

For Peace' Sake!

***Huh...



Reasons why it's good to be a Man

- Wedding plans take care of themselves.
- Chocolate is just another snack.
- You can wear a white T-shirt to a water park.
- Car mechanics tell you the truth.
- You couldn't care less if someone notices your new haircut.
- You never drive to another gas station 'cause this one's just too "yucky".
- Same work... more pay.
- Wrinkles add character.
- Wedding Dress \$5,000; Tux rental \$100.
- The occasional well-rendered belch is practically expected.
- New shoes don't cut, blister, or mangle your feet.
- Your pals are trusted to never trap you with: "So, notice anything different?"
- One mood, ALL the time.
- Phone conversations are over in 30 seconds flat.
- You can open all your own jars.
- You get extra credit for the slightest act of thoughtfulness.
- Your underwear is \$8.95 for a three-pack.
- You can quietly watch a game with a buddy for hours without thinking: "He must be mad at me."
- You are not expected to know the names of more than five colors.
- You don't have to stop and think of which way to turn a nut on a bolt.
- The same hairstyle lasts for years, maybe decades.
- You are not expected to shave below your neck.
- You can "do" your nails with a pocketknife.
- You have freedom of choice concerning growing a mustache.
- You can do Christmas shopping for 25 relatives on December 24th, in 45 minutes.

***Hmm..

"I heard the bells on Christmas Day; their old familiar carols play, and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good-will to men!"

~ [Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)

*** **(Cue Video)**- Opening scene of Charlie Brown Christmas where Charlie is talking to Linus about Christmas making him depressed)

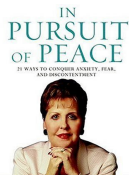


A. *** **Introduction:** How many of you feel the same way as Charlie Brown in this video clip? Depression doesn't start off in full blown depression. Most of the time, it comes on as a series of disappointments. The stress of high expectations during the holidays is enough to trigger major disappointment in your circumstances.

Every year the lights go up. Trees appear in windows. Our communities become winter wonderlands. WE try to recapture the magic of our childhoods. We search for the perfect gift. We excessively decorate in pursuit of the perfect Christmas. We party to the max. WE eat until we are stuffed pigs and people drink until they make fools of themselves.

Ex) I heard a statistic that 10,000 jobs are lost per year because of the employee's behavior at the company Christmas party.

***The Christmas season is infamous for stretching us to our limits. And often, depression, anxiety, stress, strife are the byproducts.**



*** **JOYCE MEYER** In her book, Joyce Meyer from In Pursuit of Peace (which I recommend)

Eccl. 1:3

³ **What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?**

*****For Peace' Sake!** (title page)



***Turn to **Luke 2:8-14 (NASB)**

⁸In the same region there were *some* shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. (**probably in the summer**)

⁹And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, (**epeste- “stand over”/ hover**) and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

Ex) IN some translations, it says “they were sore afraid”. I’d be “sore” afraid I’d be out of there

¹⁰But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;

¹¹for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

¹²“This *will be* a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”

How wonderful our homes could be, how wonderful our lives could be, how wonderful our world could be, if we really did put into practice the blessing of "peace on earth, good will toward men."

And as Christmas comes, we think once again, "Maybe it’s not impossible. Maybe we really could have hearts filled with love. Maybe we really could be kind to each other, & not just once a year, but all year long."

* I’m sure that most of us have begun our Christmas shopping. There may be a few procrastinators who wait until almost the last minute, but most of us spend a great deal of time & thought in choosing just the right gift for that special person in our life. We think about their needs & wants & what might make them happy.

Then we go shopping, & make that purchase, often spending more money than we

planned. We gift wrap it, & anxiously await the moment when that loved one will open our special gift. And when he or she opens the box, & looks at our gift, we eagerly anticipate expressions of joy & delight.

But if there are no expressions of joy & delight, we'll be most disappointed, won't we? Because in receiving the gift, they're receiving us. Or if they reject it, they're rejecting us. At least, that's the way we feel, isn't it?

And even while we're watching the faces of others to see how they receive our gifts, others will be watching us to see how we receive their gifts. **You see, giving & receiving is an important part of the Christmas season.**

What was God's gift to us at Christmas time? I'm sure that most of you would say, "He gave His only begotten son." And of course, you're right. Others might say, "He gave us evidence of His love." And of course, that would be right, too.

ex) pull out a gift box

But I want to be a bit more specific than that, for in actuality, God gave us several very valuable gifts.

*****God's Gift to Us...**

*****I. HE GAVE US THE OPPORTUNITY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS**

#1, He gave us the opportunity for the forgiveness of our sins. In Jesus Christ, God gave us the opportunity for the forgiveness of our sins.

You see, we'll never have peace with our fellow man until first we're at peace with ourselves. And we can never really be at peace with ourselves until we're at peace with God. And we can never be at peace with God until our sins have been forgiven.

Ex) Cookbook story

I heard something unusual a few years ago. In the Eastern part of the U.S. a cookbook was recalled. Now, I've never heard of a cookbook being recalled before. I've heard of automobiles being recalled, & toasters & baby seats. But I had never before heard of a cookbook being recalled. This cookbook was recalled because one recipe had left out an important ingredient. And the producers of the book realized that if someone followed the directions of that recipe & left out that ingredient, that the ingredients they put together could actually blow up in their faces. So because of that hazard, the cookbook was recalled.

-You see, God has given us the recipe for life. He says, "You want peace?"

Then here is the recipe. Find forgiveness through Jesus Christ. Live according to My rules & principles, the ingredients that make it all possible." But if you leave out some of His ingredients, or stick in some of the ingredients of the world, then what happens? Life can blow up in your face. That is why there is so much depression & so much suicide & so much rejection. Because too many are following the wrong recipes for life.

***1 Peter 2:10,11

¹⁰For, "THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS,

MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM EVIL AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT.

¹¹ "HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM EVIL AND DO GOOD;

HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT.

Ex) Friend whose family keeps "seeking" peace with a non-peaceful family member at Christmas

So God says, "Here's my gift. It is not just the gift of a baby, but it is the offer of forgiveness & salvation."

The 2nd thing that God offers is "Help in our present situation."

***2. HELP IN OUR PRESENT SITUATION

. I think of the shepherds sitting out on the hillsides, watching sheep all night long. They were poor, with not much prospect for improving their lives. Life was hard & harsh for them, without much hope of it ever getting better. And then, one glorious night, the angels appeared & made this wondrous announcement, "**Unto you is born this day in the City of David, a Savior who is Christ the Lord.**" And suddenly everything was changed. God had become real to them. God had come to help them, to be their Savior, to bring "peace on earth, good will to men."

At the other end of the spectrum were the wise men, Magi, people with power & authority & wealth. Increased wealth doesn't necessarily make for increased happiness. So there was an emptiness in their lives as well. When they saw the star, they came because they needed something, too.

- Whether rich or poor, powerful or weak, whoever we are, we need help. And God has promised that when the Christ child enters our hearts & lives then we will receive His help. And when we're helped by the Holy Spirit of God, then we develop a more sympathetic feeling towards one another, too.

ex) **I heard** the story of a man who was filling his car with gasoline during Christmas week, & as he did, he dropped the gas cap. It rolled under the car, right in the middle of the dirt & water that had collected there. He bent down & looked at it for a moment, wondering what to do. Finally, he decided to finish filling up his gas tank, move the car forward, & then pick up the cap. But before he could do that, a man in construction clothes saw the dilemma, got down on his knees, reached underneath the car, got the gas cap & handed it back to him. The man stood there amazed, & then thanked him. The man responded with a smile & a "Merry Christmas, & then went on his way.

- At Christmas time we seem to be more sensitive to one another, don't we? So we go around picking up gas caps, or reaching into our pockets for money to help some one in need, or delivering food to someone who is hungry, because Christmas reminds us that God has reached down to help us. And now we want to help one another.

Maybe there is more good in us than we give ourselves credit for. Maybe we spend too much time beating ourselves over the head, telling ourselves how bad we are.

ex) You can turn on the news any given day or night and be reminded of that. You will see stories of tragedy and violence. WE find ourselves discouraged about our society and filled with compassion for those who have lost loved ones to acts of violence or maybe have lost everything they own in a house fire.

-But if we are moved by scenes of sorrow & joy, how much more moved should we be to realize that the King of Kings & the Lord of Lords has visited our world to cry with them and us, to rejoice with us, & to help us over the hurts & bumps of life itself.

When you realize that, then "peace on earth, & good will toward men" becomes easier, & more realistic.

One final thing that God gave at Christmas time when He gave Jesus is hope for the future.

*****3. GOD GAVE HOPE FOR THE FUTURE**

You know what kept the shepherds going? It was hope. God had made a promise to their people. He would one day send a Messiah, the Anointed One. And when the Messiah came everything would be all right again. And that hope burned in the hearts & lives of the people of Israel.

You know what kept the wise men going? It was hope. Every night they would go out & search the heavens, looking for that star of promise. And they knew when they saw it they must follow wherever it led them, because it was a sign from God, & it promised the birth of a king. So hope kept them going.

-And God brings hope to us at Christmas. An impossible dream - "Peace on earth, good will toward men?" Maybe. Maybe there will always be wars & rumor of wars. Maybe the poor will always be hungry. And maybe we will always have to deal with the terror & crime & violence we see every day.

But there is one thing to keep us going. One day heaven is going to open, & God will come back, & the dream will be fulfilled of peace & good will for all eternity.

Ex) A great Christmas story I heard once is about a 7th-grade boy by the name of William Spurling. William Spurling was big for his age, & a little slow mentally. But he was a good boy & all the kids liked him. In fact, they wanted him for a friend because he was big enough to take their part if they needed him. When it came time for the Christmas program to be presented, William Spurling wanted to be a shepherd, but the teacher decided that he would make a better inn keeper than a shepherd since he was so big. So she gave him the task of being the rough, mean inn keeper. When Mary & Joseph came to the inn & knocked on the door, William Spurling opened it. And when they asked for a place to stay, he said harshly, "There is no place for you to stay. There is no room in the inn." Joseph said, "But my wife is tired & weary & she is expecting a baby. Isn't there just a small room somewhere where we could rest?" Once again, William Spurling said, with roughness in his voice, "You'll have to find a place somewhere else. There is no room in the inn." Once more Joseph pleaded just for some place for them to stay the night. Then there was a long pause, one of those pauses that is as embarrassing for the audience as it is for the cast. William Spurling had forgotten his next line. Back behind the props you could hear the prompter saying, "No, be gone! No, be gone!" That was his next speech. Finally, William Spurling said, with softness in his voice, "No, be gone." Mary & Joseph sadly turned to leave. But as they did, suddenly William Spurling regained his voice & said, "Wait a minute! You can stay in my room, & I'll sleep in the shed."

In the stunned silence that followed, the teacher thought the play was ruined, until she thought again of the words of a 7th-grade boy, who may have communicated the real truth of Christmas better than any. "No, you can stay in my room, & I'll sleep in the shed."

Conclusion... Isn't that what Jesus did?



was empty

Ex) (show box again) tell vision of gift giving where Jesus' box

"No, you don't have to die for your sins. I'll take your place on the cross." "No, you can enter the heavenly home. I'm preparing a place for you there."

Christmas made the difference. God wrapped up a gift & gave it. Now He stands back & waits to see what we will do. Will we receive it with joy? Or will we treat it with indifference & rejection?

God waits to see, because what we do with the gift is also what we do with Him. If we

accept the gift, then we receive Him & His forgiveness & His help & His hope. But if we reject it, then we also reject Him.

God offers that gift again this morning, & He waits to see what you will do. I pray that you will receive Him with open arms.

Poem for altar Call

*****Heaven's Song**
by Denise Corbley Snyder

A babe for us was born of humble birth
In stable crude He came in lowliness
God's special gift for all the sons of earth
His favor shown to man in graciousness.

His coming told by prophets long ago
So fervently they longed to see His day
Messiah, Son of God, sent to bestow
Salvation free to those in error's way.

Hosannas to the King was heaven's song
'Neath Bethlehem's star-sprinkled velvet sky
Still ages past angelic beings long
To comprehend redemption from on high.

Receive His gift, it came at quite a cost
His life He paid to seek and save the lost.