

“In this crisp, clear and brightly written introduction to Christianity, Glen shows how we are made to receive gifts and why that turns out to be wonderful news when we encounter the Giver.”

**Andrew Wilson**, Teaching Pastor, King’s Church London

“Glen Scrivener has written a fascinating and compelling guide to the Gift behind our Christmas gifts. It was refreshing for me as a long-time Christian but will also be one of the first things I give to someone who might want to think about this for the very first time.”

**Sam Allberry**, Speaker and Author

“The gospel is wrapped up in Glen’s humble and winsome words. He shows us how our give-and-take Christmas traditions can point us to the gracious Giver. This is worth sharing with family and friends!”

**Quina Aragon**, Author, *Love Made: A Story of God’s Overflowing, Creative Heart*

“Accessible, encouraging and inspiring. This powerful book is a must-read for anyone exploring the real meaning of Christmas.”

**Gavin Calver**, Director of Mission, Evangelical Alliance

“Christmas is a fantastic time to point people to Jesus, God’s greatest gift. In this easy-to-give-away book Glen uses his gifts as a wordsmith and communicator to do just that.”

**Roy Crowne**, Executive Director, HOPE

*The Gift* is a wonderful reflection on the act of giving presents. It starts with experiences we all share and uses these to explore what it means to be human, what it means to love and be loved, what it means to connect with the self-giving Love at the heart of reality, with God. It all adds up to a delightful book to read and a great present to give.”

**Tim Chester**, Pastor, Grace Church Boroughbridge;  
Faculty Member of Crosslands Training

GLEN SCRIVENER

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The Gift

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# INTRODUCTION

*“You shouldn’t have!”*

“I couldn’t help myself.”

*“It’s far too much!”*

“I had to. It’s you all over.”

*“It’s perfect!”*

“I knew you’d like it.”

*“I LOVE it!”*

Giving and receiving is the heart of Christmas. It’s the heart of life, really, but on one day in particular we wrap it up in paper and tie a bow on top. It becomes a dance which we teach our children from their earliest days: “Wait your turn!” “Give Lily her present!” “Say thank you!” “Card first!” “Give Auntie Joan a kiss!” “Don’t cry; socks are *very thoughtful!*”

Whether or not we think of ourselves as traditional, we all tend to be stuck in our ways when it comes to Christmas. You may imagine yourself to be reasonable, modern and completely happy-go-lucky, but all of us fall into patterns, year after year. We probably don't notice them until there's a stranger in our midst—our sister's new boyfriend, perhaps, or some exchange student who can't get home for the holidays. It's not long before we discover an inner voice rising up: "Oh dear, poor soul... They're Getting Christmas Wrong." Without doubt, they are thinking the exact same thing of us.

Perhaps you have been that stranger in someone else's Christmas. I have been, many times. Everyone else seems to know the rules. It's all second nature to them—but you're left gawking at the action from the sofa, as if you're watching the first episode of a Scandinavian crime drama: *"How's he related to her again? Is this normal where they're from? What's happening now? Shall I Google it?"*

You try to smile your way through the day, making sure to compliment the cook at least 17 times on their prawn cocktail. It can be exhausting. But none of the insiders think it's strange. No, no. It's all just *The Way Christmas Happens Around Here*.



But I wonder how a true outsider would find our Christmases. What would an alien make of our gift-giving, for instance? It's all so odd. We go to extraordinary lengths to keep the gifts secret. We hide the receipts, we hide the shopping bags, we hide the purchases under beds and on top of wardrobes. We conceal the presents in special coloured paper (whole multi-million dollar industries are founded on this one peculiarity!). Before we reveal the gifts, we haul a tree inside—a six-foot Norwegian pine tree plonked in the middle of the living room (or, stranger still, a *plastic imitation* of a six-foot Norwegian pine tree)—just so that we can arrange the gifts underneath.

Then, finally, the wait is over, and Christmas Day arrives. The presents are exchanged.

Everyone has their own traditions for this part too. Some families have a grab-and-rip free-for-all. Others are more orderly, as each person around the circle receives the gift, weighs it, shakes it and dutifully exclaims, “I wonder what this could be!” It's all a pantomime. It's all ridiculous. But we love it, so we do it anyway.

For most of us, Christmas morning is a time-honoured gift-giving ritual where each move is

important. We know our parts. We play our roles. We might make fun of our peculiar traditions, but we have those traditions for a reason: giving and receiving is serious business.

Ever wondered why?

### **Giving**

Bring to mind the moment on Christmas morning when you hand over a well-considered present. Not an Amazon gift card. Not a box of chocolates. Something meaningful. Perhaps something far too expensive, or something handmade, or something you saw back in April and you just knew this was it. Now is the moment. You hand it to your loved one, and they reach out to take it. In between you exists the gift. It's more than a purchase cloaked in green paper and sticky tape. In that moment, the gift handed over is *you*.

When it comes to important presents, we put *ourselves* into them. They are not just things: they communicate *us*, and how much the other person means to us. And when a gift is received with joy and gratitude, there is no better feeling in the world. We're ecstatic. And I mean that literally, because that word "ecstatic" comes from the Greek for "standing outside yourself". The whole flow

of give-and-take is about handing yourself over to someone you love in the form of that gift. You put your heart and soul into the present and when it's received, in a deep sense you are being received. Through the present you've gone beyond yourself and have found a home in someone else's embrace. You are "beside yourself". Giving is ecstasy.

### **Receiving**

Now think of receiving a gift. Again, not a gift card but something precious. Perhaps you've had your eye on it for ages but you haven't allowed yourself to hope for something so expensive. Or perhaps this particular present never crossed your mind—you didn't even know it existed. But as soon as you see it, you know it's right. Instinctively you cry out, "Wow, it's perfect! You didn't have to!" At that point the giver will smile and say, "I know I didn't have to. I wanted to!" And they mean it, too. It was a pleasure to give—ecstasy even.

Most often, receiving gifts is just part of the Christmas rigmarole. We tear off the paper and enthuse: "Oh! Soap on a rope! Again! You really shouldn't have!" And only the last part of that response is properly heartfelt. But then, once in a blue moon, there are gifts that truly touch us—

gifts that really are “far too much”. They’re an experience of grace, of getting more than we could possibly deserve. To be on the receiving end of this kind of generosity is to be seen, known and valued over and above all expectations. As we receive it, we are touched not just by the value of the gift but by the valuation of the giver. They really shouldn’t have. But they wanted to. Because they wanted us. They wanted to show that they love us. The experience is thrilling.

That’s what makes Christmas (or at least, the idea of Christmas) such a welcome break from the rest of our lives. For the most part, our lives are about striving. We spend our lives earning respect, earning status, earning our place. We chase rewards and success and payments. But even if we obtain them, at best they make us feel proud, or necessary, or just plain exhausted. They cannot give us what we most crave: we want to be wanted—to be loved.

That’s why the give-and-take of Christmas means so much to us. That’s why we protect the traditions and wrap up the presents and bring in the tree. Because giving and receiving is what we were made for.