



“Refocusing Christmas”

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*“Be **cheerful** with joyous celebration in **every season** of life.
Let your **joy overflow!**” – **Philippians 4:4** (TPT)*

Christmas time. *“It’s the **most wonderful time** of the year!”*

Or at least, that is what the song says. But is it really?

As Christians, Believers in Jesus, we have more reason to celebrate and be filled with joy all year round than any other people group. And especially at this time of the year! Because the reason for our celebrating comes from what Jesus ultimately did at the Cross and the Resurrection...but **neither of those events would have ever happened if He had not first come to the earth as a human!** And in God’s perfect wisdom He chose to come humbly in the form of a helpless, innocent baby.

And yet...so many people around this time of year are hurting, struggling emotionally, and do NOT consider this the *‘most wonderful time of the year’*. Typically, this is because we are separated from loved ones for one reason or another, and of course, that is quite common with men in prison. However, I have known people who were NOT alone, being surrounded by family and friends, and yet still battled discouragement and depression during the holidays. Why is that? Why is it SO COMMON...even among those of us who have a knowledge of and a relationship with Jesus?

I believe the reason for this is that **our enemy does NOT want us to put ANY of our focus and attention on Jesus**; not the Gift He became for us, and definitely not the sacrifice He made on our behalf! **Our enemy will use ANY tactic or trick he can to distract us from the REAL purpose of Christmas!** This is why we also have the over-hyped, over-marketed and commercialized "Christmas themed-everything" during the "holidays". **It is no accident that Christmas has become, filled with all sorts of things that have NOTHING to do with Jesus!** *Such as Christmas trees, colored lights, stockings, wreaths, mistletoe, building snowmen, Santa, reindeer, the Grinch, elves, toys, presents, jingle bells, holly, poinsettias, red and green decorations, eggnog, a wide variety of holiday foods, etc...)*

Now, personally I love ALL of those things! I enjoy all of these things that tend to make this time of year fun & festive! I love the nostalgia that sweeps over me when I see the decorations, hear the holiday music, smell the familiar fragrances, taste the special 'once-a-year' flavors... But if I am honest, I know **NONE of it has anything to do with Jesus!**

Christmas is about Jesus willingly stepping off of His throne in Heaven to come to a sin-filled world...and then eventually laying His life down to rescue all of us and restore our relationship with God and the destiny He created us to have as His children!

This reminds me of a classic, kid's animated movie. I bet most of you know it.

The scene: a boy tells his friend, *"I think there must be something wrong with me...Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel."*

The friend's sister then chimes in, *"I know how you feel about all this Christmas business, getting depressed and all that. It happens to me every year. I never get what I really want. I always get a lot of stupid toys, or a bicycle, or clothes, or something like that."*

Later, out of frustration the first boy cries out, *"Isn't there ANYONE who knows what Christmas is all about?"*

That's when the boy's friend finally speaks up and says, *"Sure...I can tell you what Christmas is all about."*

And he then quotes the 2nd chapter of Luke and the story of the birth of Jesus, concluding with, *"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'*

THAT'S what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown!"

During this time, it will be easy to allow the enemy to whisper lies of discouragement into our ears. He is subtle and he has been doing it for a LONG time.

I know...I feel it too.

But we must not forget the Truth about the REAL reason for Christmas.

It has nothing to do with all of the surface-level wonderful activities, and traditional elements of what we have come to accept and except as being "Christmas". Even the nice-sounding, sentimental statements.

"Christmas is about giving."

"Christmas is about family."

"Christmas is about being kind to one another and spreading good cheer."

Those sound good and may be well-intentioned, but they are wrong...and they confuse us.
(And it is intentional.)

Christmas is about ONE thing. Actually, it is about one PERSON: Jesus!

It is NOT about you and I giving gifts to each other.

Christmas is about recognizing and remembering the irreplaceable Gift Jesus became when the Heavenly Father sent Him to our world!

The more you and I return our focus, our attention, our hearts to JESUS...at ALL times, during every season...and especially during the holidays, the better prepared and equipped we will be to ignore and endure the lies of the enemy which so easily entangle our hearts and discourage us!

I know Philippians, the letter to the Christians in Philippi that the Apostle Paul wrote, is NOT the typical reading during Christmas time. However, when so many of us (myself included) are struggling with feeling down, discouraged, or depressed chapter 4 of this book provides some excellent encouragement! Keep in mind...Paul wrote this from a prison cell!

*“Be **cheerful** with joyous celebration in **every season** of life. Let your **joy overflow!**”* (Phil 4:4 – The Passion Translation)

After this verse, Paul went on to say:

“Don’t be pulled in different directions or worried about a thing. Be saturated in prayer throughout each day, offering your faith-filled requests before God with overflowing gratitude. Tell Him every detail of your life, then God’s wonderful peace that transcends human understanding, will guard your heart and mind through Jesus Christ. Keep your thoughts continually fixed on all that is authentic and real, honorable and admirable, beautiful and respectful, pure and holy, merciful and kind. And fasten your thoughts on every glorious work of God, praising Him always.” (Phil 4:6-8 - TPT)

A few verses later Paul adds:

“...I have learned to be satisfied in any circumstance. I know what it means to lack, and I know what it means to experience overwhelming abundance. For I’m trained in the secret of overcoming all things, whether in fullness or in hunger. And I find that the strength of Christ’s explosive power infuses me to conquer every difficulty.” (Phil 4:11b-13 - TPT)

I think in order for us to combat the negative emotions properly and effectively during the Christmas season, as well as all year long, we need to be BELIEVING correctly! And to do that more easily we should be applying the things mentioned in these verses:

- 1) Choose **joy**
- 2) Do **NOT** worry
- 3) **Pray & talk** to God
- 4) **Think** on the **positive things** God has done and Who He is
- 5) Learn to be **satisfied in Him** even when (or maybe, more appropriately, “**especially when**”) everything else around us is NOT the way we would like it to be!

And one other thing, which in my humble opinion affects MOST of us when it comes to ‘believing correctly’...yes, even those of us who have been in church and heard that ‘Jesus is the reason for the season’ our whole lives. When we talk about the vast majority of the ‘things’ we do around the holiday

that have nothing to do with Jesus, it is important to realize it affects us more than just being a simple distraction. In other words, *keeping JESUS at the center and focus of Christmas is vitally important to our spiritual life and health, which affects every other aspect of our lives!*

Now imagine if the following happened to you...

You show up to **YOUR** birthday party and hundreds of friends and family are gathering to celebrate YOU. They all arrive with various sizes of gifts wrapped in colorful paper, ribbons, and bows and start piling them up into a big mountain of presents. After having cake and singing "Happy Birthday", they start passing the gifts out to each other. You sit in a chair smiling, waiting with joyful anticipation for them to start handing your birthday gifts to you. But instead, to your shock and dismay they begin opening the gifts themselves. They turn to each other, showing off what they opened and start thanking each other for the thoughtfulness and love that went into each of the gifts.

Meanwhile, you are sitting there being virtually ignored. Nobody brings you a present. And then some older, wise adult in the family gets everybody's attention and says, "Let's not forget to say thank you to the birthday boy for having a birthday and giving us the opportunity to enjoy this spirit of giving and love and light and family!"

You think maybe he is then going to finally pull out YOUR birthday present from its hiding place behind the couch, but instead he pulls out a candle and suddenly everyone is holding their own little candle. He then says, "Let's all light our candles and sing quietly in honor of the birthday boy for being born on this day years ago!"

When we celebrate Christmas each year, even as Christians at church, are we bringing Jesus genuine gifts of love and worship? Or are we only offering Him lip service while we give gifts wrapped in cheap paper to each other instead?

Please understand I am not saying ANY of this from a position of pride, elevated above pain, struggles, difficulties, and suffering! On the contrary, I personally have been facing some very frustrating, challenging, humiliating and just outright awful circumstances for almost a decade, and so for me...Christmas time has NOT been "pleasant, happy, enjoyable" during all of these years! So, what I have been saying in all of this is aimed right at the center of my own heart as well! Those verses in Philippians brings conviction to me as well. Yet, they also bring me hope! And I pray they will for you, too!

Thank you for reading this! May this find you humbly choosing to **let the joy of the Lord be your strength!**

Merry Christmas and God bless!

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