

A 9-DAY HOLIDAY SERIES



# The Unbreakable Spirit of Christmas

How to experience the resilient power of Jesus during the holidays and beyond.

# The Spirit of Redemption



## What makes my life meaningful and valuable?

Redemption might be a difficult concept for us to understand at first because it's a word we don't often use in daily life. But redemption is not some old-timey ideal; it's the opportunity God gives us to live a meaningful and valuable life.

In Luke 12, Jesus tells us a story that starts with a conversation about money, and ends with a question about how we will decide to live our lives:

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; **life does not consist in** an abundance of possessions." And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. **Take life easy**; eat, drink and be merry.' **But God said** to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' **This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.**

– LUKE 12:13-21 NIV

There's a common misconception that Jesus is against wealth—that following him requires embracing poverty. But this misses his deeper message about what truly enriches our lives.

This passage tells us about a time when Jesus was pulled into a family fight about money. Instead of getting involved in their argument about money, he used this moment to teach a deeper truth: He didn't come to earth to be our financial advisor, but to redeem us from an empty way of life, as 1 Peter 1:18 reminds us:

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors.

– 1 PETER 1:18 NIV

Jesus illustrated his point with the story of a rich man blessed with an abundant harvest. This man's response is telling—he is alone, with no mentioned relationships, and focuses solely on building bigger barns to store his wealth. His life's ambition narrows to a simple formula: accumulate more wealth, then "take life easy, eat, drink, and be merry." But God interrupts this plan, calling him a fool—not because of his wealth, but because of his profound misunderstanding of what makes life meaningful.

## The unbreakable spirit of redemption

This echoes a poignant scene from the movie All the Money in the World, which depicts the life of J. Paul Getty, once the world's richest man. In the film, a security agent whom Getty has hired to rescue his grandson asks him, "What would it take for you to feel secure?" Getty's response is simply, "More" – even as he refuses to pay his grandson's ransom.

Like the rich man in Jesus's parable, Getty portrayed in the film exemplifies the deceptively empty pursuit of wealth without purpose or connection with others. We can easily be misled into thinking that having more wealth will lead to security and satisfaction when our hearts are actually searching for meaning and connection.

Jesus's redemptive mission offers us something far greater than financial prosperity. He came to free us from the soul-crushing pursuit of the empty things in life and redirect us toward what truly satisfies us—love for God and others.

Redemption, in simple terms, is our second chance to live a meaningful and purposeful life in deep connection with God and others. It's the antidote to what many consider today's global health crisis: loneliness and death by despair.

So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view. At one time we thought of Christ **merely from a human point of view**. How differently we know him now! This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. **The old life is gone; a new life has begun!** And all of this is a gift from God, **who brought us back to himself through Christ**. And **God has given us this task of reconciling people to him**. For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them.

And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, **so that we could be made right with God through Christ**.

– 2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21 NLT

The spirit of redemption is available to us because of Jesus's death on the cross and the power it gives us to be made new. It means we have a new purpose and goal in life – not of accumulating wealth, but of attaching to and reconciling relationships.

The question Jesus poses in Luke 12 remains strikingly relevant: If your life ended today, what would you have beyond your "bigger barns"? True wealth isn't measured in possessions but in the richness of our relationships with God and others. This spirit of redemption offers a way out of the pointlessness of empty accumulation and its accompanying isolation into a life of walking with God and becoming a part of the spiritual community he calls the church to be. This transformation from a life of empty pursuits to satisfying attachments and meaningful contributions allows us to leave the world better than we found it. As we live this way, wealth becomes not a goal but a tool to connect with others and contribute to their lives.

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. **My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life**.

– JOHN 10:10 NLT

Jesus wants to give us a rich and satisfying life. Who could refuse an invitation to such a full life? And how could we not share it with others?

# The spirit of redemption in *A Christmas Carol*

*A Christmas Carol* is the ultimate movie classic for the holiday season. Watching Scrooge travel through his spiritual journey can be both eye-opening and humbling as we see ourselves in the mirror of his life transformation.

Just as Scrooge was compelled to look at the path of his life and change it, we have the opportunity to reflect on the trajectory of our lives every day:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like **someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.** But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

— JAMES 1:22-25 NIV

Just as James 1:22-25 describes God's Word as a mirror that shows us our true selves, the three ghostly visitors in *A Christmas Carol* serve as spiritual mirrors for Scrooge's soul. Like Scripture itself, they reveal truth, convict of emptiness, and point toward transformation.

## THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PAST: BEWARE THE GOLDEN IDOL

In the Bible's mirror, we see what we've become, just as Scrooge does with this ghost of Christmas past. In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's lost love, Belle, gently confronts him about his greed and false hopes of finding security in it, saying, "You fear the world too much." She observes how his "hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of sordid reproach," and that his "nobler aspirations fall

off one by one, until the master passion, 'Gain' engrosses [him]."

She also points out that he worships money like a god, "a golden one," and that this obsession replaced her in his life.

Scrooge, like many, has let the "golden idol" of gain replace love.

## THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT: LEARN BEFORE YOU REGRET

Just as the Bible warns against looking in the mirror and forgetting what we've seen, the ghost of Christmas present compels Scrooge to confront his current reality. Visits to Bob Cratchit's family and nephew Fred's celebration highlight the vibrant community Scrooge has shunned in favor of his own "bigger barns." The ghost, like God's Word, reveals both what is and what could be.

## THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS FUTURE: CONTROL YOUR OWN DESTINY

This ghost mirrors the convicting power of Scripture, revealing to Scrooge his ultimate fate: a lonely, unmourned death that brings relief rather than grief to others. Similar to God's warning to the rich man in Luke's parable, it highlights the emptiness of wealth accumulated at the cost of human connection.

As we embrace God's Word as the spiritual guide of our lives, we can make three key choices: reject our golden idols, seize today's opportunities for a full life, and shape our destiny with the power of God's forgiveness, no matter past mistakes.

## How do we apply this today?

Wealth itself isn't wrong, but making it our life's purpose leads to devastating emptiness. Like Ebenezer Scrooge and the rich man in Jesus's parable, we discover that true wealth isn't found in bigger barns but in deeper relationships with God and others. This transformation moves us from fear-driven isolation to love-centered connection.

### QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- What "bigger barns" am I building that might be keeping me from deeper relationships with God and others?
- If I looked in the mirror of God's Word today, what would it reveal about my true priorities and the condition of my heart?
- Like Belle said to Scrooge, what "nobler aspirations" in my life have fallen away in pursuit of security or success?
- If my life ended today, would I be remembered for what I accumulated or for whom I loved?

### WHAT CAN I DO NOW?

- Take time to write down your goals and priorities in life. How many of them center around what you can gain, and how many around relationships?
- Pray for God to help you shift your priorities from empty pursuits to attachment to others.
- Choose three friends whose relationships you will actively prioritize. What can you do to attach to them? What can you do to contribute to their lives?

