

Scatter Your Crumbs

By President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

My dear brothers and sisters, dear friends, I bring you the greetings and blessing of our beloved prophet, President Thomas S. Monson. He is grateful for your prayers and love at this Christmastime and always.

I have always loved this time of year. This First Presidency Christmas Devotional has become a beloved tradition for many, including my own family. We look forward to ushering in the Christmas season with the sublime music of the Orchestra at Temple Square and the always amazing Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The messages and the music help to set the tone for the Christmas season and remind us of the profound significance of what and why we celebrate.

Christmas in Germany

In my early childhood, my Christmas wishes always included a picture-perfect winter, and I know I am not alone in this. To me this meant frosty winter air, crisp blue skies, and a thick blanket of fresh, white snow. Instead, the weather almost always differed from my winter wonderland dreams, often with gray foggy skies, slushy wet snow, or even rain.

Nevertheless, on Christmas Eve, my mother would bundle us up in warm winter clothing and our father would walk with us through the streets of our town.

We children knew the real reason for this annual walk—Mother needed time to decorate the Christmas tree, put the gifts under the tree, and prepare our living room for the holy night. We tried every trick to make this walk as short as possible. But our father was extremely creative in adding another loop or one more turn to give Mother the needed time.

In those days, the streets of Zwickau, Germany, were quite dark in the evenings. This was just after World War II, and street lights were scarce. Only a few shops were open, and some were located next to bombed-out houses, which still had the strange smell of war.

There was one part of the walk we all liked a lot—a stop at the cathedral in midtown Zwickau where we listened to beautiful Christmas carols and majestic organ music that always seemed to be playing on Christmas Eve. Somehow, this music made the humble lights of our city appear suddenly so much brighter—almost like sparkling stars—and filled our young hearts with a wonderful spirit of anticipation.

By the time we returned, Mother was finished with her preparations, and we would file into the living room one by one to behold the wonder of the freshly-decorated *Tannenbaum*. Trees were hard to come by in those days, and we took whatever was available. Sometimes we had to add quite a few branches to make it look like a real tree. But to my young eyes, the Christmas tree was always perfectly glorious.

The flickering lights of the wax candles brought a mysterious, almost enchanting glow to the room. We looked with excitement and delight for the presents under the tree and hoped that our secret wishes would be fulfilled.

The excitement of receiving presents was almost matched by the thrill of giving them. Often these gifts were handmade. One year when I was very young, my present to my brother was a picture of him I had drawn. I was very proud of my masterpiece. And he was very kind and gracious in his words of gratitude and praise.

I will always treasure these sweet memories of my early childhood in East Germany.

Infinite Love

Christmas traditions are celebrated in the cultures and nations of this world in amazing, unique ways. They are each beautiful and remarkable, and still very different.

But they all have a common feeling, a common spirit that always seems to be present when we celebrate the birth of Christ the King, our Comforter and Confidence, the Consolation of Israel!

There are many words one might use to describe this feeling: joy, hope, anticipation, good cheer. Each of these captures part of what we call “the Christmas spirit.”

To me, one word best describes the feelings we experience at Christmastime. That word is *love*.

After all, the gift that we celebrate at Christmas is a gift of love—God’s gift of His Son. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love.”¹

Touched by that love, our hearts soften. We feel a tenderness that causes us to reach out to others in kindness and compassion.

Christmas inspires us to love better.

Even as I say this, I acknowledge that the word *love* is inadequate. In English, as in many other languages, “love” can mean many things. For example, I might say I “love” the weather, or I “love” your new outfit, or I might even “love” the smell of a newly opened can of tennis balls.

But the love of which I speak is something far more profound. Our mortal concept of love is a speck of sand on a vast seashore compared to the love God feels for us.

His love is infinite and inexhaustible compassion. Divine love fills eternity. It overflows with eternal grace. It reaches out and lifts up. It forgives. It blesses. It redeems.

Divine love transcends differences in personality, culture, or creed. It refuses to allow bias and prejudice to stand in the way of imparting comfort, compassion, and understanding. It is completely devoid of bullying, discrimination, or arrogance. Divine love inspires us to do as the Savior did: “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees.”²

This is the kind of love we strive for. It should be our defining characteristic as individuals and as a people.

We may not be able to develop a fulness of divine love in this life, but we should never stop trying. If there is a season of the year when we get a little bit closer than any other, it might be Christmastime, when our hearts and thoughts turn to the birth of the living manifestation of divine love, even the Savior Jesus Christ.

The City Commissioner and the Boy

Let me share a story to illustrate how this love can work in our lives. On Christmas Eve 85 years ago, during the Great Depression, a city commissioner was inspecting the roads of Salt Lake City after a winter storm. While he was driving, he spotted a little boy at the side of the road, standing in the bitter cold with no coat, gloves, or boots. The commissioner pulled over, invited the boy into the warmth of his car, and asked him if he was excited for Christmas. The boy replied, “We aren’t going to have any Christmas at our home. Daddy died three months ago and left Mama and me and a little brother and a little sister.”

The city commissioner turned up the heater in his car and said, “Now, son, give me your name and address. Somebody will come to your home—you won’t be forgotten.”

This city commissioner also happened to be a stake president in downtown Salt Lake City. He had been working with members of his stake to provide food and gifts to families who were unable to provide for themselves. The boy was not a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but that did not matter to the commissioner. That night he and one of the bishops in his stake made sure the boy’s family received a well-filled Christmas basket.³

The encounter with this boy deeply affected this stake president. It made him more determined than ever to seek out and relieve suffering wherever he found it. It even became a hallmark of his life.

The city commissioner’s name was Harold Bingham Lee, and 40 years later, he would become the 11th President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

President Lee was a central figure in the development of the Church's vast program to relieve the suffering of those in distress and to help all of God's children to become more self-reliant.

Toward the end of his life, President Lee said that he understood those who suffered and yearned for relief because of his own poor and simple beginnings.⁴

It's Not How Much You Have but How Much You Love

I think I know how President Lee felt.

My family also lived in very modest circumstances at times. Twice within seven years, we fled our homes as refugees and left everything behind. In West Germany we lived in a rented attic in an old farm building. It had two small rooms, and all of us slept in one bedroom. The space was so tight I had to walk sideways to move between the beds.

My mother had a hot plate that served as our stove. And when we wanted to go from one room to the other, we had to walk through an obstacle course of farm tools, assorted chests, and various cured meats hanging from the ceiling. Once, when I was sick and had to stay in bed all day, I watched the mice who shared our attic race across the floor. Water had to be carried up to our rooms, and the bathroom was an outhouse across an open courtyard, next to the barn. On Sundays we walked a couple of hours to get to our Church building in Frankfurt and back. Rarely could we afford to take the streetcar.

I still remember those days with both heartache and joy. My parents did the best they could to provide for us, and we knew they loved us. Yes, these were times of great need, but I consider them happy times because I could feel the love we had for each other, for the Lord, and for His Church.

There is no shame in being poor. Remember that the Savior of the World was born in a stable and laid in a manger "because there was no room for [Him] in the inn."⁵ Then, a short time later, He and Mary and Joseph became refugees, fleeing to Egypt to seek protection from the murderous Herod. During His public ministry, Jesus walked among the broken, the hungry, and the sick. His days were filled with ministering to them. He came "to proclaim good news to the poor."⁶ In many ways, He was one of them, for He too had "nowhere to lay his head."⁷

He praised the destitute widow who, out of her poverty, tossed her two mites into the Jewish treasury.⁸ And one of His last messages in mortality was that our very salvation depends on how we treat others—especially those who are considered "the least"—because "inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of [them]," He said, "ye have done it unto me."⁹

A 19th-century English poet wrote these lines:

Amidst the freezing sleet and snow,
The timid robin comes;

In pity drive him not away,
But scatter out your crumbs. ...

All have to spare, none are too poor,
When want with winter comes;
The loaf is never all your own,
Then scatter out the crumbs.

Soon winter falls upon your life,
The day of reckoning comes:
Against your sins, by high decree,
Are weighed those scattered crumbs.¹⁰

Regardless of our position in life, every one of us is a timid robin—a beggar—before God. We depend on His grace. It is by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, our Savior, as part of the great plan of happiness, that we have hope of salvation and mercy. This spiritual gift inspires us to keep God's commandments and reach out with compassion to those around us. Even if all we have is a handful of crumbs, we gladly share them with those in emotional, spiritual, or temporal need as an expression of our gratitude for the divine feast God has prepared for us.

Blessing Others at Christmas

During this beloved Christmas season, it is fitting that we take delight in the lights, music, gifts, and glitter. This is all a part of why we love this time of year so much.

But let us never forget that we are disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, the living Son of the living God. To truly honor His coming into the world, we must do as He did and reach out in compassion and mercy to our fellowmen. This we can do daily, by word and deed. Let this become our Christmas tradition, no matter where we are—to be a little kinder, more forgiving, less judging, more grateful, and more generous in sharing our abundance with those in need.

May the contemplation of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem inspire us to be more like Him. May Christ's mission and example cause our hearts to swell with divine love for God and deep compassion for our fellowmen. And may we ever scatter out our crumbs with greater generosity and unceasing love. This is my prayer and blessing this Christmas season and always, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. 1 John 4:9–10.

2. Doctrine and Covenants 81:5.

3. See Harold B. Lee, *Ye Are the Light of the World* (1974), 346–47.
4. See L. Brent Goates, *Harold B. Lee: Prophet and Seer* (1985), chapter 32.
5. Luke 2:7.
6. Luke 4:18, English Standard Version.
7. Matthew 8:20, English Standard Version.
8. See Mark 12:42–44.
9. See Matthew 25:32–46.
10. Alfred Crowquill, “Scatter Your Crumbs,” in Robert Chambers, ed., *The Book of Days* (1881), 2:752. The entire poem reads as follows:

Amidst the freezing sleet and snow,
The timid robin comes;
In pity drive him not away,
But scatter out your crumbs.
And leave your door upon the latch
For whosoever comes;
The poorer they, more welcome give,
And scatter out your crumbs.
All have to spare, none are too poor,
When want with winter comes;
The loaf is never all your own,
Then scatter out the crumbs.
Soon winter falls upon your life,

The day of reckoning comes:
Against your sins, by high decree,
Are weighed those scattered crumbs.

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