

This Christmas I had a bit of a nostalgia, grass-is-always-greener induced moment where I wished I were a kid again.

Back when I was 5 – ah, those were the days! When I was 5 I sat squarely on the receiving end of Christmas. I sat around while my mom and dad decorated. I was chauffeured around town to look at lights. I ate cookies. I got gifts. Christmas as a kid was all about receiving.

Now as an adult (a husband/father/pastor) it feels like Christmas is much more on the doing end of the spectrum, not receiving. As an adult it feels like if Christmas is going to happen, I've got to make it happen. I have to plan the worship and write the sermon. I and my wife have to buy the food, cook the food, clean up after. We have to buy the gifts, wrap the gifts, try and manage gift/box/wrapping paper explosion. As an adult Christmas feels more like doing than receiving.

And for a bit this Christmas I looked back on my childhood with a bit of envy. With all the work that goes into Christmas as an adult I wished I could enjoy a Christmas again where I could be on the receiving end; a Christmas in which I don't have to do a thing but sit back and enjoy it.

I can tell you I sure didn't appreciate then everything my parents did so I could sit back and just receive all the blessings of the Christmas season.

It was a passing, silly bit of nostalgia this Christmas, and maybe some of you felt it too. But having thought that, I couldn't help but smile when I started studying Galatians 4.

Here I was this Christmas, wishing I could be a bit more on the receiving end and God reminds me that I always have been, and I always will be on the receiving end when it comes to Christmas – I'm just failing to appreciate it just as much now as I did when I was a kid. Galatians 4 takes us right back to childhood Christmas where Christmas is all about receiving, not doing.

I'm going to read Galatians 4 again and I want you to pay close attention to the subject (the one doing) and the object (the one receiving).

When the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child, and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Who is the "doer" of Christmas?

God sent his Son.

God sent the Spirit of his Son.

God has made you heirs.

We just sit back and receive it all!

We are the recipients of redemption. Like when you take your Kohl's cash this Christmas and redeem it for stuff you don't have to pay for, Christmas is God giving you Jesus cash. God sent his Son to be that ticket that pays in full the wages of sin because we failed to measure up to God's law.

We are recipients of adoption. You were chosen by God and made a part of his family.

We are recipients of the Spirit. We, born with hearts that are curved in on ourselves, obsessed with me, and my wants and my desires above all else, and tongues that from childhood cry out "mine" as we curve ever inward – God sends his Spirit to do for us what we can't do for ourselves – to break us out of this inward and destructive curve; to open our hearts to God, and to teach our tongues to call him, "Abba, Father."

We are recipients of his inheritance. Because we are not slaves but adopted children, God says, "Everything that is mine is yours."

Christmas from beginning to end is us on the receiving end of a God who goes to work to make Christmas special for us.

But here's the kicker: just like I didn't fully appreciate Christmas celebrations when I was 5 and my parents did everything, I know that this Christmas too, the appreciation is lacking.

Whether it's just underappreciation because of the trappings and busyness of life or a more subtle but insidious arrogance, it is easy to fail to appreciate being on the receiving end of God's gifts at Christmas, isn't it?

At Christmas we agree with Paul Gerhardt in his beautiful Christmas hymn: Lord Jesus Christ, your manger is, my paradise where my soul is reclining; we agree at Christmas, but there are other places our roaming souls look for paradise too, right? Career, family, education, reputation, stuff, I'm all about reclining with Jesus at Christmas, but that other stuff makes me feel pretty good too. And that other stuff is good (they are gifts from God too), but Christian friends, you know as well as I do how easy it is to be so busy appreciating that other stuff that Jesus, the one thing needful has a hard time holding my attention.

And then there is that subtle but insidious arrogance. Do you know what I'm talking about? It's primarily why Paul wrote the letter we call Galatians.

Being on the receiving end of Christmas essentially says to us, "Y'all are a bunch of trust fund babies."

Now, I don't know any trust fund babies personally, but I do know the stereotype. The guy who didn't do anything and is just resting on the laurels of somebody else's hard work; the guy who had everything handed to him in life and doesn't know what it is like to put in a good day's labor – the stereotype is not a favorable one because in America we love the self-made woman and man.

We humans love to break our own arms so that we can better pat ourselves on the back. This is a truth about humans that God has had to reckon with from the time Adam and Eve wanted to "be like God." There is a part of us that is just not content to sit back and receive, as if we have nothing to contribute. We want to be seen doing at least something so that we can feel a little better about ourselves and so that

other people can think more highly of me too. We have this rugged individualism and this independent streak that bristles at the thought of sitting, doing nothing, and receiving everything.

I call it an insidious arrogance because it is a failure to appreciate that you are on the receiving end in every way, in every minute of every day whether you realize it or not.

Your ability to wake up, go to school, have a career, make money, process thoughts, draw another breath, all of them are gifts from God.

Paul makes clear today that this is also abundantly true in spiritual things.

Your redemption: a gift. You didn't buy yourself free from sin. You were purchased by Jesus who was born of a woman, born under the law, who kept God's law perfectly for you who don't.

Your adoption: a gift. Paul says in the verses right before this, **"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."** God looks at you and sees a son he loves, not because you did a thing but because the waters of baptism gifted you a new set of duds and a new identity to go with it – child of God, clothed with Christ.

Any part of your heart that worships God rather than yourself, your voice that calls him "Abba, Father": a gift. Your faith in Jesus is a gift. You didn't decide to worship Jesus. God sent his Spirit into your heart to teach you to worship him. The good things you do after you come to faith, like being here, donating money, offering your time, all are gifts from God, you are on the receiving end of those too – all of it was the Spirit working in you.

Your inheritance, eternal life with God: a gift.

Whether you realize it or not, from the moment you were conceived to your last breath, and into eternity, you are on the receiving end – to break your own arm trying to pat yourself on the back for anything is arrogance.

Failure to appreciate: I'm guilty. The trappings and busyness of life, and the arrogance of my own heart mean, here I am, less than a week after Christmas and I'm failing to appreciate it.

Here I was this Christmas, wishing I could be a bit more on the receiving end and God reminds me that I always have been, and I always will be. Galatians 4 takes us right back to childhood Christmas where Christmas is all about receiving, not doing.

Hear again this Christmas: **when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship.**

My failure to appreciate it, doesn't change for a second what Jesus willingly did for me. He was born for me and for you so that we could be legally adopted sons.

And in case you forgot: **because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but God's child, and since you are his child, God has made you also and heir.** That's the beautiful thing about being a trust fund baby of God. I didn't need to do a thing to earn it, and he's not going to take it away.

So, maybe I don't need to look back with nostalgia on a long-lost Christmas where I wasn't so busy and stressed. Maybe what I need most is to sit back and realize nothing has changed.

Here we sit, like 5 year old me, simply receiving gifts from our Father who loves us.

Amen.