

I would like to introduce you to someone. His name is Samuel. Samuel has been visiting our home for about four years now. He shows up every year starting December 1 and returns home after Christmas. Each morning when my kids wake up, Samuel is hiding someplace different, so the fun is searching for him. This morning (December 1) he was sitting on top of our grandfather clock because, well, it is time (see what I did there?).

I know what you are probably thinking: *Well, isn't this cute. He's talking about his Elf on a Shelf.* And you would be wrong. Samuel is not an elf; he is our **Shepherd on the Search**. The search for what (or whom)? Samuel is on the search for Jesus. Each morning when the kids get up, they are searching, not just for, but with Samuel. You see, Samuel does not report back to Jesus on whether they have been naughty or nice, but rather, reminds us that because we are naughty, Jesus was born for us. He was born to die on the cross and rise from the grave for the forgiveness of our naughtiness. And that is what Christmas is all about. Now, I could easily say, "Amen" and end this article right here with that statement, but I am not done.

What are you searching for this Christmas? Are you searching for some normalcy after a pandemic-stricken year seemingly stole Christmas last year? Are you searching for that perfect gift? What is the object of your searching? What is getting your focus? The world has seemingly hijacked Christmas with its materialistic ad campaigns filled with stuff that you simply "must have". And thus, the world tries to define the object of your searching. But really, can you honestly remember what you got for Christmas 10 years ago? Five years ago? Last year? I cannot remember, but I do remember what God gave me 2000 years ago. God gave me Himself in Jesus Christ, and let me tell you, that is the gift that keeps on giving. It keeps on giving because I keep on being naughty. No, I am not unique in that sense for you/we are all naughty, all sinners in need of a Savior. And the searching is not because Jesus is playing some cosmic game of hide and seek. The searching is our reminder that Christmas is more than we think. It is not about worrying that some elf or shepherd will report back to Jesus with a list of your naughtiness. No, rather Jesus is full of grace and mercy. That is Christmas. It is all about Jesus FOR YOU.

So may your Christmas searching shine the light of hope that through faith in Jesus, you have everlasting life. Keep your eyes firmly fixed on the baby in the

manger and see a love like none other, for God IS love. Amen and happy searching.