

## The art of giving all year long

**Text:** Matt. 2:1-12



**Hi Everybody,**

Just spent two days together with youth leaders for the Nordic countries and their assistants at our school just outside of Stockholm. To be honest with you I don't particularly enjoy meetings where all we do is sit around discussing and planning. The truth is that I quickly become restless when sitting still (I am convinced I suffer from a mild form of ADHD). I actually prefer to discuss less and do more. So as you might understand my expectations prior to our meeting were not so high.

However, having spent the past two days together I have to admit that I really enjoyed our time together, not only to plan and discuss but more importantly to fellowship together and get to know each other better. We truly had a lot of fun (I hope it is okay to say this out loud). What is even more exciting is that we are team of relatively new young leaders from all over Scandinavia who are not afraid to think outside of the box. I am actually looking forward to our next meeting in Denmark in the spring (by the way we Swedes can learn a thing or two from the Danes about living life to its fullest). But as the saying goes all good things eventually come to an end.

After seeing our guests and friends off at the airport I decided to make a quick visit to a young couple I have been meaning to visit for some time. I decided to take the underground to avoid the stress of peak hour traffic. On the way to the central station I noticed a large number of people standing around asking for donations for the poor and needy. I actually noticed several groups like the *Salvation Army*, *Lutheran help*, *Situation Stockholm* and a bunch of down and out people just asking for donations.

Well this is not so uncommon in Stockholm. In fact, one might even say that in most of our countries it is commonly accepted that people should be compassionate during the Christmas season, and it's a sociological fact that they are. The point is people tend to do more, give more, and help others more during the month of December than any other time of the year. I believe this to be true even for our very own charity ADRA (*Adventist Development and Relief Agency*) which collects money to help alleviate some of the suffering in the world. Our best month to collect is usually during the month of December.

Part of the reason for this is that due to all the charities running around we have more opportunities to help others during this season and it is generally accepted by most people as something we should do. I believe it is good that we're so willing to show compassion during the holidays, but we all know that our acts of compassion and kindness shouldn't be limited to just the few weeks before Christmas. Instead I believe God wants us to show "Christmas compassion" all year round. I would like to leave you with something to ponder over. I believe the story of the wise men recorded in Matthew

2:1-12 actually teaches us some valuable principles when it comes to giving 12 months out of the year (by the way thanks for volunteering to be my guinea pigs for this year's Christmas message).

The first principle we need to seriously think about is... **We need to be willing to give more than we expect to receive.**

We understand from the text that when the wise men came to see Jesus, they knew they weren't going to a "gift exchange" party. In fact, Jesus parents were very poor so they had nothing to give in the first place. And, of course, the wise men didn't really care. The text is very clear that they came to give, and not receive. The irony of course is that the wise men actually received far more than they gave. The point is that there is an incredible reward in giving. Give more than you expect to get.

Secondly... **We need to strive to give out of love and not because we have to.**

The Bible teaches us to give out of love. Paul said... ***"Each man (and women) should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver"*** (2 Corinthians 9:7). The simple truth is that if your gift isn't motivated by love, it doesn't matter what the gift costs, it is worthless. I believe the wise men's gifts were special, not because they were so valuable (which they were), but because they were given with a heart full of love for the coming King of Kings.

And finally... **We should always strive to give gifts that tell people what they are really worth.**

Matthew reminds us that ***"They opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, and of incense, and of myrrh"***(v. 11). God wants us to give in such a way that builds up a person. Too often I have found that we give condescendingly, and with too many strings attached. We even sometimes try to use our gifts to manipulate people into doing what we want them to do or believe in us or even join our church (Yes, even we have been guilty of this from time to time). In other words, we give with the hidden message: "Now you owe me."

Well, this isn't giving according to Jesus but instead manipulating. That kind of giving doesn't build up the one who receives the gift; neither does it glorify God. Instead When you give, give a gift that says "I believe in you. You're worth it". The wise men understood this. So remember: It's all about giving. When we give, we need to give more than we hope to get; we need to give out love, not because we have to; and most importantly we need to give in a way that communicates to others that they are truly worth something.

God bless

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