



ADVENT CONSPIRACY

The story of Christ's birth is a story of promise, hope, and a revolutionary love. So, what happened to Christmas? What was once a time to celebrate the birth of a Savior has somehow turned into a season of stress, traffic jams, and shopping lists. And when it's all over, many of us are left with presents to return, looming debt that will take months to pay off, and this empty feeling of missed purpose. Is this what we really want out of Christmas? What if Christmas became a world-changing event again?

Welcome to the Advent Conspiracy, **an international movement restoring the scandal of Christmas by substituting compassion for consumption.** The concept behind Advent Conspiracy is simple...

WORSHIP FULLY.



SPEND LESS.



GIVE MORE.



LOVE ALL.



WORSHIP FULLY

For many of us, the time of year when focusing on Christ should be the easiest, is often the hardest. Our calendars are full of activities, the to-do lists are getting longer, the stores are getting busier, and an overwhelming stress has crept into our hearts.

So how do we get back to the heart of the Christmas narrative?

For starters, **worship**. There's a reason Worship Fully is the first tenet of Advent Conspiracy. We believe that when our hearts are oriented towards Christ, the rest of the tenets will fall into place. The way we spend, give, and love will radically change when it comes from a place of true worship.

Each year Advent brings another opportunity to worship the miracle of the Incarnation when God revealed himself to people in a new way. If you read the Christmas narrative, nearly every character who encountered the infant King had the same response: *worship*.

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the LORD. — Luke 2:10-11

Excitement, anticipation, hope—each of these emotions swell around the object of our dearest affection. The reality is that we spend our time and energy on what matters most to us. Notice what you're spending your time and energy on. Is it drawing you closer to God or is it distracting you from something else?

Here's a tough question: Does the way we spend our time, money, and energy testify that we worship God incarnate? Sit with that today. Ask God to open your eyes and heart to the truth.

Some activities to help you Worship Fully:

- Invite a friend over and see how they're doing. Listen well.
- Have your kids read the Christmas story while setting up the nativity.
- For one night, unplug from all technology and social media. In a world full of noise, be intentional about quiet time.
- Turn the radio off in the car and spend 10 minutes thanking God for the ways He has blessed you.
- Listen to worship music. Let the lyrics settle into your heart.



SPEND LESS

Spend less is an ambiguous goal. Spend less than last year? Spend less than my neighbor? The truth is there is no formula. The challenge of this tenet is to be willing to ask more questions and then be open to hearing what God says in return.

Is this something I want or something I need?

Why do I want to buy this?

What kind of company am I supporting if I purchase this product?

Can I afford to spend this amount?

How many presents do we actually need?

What did we do with the presents from last year?

You see, spending less requires us to plan. Instead of mindlessly shopping online and ordering more than we know what to do with, we take the time to think about each purchase. We strive to thoughtfully evaluate what we support with our spending, and we allow our spending to support products, people, and causes worthy of being supported. By spending a little less on ourselves we are able to more joyfully give to others in need.

It is not enough to say *no* to the way Christmas is celebrated by many; we need to say *yes* to a different way of celebrating.

It's important to remember that when we choose to spend less on Christmas presents, it doesn't mean that we love our friends and family any less. In fact, for many of us, we've found that the creative, intentional gifts we give showcase our love – and perhaps God's – more clearly than ever before.

More than just an invitation to say no to overspending, this is an invitation to a new way of celebrating. This year start a new tradition of spending compassionately and responsibly.

Some ideas to help you Spend Less this Christmas:

- Make a Christmas budget and then stick to it. Don't compare yourself to others, pray and do what is best for your family.
- Research companies that are Fair Trade.
- Pray for the people on your Christmas list before purchasing anything. Make spending a conscious decision that engages your heart.
- It's not just about the presents. Notice how much you're spending on other Christmas activities (going out to eat, new outfits, wrapping paper, decorations, etc.). Find one area where you can cut back this year.
- Write down five things you're thankful for. Take inventory of how blessed you already are.
- Set a spending limit as a family. Let everyone have the same amount to spend on each other. You'll be surprised at how creative your kids will get!
- Donate old and unused clothes, toys, and books to a local organization. Notice how much *stuff* you actually don't use or need.



GIVE MORE

We've talked about rebelling against consumerism by spending less but now we're encouraging you to give more...Is that a contradiction? Nope! Giving more isn't about giving more toys, more gadgets, more clothes, more gift cards, more **stuff**.

God is calling us to give more *intentionally and relationally*. That means giving more of our time, our energy, our memories, our talents, our *presence*. It's a both/and. Spend less money and **give more of yourself** to the ones you love.

We believe that the best gifts celebrate a relationship. Think back on the most meaningful gift you've ever received. Chances are that there is a story and a relationship that was connected to that gift. Now try and remember all of the gifts you were given last year...For most of us that's hard to do.

It sounds obvious, yet we seem to have drifted away from this liberating, straightforward truth: The Father gave his one and only Son. God's answer for the world's problems has never been material things. God did not give us more stuff – even good stuff like work, food, or health. He gave us himself. The most priceless and personal gift of all!

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

Relational giving means that we think about the other person—who they are and what they care about. We focus more on giving our undivided presence and less on a pile of presents under the tree. This takes time and effort on our part. These kinds of gifts often require planning, but you'll hardly be able to wait until Christmas to give such a gift!

When we give relationally during the Advent season, this is what we remember: it's an opportunity to worship as we remind each other of the gift that was given for our sake. If we can resist the trap of giving easy gifts, and reject the assumption that giving expensive gifts is the best way to express love, something else might begin to happen. Our kids, family, neighbors, and coworkers will watch us celebrate Christmas differently, and through our actions they will hear the good news of the Gospel.

Some ideas to help you Give More:

- Check out our list of relational gift ideas.
- If you're overwhelmed, start small. Choose one person on your list to give a relational gift to.
- On Christmas morning, turn off your cell phone. Take a couple hours to be present with your family and focus on the people God has put in your life.
- Invest in experiences you can share. Sign up for dance lessons, go camping, plan a vacation, take cooking classes.
- Pass down memories. Make a recipe book or photo album to give to your family.
- Get a blank journal and write notes and prayers to your kids.
- Give a copy of your favorite book to a friend and then meet up for coffee and discuss it. Then switch and read their favorite book.
- Buy someone a gift that relieves a burden: babysitting money, help out with yard work, make a meal.
- Give the gift of hospitality. Invite a new family over for dinner and games.
- Do an activity with your kids – puzzles, jewelry making, baking, hiking, fishing, sports. Be present.





RELATIONAL GIFT IDEAS

Spend Time Together

- Host a dinner party. Have everyone bring a prayer request to share with the group. Spend time encouraging and praying for the people God has put in your life.
- Create together. Do a puzzle, paint a picture, bake cookies, build a fort, write a song, make jewelry, garden, take photos.
- Be present. Make it a habit to have one technology-free night. Turn off the distractions and spend quality time together.
- Buy a devotional for you and a friend. Get together and talk about what you're learning from God.
- Do an activity. Go for a hike and look at creation. Go see a concert or play.
- Read the Advent Conspiracy book with a friend and swap ideas for new Christmas traditions.

Purchase with a Purpose

- Research Fair Trade companies and purchase Fair Trade certified goods.
- Shop local. Buy from local boutiques and artisans. Get to know the local business owners in your city.
- Find companies that give back.

Serve Someone

- Partner with a Christian non-profit organization and change a life.
- Make a helping-hands coupon book. Give your family vouchers to babysit, fold laundry, clean the kitchen, walk the dog.
- Host a serving day. Have friends and family get together and work on a project or volunteer at a local organization. You'll be spending time together and serving someone in need.
- Care for the widows in your church. Invite someone over after a church service and get to know their story.
- Volunteer at church as a family or small group. Christmas is often a very busy time for churches and their serving teams. Look for ways to help out during this season.
- Organize and clean out your friend's pantry.
- Bake cookies and make a thank you card for someone who regularly serves your community.
- Pay for a date night or babysit for a couple with young kids.

Celebrate Memories

- Skip the traditional Christmas presents and instead plan a family vacation.
- Try something new. Cooking classes, music lessons, rock climbing, painting.
- Make a list of local restaurants, parks, and activities you want to explore. Grab a friend and see how many you can experience together in the next year.
- Hire a photographer to take family photos for one of your friends.
- Put together a cookbook of your favorite recipes that you can share with everyone in your family.
- Make a scrapbook or photo album for your grandparents.
- Over the next year, write 52 notes and share them with someone special next Christmas.
- Put together a family night basket. Wrap up some popcorn, candy, gift cards, and board games.

Make it Personal

- Pray for everyone on your Christmas list before purchasing anything. Remember what a gift they are.
- Find presents that celebrate the hobbies and passions of someone else.
- Remember it's not about the number of gifts you give. It's about celebrating your relationship and giving thanks to God for that person.

Share Your Talents

- Celebrate the talents that God has given *you* and share those with others. Throw a dinner party, take photos, knit a quilt, play music, write a children's story, plan an adventure, organize and clean, sculpt and paint, etc.



LOVE ALL

At Christmas, one of the things that should distinguish a Christ follower is a love that reaches out to the marginalized and the forgotten.

Such giving is an act of true worship. For Jesus this is personal. Read the Christmas narrative and remember that the Son of God *chose* to be born into a family that was struggling with poverty. Nobody expected the Messiah to be born in a manger in the little town of Bethlehem.

Over and over again in scripture we see Jesus teaching that He is on the side of the impoverished. As followers of Christ, we are called to do the same—to lavishly love the poor, the hurting, and the lonely. The people in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in our cities, and around the world.

When God's people serve in humble, generous ways, the story of Jesus is told again and again. The poor in our world will be touched by God through how we choose to celebrate Christmas. Through our actions and our words, people will be reminded that they are loved by the Creator of the universe and He has not forgotten them.

When we show up and love in the name of God, **God shows up.**

That's part of the mystery of partnering with Jesus in the work he is still doing. Remember to love and serve not out of a place of guilt but as an act of worship. We must not forget that. The good news of the gospel is for all people, including us! We radically love others because we have personally experienced the radical love of God. That changes our hearts and it should change the way we celebrate Christmas.

We love because He first loved us. – 1 John 4:19

Ways to Love All this year:

- Donate the money you saved from spending less. Cornerstone is partnering with Hope of Life International. The money we saved from spending less will be used to serve our friends in Guatemala.
- Invite someone to church. Share a meal together after.
- Be the person with an extra dose of patience this week. Listen well to others, offer grace.
- Read Matthew 25. Notice how much Jesus cares about the way we love and serve others.
- Find out what serving opportunities there are at church and how you can get involved.
- Pray for families around the world that are in need: single moms, refugees, villages without clean water, the homeless in your city.
- Find a local organization to volunteer at. Go with your family, friends, or small group. Then talk about the experience and see what you learned.

