on Christmas Day? I will tell you what you think happiness is on Christmas Day.

I'm going to sleep late. Then I'm going to get up and eat and then sleep and then eat and then sleep. (Personally, I don't see why you want to waste all that good eating time just sleeping.) Then I'm going to watch a ball game and eat and watch a ball game and eat and watch a ball game. Every time there is a timeout or a commercial, I'm going to run to the icebox (Icebox? That shows how old I am!), open the door, grab a handful and go back down in about sixty seconds. (I've got it narrowed down to where I can

do it in about fifteen seconds!)

. That is what a lot of you are going to do on Christmas. You will have that hollow feeling Christmas night.

I will tell you how to feel good tomorrow night! Get up early, have your family presents and go ahead with that. Then get in your car at the best part of the day, the time when you would rather do something else, the part of the day when your flesh says, "This is the best time of day to eat)" Drive somewhere to a rest home, take some flowers, walk through the rest home and leave a flower and a word of greeting and a little gift with each shut-in. Come back home just about sundown, that usual melancholy time of the day, and you will find that that little empty feeling is all gone)

That kind of melancholy feeling at the end of Christmas comes only when you have thought about yourself instead of somebody else. It is always the case, as the Master put it, "He that findeth his life shall lose it, and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." The word "loseth" there is in the linear tense, "He that loseth and loseth and loseth and loseth and loseth his life shall find it and find it and find it and find it and find it and find it and find it."

So I decided that happiness is not in rest; happiness is in work. Happiness is not in the restaurant; happiness is in the slums. Happiness is not in the department store; happiness is in the hospital. Happiness is not in getting; happiness is in giving. Happiness is not in lights; happiness is in the dark places, bringing a little bit of light to somebody who lives in darkness. That is happiness)

Somebody asked me this week, "Did you remember all your friends for Christmas?" You'll forgive me for saying this, but I've been remembering all my friends all year. I want that good feeling all the time. I don't want to sit there on Christmas night with that old, stuffed, selfish-kind of feeling, where all I've done is live for myself.

I want a lot of things for you, my people. Besides salvation I guess the thing I want more than anything in the whole world for you, my people, is for you to know the joy, peace, satisfaction, excitement and the thrill of not living for yourself, but of living for others)

When General Booth, founder of the great Salvation Army, got old, he couldn't attend the convention one year in London. It was the first time in his life he couldn't attend the convention. He sent a telegram. It was to be read to the delegates at the opening session. Thousands of people were assembled and the telegram was read: "Dear delegates of the Salvation Army Convention: Others! (Signed) General Booth." That is what I want for you.

This fall, a few days before my birthday, I told you about the time some folks spit on me out at the Montgomery Ward Shopping Center. On my birthday Sunday a little girl came to my office and said, "Brother Hyles, I don't want anybody to spit on you. I want everybody to love you. I got you a birthday present." She handed me a health-food candy bar. It had been unwrapped, and one bite had been taken. I wept as I thought, "I think she really has found out what life is all about." She gave most of it-to others.

If we could learn that lesson this morning, we could have 365 Christmases a year.

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