

4 Gifts To Celebrate

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Introduction:

How many of you feel like you're ready for Christmas?

Slide: Christmas lights on home pic.: "DITTO"

When we think about Christmas- *we've either got to survive it or celebrate it.* I want you to think about those two feelings for a moment. When it comes to Christmas-- right now are you feeling like, *I've got to survive it?* Or are you feeling like, *I'm going to celebrate it!* I want you to be honest with those feelings. *I've just got to survive it or I'm going to celebrate it.* **When you think of Christmas- do you feel pressure? Or pleasure?**

Those of you who said "survive" tell me why. Give me one word descriptions. *Why are you feeling like, I've just got to survive?*

Money; the jungle out there; Christmas lights; parents; children – there we go! Let's get them all in; flying, the airlines. I hate travel around the holidays; in-laws; fattening food; grumpy in-laws... ☺

In all honesty, I often choose the word "survive" when I think of Christmas. Because when I think about the Christmas season for Andy Wirt, it's just a lot of tension. A lot of times it feels like, I've just got to survive that month.

I am the only one of the six Wirt family that does not love everything that's wrapped around Christmas—**so my attitude sometimes creates tension in my home.** I don't love it because of all the extra work that it takes. I'm the one the one that has to go find all the junk... in the running up and down ladders to the attic- or getting stuff out of storage. We have a nine foot tree. Do you know how heavy that thing is to carry up from the basement? I spent two hours this week one evening trying to get the lights to work!

There's also tension in my schedule. *How many of you would say there's just too much to do this month?* Too many parties, too many kids' things, too many invitations. This week I've been trying to organize my schedule up to the new year- next week on Weds. There is a breakfast for bus drivers. Then Thursday is a Chamber of Commerce lunch. Then Friday is a bus driver carry in—and I'm trying to watch what I eat! This time of year- we celebrate Christmas, wrap up 2011, and plan for 2012- it is a busy time of year!

Then there is all the money you spend on gifts and entertaining and decorating. I don't mind getting gifts for people... I just hate spending money. *Survive* is the operative word.

You may be ready to celebrate it but let me just ask you this. *Can you relate to any of those tensions?*

Here's something that is true for me- maybe you can relate to it. If I'm honest with myself—**when I am focused on the tensions, I am not focused on Jesus.**

The truth is- whether we are surviving Christmas or celebrating it (in the way that the world around us emphasizes)—it is easy to forget about Jesus. It is easy to forget about the reason for Christmas.

4 Gifts To Celebrate

I bought a copy of Rick Warren's book The Purpose of Christmas. He writes: "*Ironically at most Christmas parties the person whose birthday you're supposed to be celebrating is completely ignored. He's never even mentioned. Although Jesus is the reason for the season, he's often overlooked or merely mentioned along with Rudolph, Frosty the Snowman, Santa Clause, the Grinch, the elves and a long list of celebrated fictional characters. He's often overlooked.*"

When you overlook Jesus you move to survive. When you focus on Jesus you celebrate.

Really, that's the message of today—**the purpose of Christmas is to celebrate.** *If I could help you really focus on Jesus this season would you be interested?*

The story of Jesus' birth is found in Luke 2. I encourage people during the Christmas season to read this over and over and over. When you do-- you not only learn about what happened when Jesus was born but you see the first people to celebrate him were not the kings, they were not the elite, they were the ordinary shepherds.

READ Luke 2:8-19 (pg. 614 in Bible under your seat)

You see, **there was something in the Shepherds' encounter with Jesus that triggered something within their soul that made them celebrate.** It says when they went back they told everyone. They were glorifying and praising God. There was something there. There was this uncontrolled excitement.

The shepherds teach us an *appropriate response to Jesus*. **It's about celebration.**

What did they do? When they encountered Jesus-- they ran! They told everyone. They glorified and praised God.

Let me ask you a personal question. *Can you remember back to the time when you first encountered Jesus? Can you remember the excitement around that time? The thrill of being a new believer and all of a sudden going, "Wait! I am saved? I'm forgiven?" And there's this new excitement.*

I see it when I talk with new believers. People grab a Bible and they actually start reading it. You can tell they're excited because they're reading their Bible and telling you about it and they're not pronouncing the names of the books right. "*Andy, I was reading in the Philippines... Malachi, was he an Italian prophet? I read Job. There was nothing about employment but that dude's life sucked!*" There's all this enthusiasm. When they have kids they're going to name them Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. They're going to sleep in a manger. They eat manna. They want a camel as a pet. Jesus was everything! *Remember that excitement?*

So here's the question for many of us. **What happened? Why did the good news stop being good? What happened in your life that the enthusiasm of being a follower of Jesus fell away? Why isn't Jesus worthy of being celebrated three hundred sixty five days of the year?**

The answer is he is worthy. The problem isn't with his worthiness. The problem is with our forgetfulness.

4 Gifts To Celebrate

If you're anything like me and I know you are, we forget. **We just forget about the wonder and the majesty.** So *the good news evolves into news.* Sometimes, for some of us—it becomes old news. “Heard that, been there, done that.” The news of God’s word becomes informational. *It’s no longer transformational.* We have so much going on in life that we think and we worry about all this other stuff and we lose that focus and we forget about Jesus.

Here’s what I want you to write down in your notes because this is the essence of what I want to go after. **We are a people of forgetting, but our faith is strengthened by remembering.**

I want to remember. *I want to remember all that God has done for me.* God wants me to remember. As a matter of fact, one of these days I want to do a series just on that word “remember” in the Bible. It’s used hundreds of times. We’re told to remember. If you are forgetful, you’re not alone.

One time, Jesus fed five thousand people by providing a miracle with just a couple of fish and five loaves of bread. Then a few days later they’re with another crowd and Jesus says, “*Don’t let these people go hungry. Feed them.*” And one of the followers says, “*Where will we get the food?*” **Really???** You’d think they’d go; “*A couple days ago you did that little thing with bread and fish. Do it again! Do the water into wine. You’re God. You’ve proven you’re God. Do it again. That was awesome. These people are hungry, feed them. This time give them desert, Jesus. I’ll pick up the left over Twizzlers and it’ll be awesome!*”

Look what Jesus says when they said (Matthew 16:9-10), Where will we get the food? ⁹ *Don’t you understand even yet? Don’t you remember the 5,000 I fed with five loaves, and the baskets of leftovers you picked up?* ¹⁰ *Or the 4,000 I fed with seven loaves, and the large baskets of leftovers you picked up? Don’t you remember? Don’t you remember?* Please don’t forget. Remember that. Remember this. Don’t forget.

I wish I could distance myself from the knuckleheads in the Bible. But I can’t. Because they remind me too much of myself.

I hate to stand before you and admit that. I hate to stand before you and admit that as far as I’ve walked in my journey with Jesus-- there are times *I forget to celebrate his goodness. I forget to worship him for all that he’s done. I need to celebrate.* I, Andrew Wirt--need to celebrate. I need to celebrate that because of Jesus, I’ve been saved. Because of Jesus, I don’t have to pay for my sins. Because of Jesus, I have God’s power in me today. Because of Jesus, there’s a place reserved for me in heaven. Because of Jesus, I can keep growing while I’m here and changing and I don’t have to be the same.

Is there anybody here like me that just needs to be reminded? I want to tell you today that at Christmas- Jesus gave you four gifts. They are gifts to celebrate—365/24/7.

How do you remember to celebrate? I have an idea. Please get a coin in your hand (off your seat). I need to let you know, those coins are from my bank account and they’re a gift to you. Because they are from my bank account—most of them are pennies and nickels. ☺

I know some of you are thinking, “Wait a second! This is not how we normally do church.” I know. It’s kind of like reverse offering here. You write a check this a.m. and you get a nickel back. ☺

4 Gifts To Celebrate

The beauty of coins are that they are everywhere. There are coins on the ground. There are coins in the bottom of your car, under cushions. You can always have access to coins. When I want a soda- I always go and clean out my wife's car. The kids drop money in all the crevices- I come away with a few bucks every time I sweep!

I'm going to teach you how to remember to celebrate Jesus every time you see a coin. This is not just message about celebrating Jesus at Christmas- this is a message about celebrating Jesus every day!

This is very practical here. Let's start with the penny.

1. When You See A Penny: Celebrate- Your Past Is Forgiven

When you see a penny here's what you're going to celebrate. "**Penny-past.**" Remember that. "**My past is forgiven.**" One of the messages of Christmas is that Jesus came to forgive my past.

Please listen very carefully. There is no past that Jesus can't forgive. Some of you need to hear that. Some of us are living in the past- we still haven't forgiven ourselves for things we've asked Jesus to forgive us for long ago. We need to start living- start celebrating- like we've been forgiven. There's no past that Jesus can't forgive.

That's why Jesus was born. That's why we celebrate Christmas. So when you see a penny remember: My past is forgiven.

Look what Jesus said in Mark 2:17: *17 When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but **those who know they are sinners.**"* Why did Jesus come? **To save those of us who are sinners.** He was born so that I could be forgiven.

Romans 4:7-8:

*7 "Oh, what joy for those
whose disobedience is forgiven,
whose sins are put out of sight.*

*8 Yes, what joy for those
whose record the LORD has cleared of sin."*

If you have been forgiven your sins are no longer counted against you. And, when my sins are no longer counted against me- my eternity is secure. Colossians 1:13-14: says this, "*13 For he has rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, 14 who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins.*"

If you're here today and you have never taken advantage of God's forgiveness and that free gift of salvation, *it's free.* **It doesn't even cost a penny.** Although it cost Jesus his life-- it's free for you and it's free for me. *If you've never asked him—would you to think about that—today?*

So when you see a penny—celebrate-- your past is forgiven.

4 Gifts To Celebrate

2. When You See A Nickel: Celebrate- Now God's Spirit Is In Me

When you see a nickel... N for nickel reminds of us of Now.

Now God's Spirit is in me. You can celebrate that when you said yes to God and you invited him into your life he invaded you with his Spirit. And God's Spirit lives in your life right now.

Personally I believe most of the mess we get in in our lives is because we forget that God's Spirit resides in us. You don't have to go through life alone. You are not powerless to change...in fact, you have the very power that raised Christ from the dead living in your heart.

Romans 8:11 (NLT):

¹¹ The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you.

So when you see a nickel remember *Now*. That God's Spirit lives in me now.

3. When You See A Dime: Celebrate- I Have Determined Destiny (A Place In Heaven)

The dime. **D – Determined destiny.** You can remember that either way. Destiny determined. What this means is this: **“I have a place in heaven.”**

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you've been forgiven of your sins, you have a personal relationship with him, your destiny has been determined. There's a place for you in heaven. That is worthy of celebration.

Why do we celebrate? We celebrate because when my life ends here it doesn't end. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ-- death has no sting.

We shouldn't be scared of death. Death just kicks the door open into eternity. Jesus said in John 5:24: ²⁴ *“I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life.”*

Romans 5:21 *“So just as sin ruled over all people and brought them to death, now God's wonderful grace rules instead, giving us right standing with God and resulting in eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* If you are a Christ follower you've got to celebrate that. Celebrate!

So a Dime – My destiny is determined.
The Nickel – Now. God's Spirit is within me.
Penny – past. My past is forgiven.

4. When You See A Quarter: Celebrate- I Can Continue To Grow (Spiritual Growth)

If you've got a quarter, raise your hand. When you see a **quarter**—thing **Spiritual Growth**.

Some of you are thinking, *“Where's the Q word? You're throwing me off. How am I going to celebrate if I can't remember the Q word?”*

4 Gifts To Celebrate

It's not as easy to remember, this quarter, but here's how you're going to remember it. Jesus told a story about a farmer and, in this story, the farmer planted seed. The theme of the story was that only one quarter of the seed grew. Only one quarter. Think about this. Seventy-five percent didn't grow. Only one quarter grew. You celebrate that growth.

Matthew 13:4-8 it says *"4 As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. 5 Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. 6 But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn't have deep roots, they died. 7 Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. 8 Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted!"*

What percent grew? Twenty-five percent. One quarter-- growth. How many can remember that? It's a little tougher, I realize. I'm stretching you. But that is worthy to celebrate. We don't have to be the same. I don't have to stay the same. Because of God's Spirit working within me, while I'm alive here on planet earth, I can grow and I can change *beyond my wildest dreams*.

Spiritual growth is a gift. It is a sacred privilege and it's a reality for those of us who pursue and are faithful in obedience to God's ways. There's a lot to celebrate, a lot about Jesus to celebrate. Not just this month, not just one day. But three hundred sixty five days of the year.

Dream with me just for a second. *What would your life look like if you were to go through life with a daily attitude of celebration? What if every time you saw a penny, whether it be on the ground or next to your sink or in an ashtray in your car, you just celebrated. You said, "Thank you, God, that my past is forgiven!" Imagine what your life would look like.*

What if every time you saw a nickel you were reminded that God's Spirit is in you now. And God's Spirit is without measure and without limit.

Or that dime. You saw a dime and you're going, "My destiny is determined. I'm alive right now but I've got a place waiting for me in heaven because of what Jesus did on the cross."

When you see the quarter you think, *"I can change. I can grow. Spiritual growth is a part of my reality. I don't have to be the same."*

What do you think your life would look like? I think your life would be a lot richer. I think your faith could be a lot stronger. I think your struggles, I think they'd still be there but I think they'd be a lot lighter. I think your perspective in life would be brighter. Your attitude would be positive. Your purpose would be clearer. Your relationships would be deeper. Celebration wouldn't be limited to a season. To a month. To a day. Every day could be like Christmas.

We're just dreaming, but what if? What if we became people who instead of being known for being forgetful, we were remembered for having an unforgettable faith. An unforgettable attitude of celebration. What if?