

OVERCOMING CHRISTMAS DISAPPOINTMENTS

LUKE 1:76-79

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins...

through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

There was a poem the third grade class at CCCS recited every Christmas season... "I wanted a rifle for Christmas. I wanted a bat and a ball. I wanted some skates and a bicycle. But I didn't want mittens at all.

I wanted a whistle. I wanted a kite. I wanted a pocketknife that closed up tight. I wanted some books.

I wanted a kit, but I didn't want mittens one little bit.

I told them I didn't like mittens. I told them as plain as plain. I told them I didn't *want* mittens, and they've given me mittens again." For the third graders of CCCS *mittens for Christmas* was a huge disappointment.

This evening I want to talk to you about *Christmas disappointments*... Have you ever been disappointed at Christmas? Perhaps, you asked for a specific gift and you were sure it was coming... but it never did.

It reminds me of the wife who left her husband a note, “Buy me something that will make me look beautiful and sexy.” She was expecting an evening gown or a piece of lingerie... On Christmas AM she was shocked to discover that her husband had bought her an exercise bike. *It was a huge disappointment.*

Author, Charles Swindoll, recalls the Christmas he wanted a basketball. He writes, “I wanted a basketball so bad I could scream. I dropped hints. I made false phone calls to my mom in another voice, telling her that her son ought to have a basketball. I found the cheapest prices, and dropped ads on the table.

And finally there it appeared under the Christmas tree in a box. It looked just like the size of a basketball.

I could feel myself making shots with it. When Christmas Day came, I tore into that thing!... *And it was a globe.* Have you ever tried to dribble a globe? I mean, you can't even inflate the dumb thing.”

Wow, another Christmas disappointment.

My greatest Christmas disappointment came when I was 3 or 4 years old. I had been sick the week prior to Christmas, and my mom had taken me to the doctor.

The doctor misdiagnosed my scarlet fever. He called it a virus, prescribed me some medicine, and promised my mom I would feel better by Christmas morning.

Instead, I felt worse. My fever that morning spiked to 104, and I had managed to spread my illness to my baby brother. Mom's two sons both had scarlet fever.

That Christmas I got an Army pup tent. Dad set it up in the living room floor, and mom says all I could do was lay down under that tent - sweat - and shiver.

The gift I really liked was a battery operated Godzilla.

The mechanical green monster was about two feet high, and when you turned it on, the traction wheels got it moving in a forward direction. The Godzilla came with a rubber-tipped dart gun, and when you shot it its red eyes lit up - it sounded a fierce growl - the monster would change direction, and come straight at you...

That Godzilla was my *one* enjoyment that Christmas, but there was a problem. It scared my baby brother.

Whenever I hit it with a dart, and those red eyes lit up, and the monster let out that ominous roar... My sick baby brother would scream, and cry, and go into a panic. For my mom and dad it made for a long, long, long Christmas morning... *a huge disappointment.*

I'm sure you've had your Christmas disappointments.

Christmas can be fun, and happy, and meaningful, but it can also be a depressing time of the year.

Loneliness grows more acute during the holidays.

Financial pressures rise to the surface.

The faster pace creates stresses and strains.

And as the stress of the holiday builds - little cracks in family relationships tend to get exposed, and can split open. Sadly, the Christmas time of year has the potential of driving families apart, not just together.

Rather than ease a person's pain, often Christmas festivities will intensify their anxiety. Christmas time has the potential of producing grave disappointments.

Frequently, it's the anxiety of wanting everything to be perfect at Christmas that's the greatest stress...

We worry about being a good host to our guests, or whether dinner will be up to grandma's specifications, or we fret over whether our gifts will match the high expectations of our kids - or satisfy our spouse - or impress our boss - or make the in-laws happy.

We worry about family members cooperating and getting along. Everybody wants things to be picture perfect at Christmas time... *but they seldom are...*

Actually, we live in a *very imperfect world*. We're all *imperfect people*. I hate to be the one to break it to you, but *life isn't perfect...* Christmas won't be either.

Talk about huge disappointments – *if all you're worried about this Christmas is whether Uncle Harry likes his \$9.99 necktie you're a blessed person!*

Remember, there're people this Christmas who've just been told that their tumor is malignant... They've heard the surgeon wasn't able to get all the cancer...

This Christmas, dads will come home from work having been told they won't have a job in the new year... Students will return on Christmas break with failing grades... There're parents trying to find presents for their kids, with an eviction notice in their pocket...

Years ago, the rock group, *Pearl Jam*, wrote a bleak song about Christmas... “Cold wind blows on the soles of my shoes. Heaven knows nothing of me.

I’m lost, nowhere to go. Oh, when I was a kid. Oh, how magic it seemed. Oh, please let me sleep.

It’s Christmas time. Flowered winds were where I lived. Thought you burned, not froze for your sins.

I’m so tired... and cold. Oh, when I was a kid. Oh, how magic it seemed. Oh, please let me dream. It’s Christmas time...” Obviously, the author has a hard time reconciling the idealized Christmases of his youth with the realities of imperfect Christmases since.

Folks see how Christmas is *suppose to be*... how *they want it to be*... they realize how *harsh it can be*...

The disappointment drives them further from God.

Thus the lyrics... “Heaven knows nothing of me. I’m lost, nowhere to go.” The song eventually pleads... “just let me bury my head, and sleep away Christmas.”

Pearl Jam has one thing right... in an imperfect, sin-stained, fallen world - there is no such thing as a Christmas that’s totally free from disappointment.

Fictional character George Bailey learned *it is a wonderful life* - but nobody’s life is a perfect life, and there is no such thing as a perfect Christmas...

Even the first Christmas was far from perfect!

The Christmas story the Bible tells reels with inconvenience, and hardship, and let-downs. The very first Christmas also had its share of disappointments...

We forget the Christmas story starts with a fresh round of taxes. If you're a Republican that alone would've cast a cloud over the events that followed.

And can you imagine a tougher start for Joseph and Mary? She turns up pregnant and offers the preposterous explanation... it was a miracle from God.

At first, Joseph doubted Mary's fidelity.

He concocted a plan to break off their betrothal. An angel had to intervene to convince him otherwise.

What a complex and tangled set of circumstances for a young couple to have to sort out. And here's my point... *It's certainly not what you'd call a smooth start!*

Then Joseph and Mary had to travel three days and 100 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem... *You signed up for the census in your hometown, and Joseph was from Bethlehem - at the southern end of the country.*

This was problematic... we all know that expectant women don't travel well. Imagine, putting a woman - 9 months pregnant - on the back of a donkey and riding 100 miles across rocky terrain. *I did the calculations and I figured Joseph had to make 447 potty stops.*

It's a miracle Mary's water didn't break.

And when they finally arrive in Bethlehem, Mary finds that her man, Joe, forgot to make hotel reservations.

There's no room in the inn! Imagine this, the chosen mother - “the highly favored of God” - has to give birth to the most important baby ever born... *in a stable*.
Mary lays her baby in a feed trough.

If this had happened to you and your spouse, it all would've felt more like *a fiasco* - not *a blessed birth*.

I'm sure Joseph and Mary had higher expectations.

You'd think, if your baby was the Son of God circumstances would've been a little less troublesome.

Even Joseph and Mary dealt with disappointment!

And imagine too, the detour they took to Egypt.

Mary had a baby, and like any new mom she was anxious to get home, and show him off to her friends and family. But when it was time to return to Nazareth - God sent them instead to a foreign land called Egypt.

How disappointing that must've been?

Think also of the crushing experience it was when Mary and Joseph heard the news of what had happened in Bethlehem after their departure. An evil and jealous King Herod went on a violent rampage.

In his search for the baby who would rival his throne, Herod slaughtered every baby boy under 2 years old.

Mary had girlfriends with newborns the same age as Jesus, who were now grieving the murder of their sons.

She had safe passage to Egypt, while other young moms she'd known, were making funeral arrangements, and picking out miniature coffins. It's difficult to imagine a greater set of disappointments.

Once, a pastor recruited four children to help him with his Christmas Eve service. He was preaching on the Star of Bethlehem - and he wanted the kids to hold up signs that spelled out the four letters... "S-T-A-R."

But unbeknownst to the pastor the kids lined up in reverse order. The letters ended up backwards - and everyone cackled when the kids spelled "R-A-T-S."

Yet that's what happened that first Christmas...

Yes, the star shown in the heavens, and guided the wise men to the Baby's house. God came to Earth in human flesh. A child was born of a virgin, and was laid in manger. But it all happened around a rat named Herod - and in a ratty place like a Bethlehem stable.

Which brings us to our text in Luke 1 - it's a prophecy concerning John the Baptist... In verse 76 an angel speaks of John, "And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; for you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, to give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins..."

John was to be the Messiah's advance man - His setup crew. John the Baptist paved the way for Jesus.

But then in verse 78 the angel speaks of the Savior Himself, “Through the tender mercy of our God, with which the Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

Here how Luke describes the world into which Jesus came. We “*sit in darkness and the shadow of death.*”

Can you think of a bleaker description of the human condition? The angel sounds like *Pearl Jam*... “A cold wind blows... Heaven knows nothing of me. I’m lost, nowhere to go... thought you burned, not froze for your sins. I’m so tired... and cold...” In the spiritual darkness, you do feel lost - alone - cold - and tired.

The world Jesus’ entered was less than ideal. He came into an imperfect world - a world full of regret, frustration, disappointment. Yet here the prophecy calls Jesus the “Dayspring.” Literally “the dawn, the sunrise.”

The first Christmas was full of disappointment, but it saw the initial flickers of a new day rising in the sky.

With the coming of Jesus the opening rays of God’s light penetrated the dark. He dispelled the shadows of death. *It’s always interesting to note that Jesus was born in the night-time - light entered our darkness.*

Here’s how to overcome Christmas disappointments.

First, you accept that life in general - and Christmas in particular - will always have flaws and imperfections and disappointments... We live in a darkened world.

But second, you look to Jesus in the midst of that darkness. You have faith that God's Son will rise up and reveal Himself in your situation. If you're sitting in *a kind of darkness* tonight - like the shepherds, rise quickly and run to see the Baby. Make haste to Jesus.

He's the dawning of hope, light, and a better day.

The most popular Christmas carol ever written was penned in a panic... It was a dark, discouraging time.

The organ at St. Nicholas Church in Obendorf, Austria had malfunctioned. It was 1818, the night of Christmas Eve, and the church were filling up fast.

Something had to be done, and quickly...

The assistant pastor took out a pen and paper, and hastily jotted down a six stanza poem. He took it to the organist, who in minutes, had worked out a melody that could be played on a guitar, and sung by two voices...

The song sung that night is still sung all over the world at Christmas. **“Silent night, holy night...”**

And like the night it was written, the song speaks of God coming to the rescue in a desperate situation. He loves to appear in the midst of our disappointments.

The first Christmas is the perfect illustration... Jesus was born into a dark and disheartened world. He came in a time of panic, and anxiety, and disappointment.

Jesus is the **“Dayspring.”** He's the first light!

Jesus was born while the world was still in darkness. The appearance of Jesus was the daybreak, or the first sighting of the new beginning God had promised us.

Let me challenge you with a story from a book entitled, [“The Manger is Empty.”](#) Author Walter Wangerin reflects on some Christmas memories...

While growing up, every year his dad would follow the same Christmas tradition. On Christmas Eve he'd go into a room, take the knob off the outside of the door so his kids couldn't open it, decorate a Christmas tree, then stack presents everywhere... And each year his kids followed a tradition. They hovered outside the door - hoping, wishing, longing for the gifts behind it.

It was Christmas 1944, Walter had turned 10 years old that year. In his mind, he was all grown up. And he had decided it was time to revolt. He was determined not to respond the way he had previous Christmases.

You see the year before, Walter's brother, Paul, had been crushed by disappointment. Tears had erupted when Paul didn't get all that Paul had wanted. And it impacted his older brother, Walter. Walt became jaded.

In his book Wangerin explains, ["I was shocked to discover that the Christmas time was not inviolate. I was horrified that pain could invade the holy ceremony.](#)

[And I was angry that my father had not protected my brother from tears. Besides - what if you hope and it doesn't happen? It's treacherous to hope. The harder you hope, the more vulnerable you become."](#)

So on Christmas Day 1944, Walter just stood outside that door with an impassioned look on his face. He was determined to show restraint. Walter would never again subject himself to the possibility of disappointment.

Of course, his brothers did what they'd always done.

They rushed the room googling over toys earmarked for them. But Walter just stood there with a frown on his face - disgusted by the gullibility of his siblings.

Yet young Walter was in for a surprise. For he saw something he'd never seen before... *it was the look on his father's face*. Here's how he puts it in his book...

“There... was my father... gazing at me... filled with a yearning, painful expectation - on account of me.

Everything else in this room was just as it had been before... But this was new. This thing I had never seen before. My father, too, had to trust the promises against their disappointments. And his hope, his faith, was that his eldest son would soften and be glad...”

Do you understand what Wangerin is attempting to say with his story? Disappointment goes both ways!

Sure there's Christmas disappointments. It's possible for life to upset *your* plans - and not go *your way*.

Christmas *and* life can be disappointing at times.

The Christ who came into the world that first Christmas wasn't insulated from let-downs, and He hasn't sheltered us from disappointments as well.

But **disappointment is a two way street...**

God the Father sent His Son into this sin-stained world to bear our sins and stains. There, on the cross, Jesus paid the penalty for our crimes against God.

And now God has gifts under that tree for us!

There's life, love, forgiveness, healing, strength, wisdom, and guidance. Yet in offering us these gifts, God has made Himself vulnerable to disappointment. What if we reject His gifts? *We can disappoint God!*

Here's how to overcome Christmas disappointment: **Stop focusing on what you want this Christmas, and set your heart on what God wants for you...**

He has gifts for you, and He's gone out on a limb to pay for them, and secure them for you in His name.

Rather than be fickle, and stay preoccupied with how God might've disappointed you - *what if you worried about disappointing God!* Jesus is the One who went out on a limb. He's the One who has the most to lose.

Don't disappoint Jesus by insisting on *your own life - your own way*. Remember, we're the ones who *"sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death."* Jesus invaded our darkness to shine His light and love into our lives.

The Christmas prescription for all our ills is to bask in the light of Jesus. Let Him dispel our dark confusions.

Rather than focus on what's gone wrong in your life - what if you zeroed in on what Jesus wants to do!

Though the first Christmas was far from perfect, and though it was laced with plenty of disappointments - it has still proven to be the very best Christmas ever...

And despite the discouragement you've experienced, if you let Him, Jesus can make this Christmas your best ever! Don't be defeated by disappointment.

Jesus invaded our darkness, and spread His light, His joy, His love. The angel called Him **"the Daybreak!"**

Rather than cry over past disappointments, realize Jesus is the dawning of a brand new day for you!

Like the shepherds, let's run to the manger. Let's open our hearts and bow our lives to Christ the King!

The biggest Christmas disappointment would be if we disappointed Jesus and refused to receive His gifts!