

ADVENT CONSPIRACY

presented by

CHRISTMAS
WITH
LIVING
WATER



Worship Fully

“You have a water ministry?” Pastor Chevo asked his two new American friends. “We have a water ministry too!” Every day during the dry season, members of Chevo’s rural Salvadoran church used to tie water containers to their bicycles and pedaled them to a water-scarce village five miles away.

Their church building was one year old, and their water ministry was two. Living Water was there to help him more effectively reach out to his neighbors with clean water in Jesus’ name.

One of the American pastors was dumbfounded by Chevo, “How did you decide to start a water ministry before you even had a place to worship...” The word “worship” had not left his lips before it dawned on us that for Chevo, his water ministry was an act of worship. His church plant, our help, time spent in peoples’ homes, the church daycare, their songs, vigils, smiles, prayers, even Sunday services—all worship.

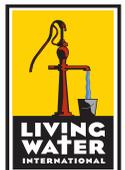
“Worship” derives from Old-English words meaning “worth-ship.” What we give worth to is what we worship: possessions, God, shopping, money, Jesus. Advent is a time to consciously direct our worship at Jesus, seeing him in everyone and worshipping him everywhere. How can you worship more fully this Christmas?

DISCUSSION

- ▶ *In the Exodus story, every time God says, “Let my people go” it’s followed by “so that they may worship me.” Is our culture captive to things that come between us and full worship? What are those things?*
- ▶ *“Even while these people were worshipping the LORD, they were serving their idols.” (2 Kings 17:41) Does that passage apply only to ancient polytheists?*
- ▶ *In the weeks before Christmas, is it easier to worship God or more difficult?*
- ▶ *If extra-terrestrials landed in our homes on Christmas morning, what would they see as having “worth-ship” to us?*
- ▶ *“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24) What does that mean?*
- ▶ *In what specific ways do you find it easy to worship to God?*
- ▶ *What specific thing can you do during the coming week to prepare for the birth of Christ by worshipping more fully? Share it with a friend. Ask each other how it went next week.*

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Spend Less

A group of Living Water International missionaries and Advent Conspiracy visionaries visited an AC well in a Liberian village. The area had been ravaged by theft, so Living Water had installed a lockable protective steel jacket over the new well's pump to prevent it from being stolen. The village had taken an additional measure—they encased the entire pump in concrete! Only the pump handle and spout stuck out. We asked what they were going to do if we needed to repair the well in a few years. They said they would gladly spend days chipping it out of the concrete with hammers. They said that was far better than spending days without water to drink. They had seen all the death they could stand. Jesus had given them life for Christmas, and that was a gift too precious to lose. When we asked what they wanted next Christmas, they asked for a well for the neighboring village.

Not one of the Americans there could even remember what gifts we had received the previous Christmas. None of us had ever received a gift we loved so much that our first reaction was to want someone else to have it. Meanwhile, children all around played with little cars they had made out of plastic talcum powder bottles with wire axels and wheels cut from sandal soles, happy as can be, without spending a dime.

DISCUSSION

- ▶ “Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?” (Matthew 6:26) What does this translate to in terms of practice?
- ▶ “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.” (Ezekiel 16:49) Were you brought up with the same view as Ezekiel regarding the “sin of Sodom”?
- ▶ “So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?” (Luke 16:11) What does it mean to be “trustworthy” with wealth? What are “true riches”?
- ▶ “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20) What is one step you could take in the coming week towards trusting God’s sufficiency?
- ▶ Americans spend \$601 billion on Christmas.* Less than 1 percent of that, \$3.9 billion, would provide a year’s worth of clean drinking water access in Jesus’ name to the world’s 783 million thirsty.** Is this doable? Or is it a crazy pipe-dream?

* This 2013 figure was provided by the National Retail Foundation at www.nrf.com/media/press-releases/holiday-retail-sales-come-nrf-expectations.

** This figure is based on 2012 research from the International Water and Sanitation Centre at www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/IRC-2012-Providing.pdf.

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Give More

Living Water International sends more than 2,300 people a year on more than 280 short-term trips to Guatemala, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, and Haiti. Every week volunteers are received by indigenous hosts in those countries. We asked one of those hosts, an evangelist and seminary graduate, the following question: “As short-term missionaries, what is the single most valuable thing we can do to advance the gospel in your country? Share my testimony? Show the Jesus film? Drill more wells? Hand out Bibles? Tell Bible stories? Build churches? What?”

This was his answer: “Make friends. Give yourself. Give time. Eat a meal in my house even if all I have is beans. Let me give something to you. Grab a Frisbee and play with our children. It makes us feel important. Laugh. If you don’t speak our language, just smile and make signs with your hands. In our culture, nothing you can say about Jesus makes much sense until you’ve made friends with us. Our perception of gringos comes from television and movies. You could be other things, and we know your time is valuable. Share it with us.”

Is any culture really any different?

DISCUSSION

- ▶ God gave us his son for Christmas. We give stuff. What our Christmas giving tradition look like if it were modeled after God’s?
- ▶ Have you ever received a gift you felt was given out of a sense of obligation? How would you describe the “spirit” of such a gift?
- ▶ What is the most thoughtful or loving gift you have ever received? How would you describe its “spirit”?
- ▶ Life itself is God’s gift of time to you. Is there someone in your life who would prosper from the gift of your time?
- ▶ In what specific way will you give yourself in the coming week?

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Love All

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).

*Perhaps the biggest word in that passage is one of the smallest: “and.” We are each to demonstrate God’s love where we are and where we’re near and to the ends of the earth. We have a nasty habit of feeling overwhelmed by the world’s biggest problems—like the 783,000,000 people without clean drinking water. We find it difficult to truly believe God’s love could work through us so powerfully that we could take on something so big. But it can! All 783 million of the world’s thirsty could access safe water for a year with less than 1 percent of America’s annual Christmas budget!**

It’s not too far-fetched a vision to imagine that the grandchildren of people alive today might sit on their grandfathers’ knees one day and say, “Grandpa, I heard there used to be almost a billion people without clean drinking water until the Christians did something about it.”

How’s that for a birthday party for Jesus?

DISCUSSION

- ▶ *What’s your Jerusalem? What are your Judea and Samaria, and your ends of the earth?*
- ▶ *In what ways has the Holy Spirit come upon your church this Advent season?*
- ▶ *Consider the internet, digital technology, and air travel—in what ways are we uniquely positioned to witness to the ends of the earth today? In what ways is it more challenging than before?*
- ▶ *Just \$25 provides access to clean drinking water for a family of five for a year. A new well—costing between \$5,000 and \$20,000, depending on geography—can transform an entire community as a physical demonstration of God’s love. Take time to close your eyes and meditate on the reality of that. Imagine a mother who can sleep more easily knowing her baby will live. What would that feel like?*

* The National Retail Foundation reported America’s 2013 Christmas spending at www.nrf.com/media/press-releases/holiday-retail-sales-come-nrf-expectations. Calculations are based on 2012 research from the International Water and Sanitation Centre at www.ircwash.org/sites/default/files/IRC-2012-Providing.pdf.

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