

*A different kind*  
*of*  
**CHRISTMAS**

*Stephen Santos*

# *A different kind of Christmas*

*by: Stephen Santos and his kids*

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## **Introduction**

It seems to me that some of our best creativity, our most remembered adventures and our greatest accomplishments come out of seasons of hardship. This Christmas adventure was no different. It was a very pain-filled season in the life of my children and myself, and yet in the midst of it, God released to me a blueprint to give my children a Christmas that would not only fill them up, but remind them of who He is and what He is like with all of us on our journey with Him.

About two months before the Christmas of 2021 I began to sense the Lord saying that this Christmas was going to be a different one. I told the kids that they should prepare for this year to be different than other years, and that of course sparked their curiosity. Their most common question was: “does that mean we won’t be getting any presents?” I assured them that they would still receive presents, but it wouldn’t be in the same manner that they had understood Christmas in prior years.

I released the gameplan 5 days prior to Christmas and gave them a schedule for each gift that I was going to offer to them.

We had a fairly busy schedule so this could be modified in any way to fit the schedule and needs of the children, but I wanted to share this

with you in hopes that it would encourage you to help break your kids out of the typical American Christmas mindset.

It's easy to get stuck in the rut of everything builds up to this one day, the kids suffer through the reading of the nativity story so that they can start tearing into their gifts and all the while we look around to see just another Christmas, where something feels like it's missing.

I'm not claiming that this will solve all of that for us, but it did give us a memory that I don't believe will be easily forgotten. And within that memory were so many seeds planted in our hearts and minds of God's love and truth. At the end of it I can truly say, that my kids didn't just want to have Christmas, they wanted to be a part of it.

## **Wednesday**

-The Gift of Adventure

-The Gift of Giving

-The Gift of Serving and Honoring

## **Thursday**

-The Gift of provision

-The Gift of Learning

-The Gift of Teaching

## **Friday**

-Christmas Eve

-The Gift of Worship

-The Gift of Ministry

## **Saturday**

-Christmas Day

-The Gift of Wisdom and Waiting

For each gift I printed out a piece of paper with a sort of direction on it. In the pages that follow I will share those letters and then an explanation of what took place and the reaction of the kids.

## The Gift of Family

This was the first gift that the children received. We actually did this the night before the calendar started. It was a simple one but it gave me a foundation to work from throughout the rest of the gifts. My oldest daughter had mentioned months prior to Christmas that she always wanted to get those family Christmas pajamas. I began looking for them and finally found a good deal and they ended up having just enough of our sizes.

I spent a little bit of time talking to them about the importance of them sticking together, and of supporting each other through life. We talked about the representation of family and how it is an incredible picture of what God invites us into. I then presented to them their pajamas, and needless to say, they all ran off to put them on. Most of them wore them every night until Christmas. (I did wash them!)

As we continued through the gifts a major focus was on them sticking together and working together, this first gift become the anchor.



## The Gift of Adventure

*You will have to follow the clues in order to unlock not just the gift of adventure  
but the key to true adventure.*

*Let me just say I am so excited about this one!!!*

I spent a bunch of time talking to the kids about the difference between goals and tasks. I reminded them multiple times that the goal of them sticking together and working together was far more important than finding and solving the clues. I had to remind them of this occasionally, and we had to take a couple breaks in order to talk through some relational issues, but being the first of the gifts and their excitement, they were all willing to evaluate their own personal responsibility in any arguments and we were able to get back on track pretty easily.

Another thing I wanted to encourage was this aspect of wonder. We lose so much wonder in the amazing adventure that life is, and I want so

badly for my kids to understand this concept of a life fully alive is following the adventure that Jesus has for you.

The biggest mistake in this gift is to feel like you need to copy what was done for my kids. Adventure to your family may look completely different. This could take on so many forms. It could be an invitation to a family hike where the children have to find certain things in nature. It could be a family trip to the mall where the kids have to find items on a scavenger hunt that you've created, or even something like as a family asking God to lead you in what adventure to have for the next 3 hours and then simply doing whatever God puts in your children's minds. Whatever the adventure part is, it's important to make it something unique to your children, something that can bring the focus of unity and working together and something that will stir in them this desire to do something out of the ordinary.

Our adventure included a series of clues. I had written out 5 clues that led them on a scavenger hunt through the house and through the woods. The last clue had them find a key to our barn. I had kept them out of the barn for the past month so they knew something was being hidden

there. A couple months prior to this I was able to purchase a couple small electric dirt bikes and a small four-wheeler that all needed repair and were incredibly discounted because of this. I bought the parts and fixed them up and had them sitting there for the kids when they pulled the door open. For my kids this was a really great gift encouraging adventure, but for others this simply wouldn't work.

Remember, it isn't about the gift, it's about the learning that comes from the gift. Think about it this way, you are handing them a truth about life along with a memory they will be hard pressed to forget. And for years down the road they will think on that one Christmas that their parents really did go 'all out', for them.

Even with very little money these gifts can be accomplished. If you don't feel like you are a creative person, ask God to show you what to do with each gift and then trust Him to prepare your kids hearts to receive.

I'm listing the scavenger hunt clues below, just to give you an idea.

On a mantle inside there's a picture set centered  
And above is a phrase that the Father has mentored

Using only those letters write down three other words  
And then open the paper to find directions forward

Out by a cabin in the blessed woods they say  
Is a note set there waiting for young hands to take  
On the note find direction for where you should go  
But stay together for the task is worth less than the goal

In a big sock marked H there's a note hid inside  
That will lead you on a journey that is sure to surprise  
I cannot give hints except that you must work together  
and if you work as a family all the testing you'll weather

Under old tires of concrete there's a pole that's of use  
For tilting you made need the help of a noose  
But under the one where the pole is still stuck  
You will find directions one step closer, Good Luck  
Where the water flows the most like a snake  
You will find a bench to rest while you wait

On that bench you shall rest all five  
And then you shall ponder what is under your hide

A key is the key to unlock some things swift,  
They are great and are fun  
But don't lose sight of the gift.  
Because the gift that God wants you to have this year  
Is a love for each other and a hope without fear.

Again, the goals of the gift of adventure are:

- bringing the family or the kids together to work as a team
- creating an opportunity for wonder and creative fun

## The Gift of Giving

Now this is a challenging one because to decide as a family what and how to give may mean that your idea isn't the one chosen, but remember the gift of family says that the goal of sticking together, is more important than any of the tasks. You will each be given an envelope with money in it. You can choose to put it all together or keep it separate. Pray and ask Holy Spirit who you or we should bless this Christmas.

The gift of giving isn't just about giving something to someone, it's about being God's hands and feet, so let Him lead you in where to go.

We will also be looking for toys around the house that we can donate to the Dream Store. This will give some kids an opportunity to get presents, that may not have been able to.

This was one of our favorites, in fact, my oldest daughter, Hadassah, asked if we could do this one every year. Each child received \$20 in an envelope and could do whatever they wanted to bless someone else outside of our family. I turned on some instrumental music and for the next ten minutes I gave them time to be with Jesus and ask Him what He wanted them to do with what they had received.

We spent the next few hours driving to a few different stores for them to pick up gifts.

My oldest two daughters put their money together and made gift bags for kids at a shelter. They were able to put together 10 gift bags filled with small toys and candy from the dollar store. They also were intent on putting a Bible in each bag, so while we were at a local thrift store, the girl behind the counter blessed them with ten bibles to add to their bags. They were beyond excited to see that God had provided for what He put on their hearts to do. They had to check out on their own which provided a good learning experience. They accidentally picked up a few items that cost more than they realized and went over their budget and didn't have enough money. They immediately looked to me to save the day with my

wallet. I just told them, it wasn't a big deal, but they would need to figure out which items they wanted to keep and which ones to put back.

Although it took a little time with the cashier, they figured it out.

My son and two other daughters put some money together to buy a ukulele for a boy in our church. He is a very special boy to our family. He is in a wheelchair and can't talk as clearly as most, but his smile and excitement when he sees you will fill up your heart with the love of God.

My youngest daughter (5) wanted to buy presents for an older girl at our church and picked out a random bunch of toys and candy for her.

My other daughter (7) wanted to get toys for two boys in our church, and found some great items for them.

We delivered the gifts the next day and it was so great to see the kid's faces as they allowed what was given to them to be poured through them.

We drove to a women's shelter first and dropped off the gift bags, and I could see the excitement all over my girl's faces. When we got back in the truck my oldest daughter said, I want to do this again next year, but I want to make even more gift bags.



We delivered the ukulele to Jason at a restaurant and his eyes lit up so bright. The smile on my son's face was priceless.

We delivered the other gifts and each time it was amazing to see this connecting point for the kids, that God had used them to bring a blessing into someone else's life.

The goals of this gift are:

- giving the kids time to connect with hearing from God.
- empowering them to release what they've been given.

## The gift of serving and honoring

We will prepare and serve dinner to  
and honor a family with encouragement notes.

This is one of the greatest gifts that we can give. It is not just our time, it is our strength our minds and our hearts. Anybody can hand money to a person in need, but it takes something from you to give them a part of your life.

We invited a family from our church that we enjoy spending time with over for dinner. The kids helped set the table, fix the meal and prepare everything for the evening, and then even became waiter and waitresses. They gave them their encouragement notes, and told them what they loved about their family.

This family had actually bought gifts for all of my children and brought them over, so the rest of the night we spent playing with these

crafts and toys with friends. It ended up being such a blessing and encouragement for them to see that when we give to others, we are always blessed, sometimes in the natural, but always in our spirits.

When you create an environment of servanthood in your home, things like this become so much easier and even life giving.

Other alternatives of this are serving in a soup kitchen, or shelter. Or you can as a family serve someone in your community that needs help with something at their house or in their yard. It is the opportunity to include our kids in something that they might not be able to do on their own.

As with most of these gifts, you may get some resistance from kids who have already 'checked out', but I believe that if you are determined to see it through and pray your way through it, that whether you see the fruit of the seeds you planted right away or not, it will in time take root in your kid's lives.

The goals of this gift are:

-working together

-the importance of serving others with more than just money

## The Gift of Provision

There are no presents to unwrap here, but there is a gift. It is the declaration, that God always provides for those who follow Him. Some will receive more than others at different times. Either because of their need or simply because God chooses, but the thing to always remember is that God will always provide for his children.

Matthew 6:28

And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven will He not much more clothe you?

I had a bag of clothes that I had gotten for each child. I didn't wrap them, I just put them in a grocery bag and handed them to the kids. These were all items that I had gotten from hitting the clearance racks and waiting on God's amazing ability to put me in front of deals. I really wanted them to understand that God's provision for them was a gift but not a present to be unwrapped. It wasn't something that they earned by being good, it was something that He wants to give to them simply because they are His.

Another thing I talked to them about was the fact that each of them received different things and different amounts of things. We talked about the importance of not comparing another person's gifts to your own.

This was a simple one, but one that I wanted them to grasp. God will always provide for His children, and our response to the 'what' He gives us is the key.

The goals of this gift are:

- to receive with gratefulness what we are given
- to reinforce the truth of God's provision for His children

## The Gift of Learning

You will each be given a workbook or other type of book in which to expand your minds.

Always remember that to learn and grow and change is a gift of God, and as we surrender our ability to do these things we will continue to be blessed on the journey.

My prayer for each one of you is that at no point in your life will you believe that you have learned all there is to know about anything, especially God.

Again this is a simple truth, but it provided a really great opportunity to reinforce the idea of humility and approaching every opportunity as one, which we can learn from. They spent the rest of the afternoon reading and working through workbooks.

The goals of this gift are:

-encourage them to see their ability to learn as a gift

-Encourage them to approach knowledge with a mindset of humility

## The Gift of Teaching

God has given each one of you very special gifts and talents, you will teach and share something you have learned with someone else. Don't think of this as being better than someone. This is an opportunity to pull someone else up.

This was the only gift that we were not able to accomplish due to a cancellation. But the goal was for each one of my kids to take something that they could do and teach another child or person that thing. It could be as simple as tying a shoe, or drawing, dance, a gymnastics move, an instrument, or type of craft. I really wanted them to see that the things that they knew how to do were gifts and that them sharing what they knew would bless others. I found a family with the same amount of children as we have and our plans were to offer the things we'd learned.



Really this could be done anywhere and with any other person. This was another gift focused on looking outward and seeing how giving to others actually fills us up.

The goals of this gift are:

- acknowledge the abilities that God has given to you
- share what God has given you to those around you.

## The Gift of Worship

*It is truly a gift to us to be able to worship God and it is our gift back to Him.*

*We will celebrate with other followers of Jesus  
at a Christmas Eve Candle-lighting Service today.*

This one is pretty self explanatory, but we spent a good bit of time talking about how worshiping God is truly a gift. I tried to ask them a lot of questions about what they think worship does for them, as well as what they think it does for God. Encourage your kids to picture what worship looks like in heaven. Ask them questions about why they think it is important.

The goals of this gift are:

-to remind them that the ultimate gift in this season is our connection to Jesus

-to worship Him together as a family. On a side note, if your children never see you entering into worshipping God, if they never sense that He is touching your heart, they will have a hard time believing any of it is real. I'm not suggesting that you fake a connection with the Almighty, but instead that you are vulnerable about your journey with Him, no matter where you are at. As parents it is a part of our job to make visible and tangible the truth of God. Trust me, they need to see the moments that you are moved by Him.

## The Gift of Ministry

*The best way to spread Christmas cheer*

*Is singing loud for all to hear.*

*We will be travelling around to spread the joy of Jesus birth with people.*

*And as a bonus I thought it would be cool if we did a live Nativity scene.*

*Notice that this is after the Gift of Worship. Our ministry to others must always  
come after our Worship of The King!*

That's right, we went caroling. We picked the people that we wanted to bless and drove to their house, rang the doorbell and started singing. By the end of this, my son, who was the least excited about this gift was the one begging for us to keep going. After you get over the first little awkwardness and you see the faces of people, it makes it all worth it.

The gift of ministry doesn't have to be singing carols. You could as a family write encouragement notes and drop them off at a neighbor's house.

You could make a list of people you would like to phone and yell out 'Merry Christmas, Jesus is born'.

The point of this for us, was to bring the good news that Jesus was born to people. We wanted to shine our light to others, and be a testimony of what we believe is true.

The goals of this gift are:

- to encourage the children not to be ashamed of God's truth
- to bless and encourage others in some way or another.

## The Gift of Wisdom and Waiting

I wanted to buy you each so many fun things, but I thought that this year since we are doing things differently I would offer you a symbolic declaration for your lives. You will each receive an envelope with a specific amount of money in it. That amount of money is symbolic to the journey of any follower of Jesus, even back to the Israelites.

But that is not the only part of the gift. The money is yours to do with as you please.

However, I would like to give you the opportunity to learn the Gift of waiting, therefore, if you put your money in the bank safe for this entire year, at the end of 2022 it will double. Which means if you choose to save this money for a whole year, you will have twice as much at the end of the year. Either way it is yours to do with as you please.

Merry Christmas!

Before I gave them their envelopes, they were required to search out the number '40' in the Bible and write down three times it was used. They came up with Jesus' 40 days of fasting and temptation, the Israelites 40 years in the desert, and Noah and the 40 days of rain.

I then asked them to give me the theme for all of those stories.

After we talked about this and I explained to them that on our journey with Jesus there would always be seasons of '40'. Trials with a greater purpose. These are times when God wants to give us something but we need to endure through the trial to the end.

I gave them each their envelope with a card that I had written to each of them blessing them, and telling them the things I saw in them and believed for them, and then explained the opportunity.

One of them asked if they could just give me part of the \$40 and have the rest of it double. I told them that it was an all or nothing sort of thing. They asked if they could take it back out if they changed their mind. I told them they absolutely could, and in fact that was better for me.

In the end, three of them handed me the money and two began looking on Amazon.

Another question was, 'do we have to wait till the end of next year, or will we get the money on Christmas Day of next year?'

My favorite part of this was the wrestling match I could see going on inside of them. Immediately they were thinking through the options of what they could buy, and yet there was this pulling back of wanting to wait and receive more.

This is a foundational truth of the kingdom. We accept less in the world's eyes here on earth in order to gain a greater reward in heaven.

The goals of this gift are:

- give the opportunity for the kids to make a choice between right now and more later.
- teach about the kingdom and eternal rewards.



## In Closing:

My hope is that this helps you and your family, experience something different in Christmas. I find that being a parent requires so much purposeful action and so much communication.

I hear story after story of parents who wished they had done a better job. The reality is that we all feel that way to some degree. We wish we had done this or that differently. We weren't made to be a perfect representation of God the Father to our children, we were just asked to steward what we've been given and lead our children in the direction to their true home. I pray that this helps you on your journey with Jesus as you see the purpose in your parenting and leading of your kids through heaven's eyes.

We have a short amount of time to influence our kids and prepare them, let's use every moment we've been given to do so!

Blessings on your journey!

Stephen Santos

## About the author

Stephen lives in South Carolina with his family.

He finds great joy in sharing his own story with others; the one where he was led out of religion by Love.

At the end of his life he is looking forward to answering the one question he believes God will ask him.

“How well did you follow my Son?”

And to this end he writes books, he writes songs, he swings a hammer, he serves and loves his family, he encourages those around him and he prays for broken hearts and broken bodies, but more important and precious to him than any of that, he talks with his friend Jesus about all of it. He has become convinced that if he does everything while walking with Jesus, he will truly have the privilege and blessing of The Abundant Life.

Be blessed on your journey!

## More Writings

You can find out more about Stephen's current books as well as soon to be released books at: [www.stephensantos.com](http://www.stephensantos.com)  
There, you will also find many other short stories, children's books, writings and songs, all with the expressed intent of encouraging you on your journey with Jesus.