

## **Christmas Gift Exchange**

### **Fear for Joy**

We've all likely been invited to participate in a Christmas gift exchange at an office party, at a gathering of friends, or some other occasion. Maybe it was billed as a "white elephant" gift exchange or as a "Yankee swap" gift exchange, but the idea is that we bring some low-dollar gift or a gag-gift of some sort. We do not bring any grand gift to such an exchange, yet we hope to receive something unexpectedly neat. So, too, in the spiritual realm, when it comes to exchanging things with God, we have no grand gift to bring. We are sinful, fallen creatures with only fear, doubt, despair, hurt, darkness, and worry to bring. God wants each of us—from the lowly to the well-to-do, from the seasoned believer to the first-time church goer—to bring those meager and all-too-common problems and marvel as God exchanges them for something truly remarkable, neat, and praiseworthy. We can exchange our fear for joy. Fear is a basic emotion caused by a perceived threat. Joy is a deep sense of happiness and pleasure that is a gift from the Holy Spirit, which is rooted in God's promises and presence, rather than in worldly possessions or achievements.

**Topic:** Fear is one of the motivations for obeying Yahweh. Obligation is another, but love is the best motivation for obeying Yahweh. The one motivated by fear is a slave of God. The one motivated by obligation is a friend of God. The one motivated by love is an heir of God. We should embrace our status as co-heirs of Christ, never settling for fearful or obligatory obedience.

- Isn't the fear of Yahweh good? See Proverbs 1:7, 3:7, 9:10, 10:27, 14:27, 15:16, 15:33, 22:4.
- What is it that switches when Jesus calls us friends instead of slaves? See John 15:12-17.
- Why should fear give way to love? See 1 John 4:15-21.
- How do we become heirs of God? See Romans 8:12-17.

**Association:** You can learn a lot about someone by learning their fears and by noticing their joy.

- What was your biggest fear? Do you still have it, or have you gotten over it?
- Do you fear divine judgment?
- Why do you suppose so many Christians do fear judgment?
- How do you summarize the Enemy, Slave, Friend, Heir progression? Focus on the gospel and on the importance of embracing joy over fear.

**Guidance:** It's easy to allow fear to creep back in. Let's focus on the joy-producing truth instead.

- What is the Holy Spirit's role in all this? How does He remind us of the joyful truth?
- What steps should we take when we start to fear divine retribution?
- What tips, tricks, or techniques do you like to employ to keep the joyful truth top of mind?
- Encourage one another to internalize this concept and to work it into our gospel presentations.
- Confess your tendencies to slip back into fearful obedience and receive encouragement to shift our motivation for obedience. Pray with and for one another.