

December 5th, 2021 Second Advent Christmas Season

Partners in Prayer

Dear Partners in Prayer Team,

“In the days of Herod... there was a priest named Zechariah. And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.”

Luke 2:5-7 (ESV)

*“To the fatherless God is a father.
To the widow He is a champion friend and husband.
The lonely He makes part of a family.
The prisoners He leads into prosperity until they sing
for joy.*

This is our Holy God in His Holy Place!”
Psalm 68:5-6 (The Passion Translation)

*“Deliver us! Then our homes will be happy.
Our sons will grow up as strong, sturdy men
and our daughters with graceful beauty,”*
Psalm 144:12 (The Passion Translation)



How would you like it if in the middle of your Christmas celebration, while within the security and safety of your home, an uninvited guest came to invade your home? Many times we are unaware of the “new uninvited guests” that others struggle with in the Christmas season. If you and I shared a cup of cocoa and chatted about Christmas, we would each reveal certain traditions that mark Christmas in our homes. We may not think of them as formal traditions, but if we do them year after year, that’s what they are. Because the greatest tradition that never changes is to keep Jesus Christ at the center of Christmas in all that we do. Yes, that famous cliché is still important: “Jesus is the reason for the season.” I can’t think of a better way to summarize what is most important about the season we are entering. It’s short, it’s memorable, and it’s true- just what we need to stay focused. Remove Jesus Christ from Christmas and you have nothing but a secular celebration. Christmas is the most hopeful time of the year for those who know Jesus, but what if God allows circumstances to cause your home to be anything less than ideal?

This year our Christmas series is: “Finding Our Way Home for Christmas!” Today we are going to look at the beginning story of Luke’s Gospel Christmas narrative to find that Messiah Jesus was not even on the radar to a home that

was barren and hurting. The aged couple who are involved in our story had years of broken-heartedness, and they would never say they had a happy or perfect home. They are the perfect home to get us thinking of what Christmas is really about. We are inviting believers to “come home” to their church family, and physical families, but many have seen changes through the years that are like the “uninvited guest” who ruins their Christmas. This last year of Covid-19 has revealed the sadness and darkness of this world’s thinking even more. People have lost their home-like connections. Divorce has ripped families apart. Depression is tough at the best of times. Perhaps it’s the best of times, such as holiday times, when it’s especially tough. The thought of some people who have a destroyed home because of divorce, separation, moving, and fighting, has made it hard for them to mix with happy people during Christmas. They feel more dread and sadness. It jars our souls and scrapes our tender wounds, doesn’t it?

Another uninvited guest to our homes through this last year is unfortunately suicide and addictions. They have stripped families of the love and security that they once knew. I was given this startling statistic from a Pastor who works with addiction recovery: “From April 2020 through April 2021, 100,000 people died of overdose in our country. And of the people falling into addictions only one of every ten have successfully made it out of the addiction.” So many are entering this season with unresolved tragedies in their families.

Another uninvited guest for those entering this season the loss of loved ones from Covid and many more from other means. But the isolation and lockdowns have damaged and hurt families on so many new levels. Suddenly, the uninvited guests of emptiness, loneliness, and isolation have made their bed on the couch. Just these three emotions will be an ambush of mixed bag issues to drag families apart and destroy any sense of happiness through Christmas. We laugh at the family sitcoms when the old joke is played out upon the hen-pecked husband, hearing the words: “Oh, dear, my mother is coming to stay for Christmas!” And we laugh at the jokes and the digs about family dysfunction, but inside we are hurting because of the truth of it.

Remember the Olympics in Japan this last summer? Because of Covid-19, the stadiums were empty, and the stands were vacant, the cheers were muted, and the ratings were down. The athletes performed in cavernous amphitheaters of silence, unable to feel the rush of the deafening shouts of their supporters. How many people feel as if their homes and families are as empty as a deserted stadium? How many have no cheerleaders, no encouragement? Life feels futile and vain. They try to grab onto the excitement of Christmas, but are grieving and angry at God because of the destruction and breakdown of their families.

The worst of the uninvited guests is “grief”! People feel drowned in the waves of it thinking that God has forgotten them or ask why God is mad at them. Gregory Floyd, who lost a six-year-old son, describes his feelings and thoughts:

*“We knew we were not alone. The God of Jesus Christ, who spoke not a word because He knows we could not hear one, was with us like the air we breathe, a vast presence, subtle, but nonetheless so real and fine. We did not need Him to say anything. We needed Him just to hold us, to hear our heart break again and again, to tell Him how unbearable this was and that if He did not shoulder the burden we would be lost. He was always there. The Psalmist says, ‘... I am always with you; you take hold of my right hand’ (Ps. 73:23 NASB). Touch was what was needed, not words. Yes, hold my right hand, and my left one, too. In the crush of your neck, Oh great God.” (H. Norman Wright, *Experiencing Grief*, pg. 37).*

Each holiday after a loved one’s death will bring new changes, more memories, and new questions. And since Christmas is about Christ’s coming to save the world from sin and suffering, we need to help others and pray that others will find their hearts turning home to Jesus. We need to pray for those who, when opening a box of ornaments, suddenly stand frozen. A handmade wreath with a child’s picture in it. The engraved “Our first Christmas together” silver star. A mini palm tree from last year’s trip to the beach. The memories and emotions will ambush some folks like an unwanted visitor. And the unwanted visitors of grief and shame and hurt will fill eyes with tears instead of hearts with hope.

So, to prepare us for our message today, which calls those who are changing and grieving, to come home to Jesus, I want to give us what I’m calling three very important Biblical filters of theology to help us in this Christmas season. I’m officially calling it “Home-ology” 101. These three principles must be understood by all of us to be able to find answers to those yearning and truanting toward finding a real “home-like connection.”

Home-ology help #1: God is the only One who can put the solidarity and purpose into every home! *What comes to mind when you think about your family? Did you have a mom and dad that loved and cared for you, even if imperfectly? Did you have brothers and sisters with whom you played and laughed and sometimes argued? Family is not just a social necessity; it is also one of God’s most common grace gifts to the world. He takes individuals who are isolated and lonely, and wants them to create a safe and nurturing family to thrive in. I love how two of the Psalms encourage this, “To the fatherless God is a father.*

To the widow He is a champion friend and husband.

The lonely He makes part of a family.

The prisoners He leads into prosperity until they sing for joy.

This is our Holy God in His Holy Place!”

Psalm 68:5-6 (The Passion Translation)

God is the only One, and has the power to be the true wholeness and sense of family into every home that comes upon the face of this planet. He is the one

who brings the sense of fatherliness. He is the one who brings the sense of a loving husband to the widow. He is the one who takes the loneliness away from that teen or divorced family member. He is the one who leads those who feel their home is a prison to a holy place! He is the one who will grow our homes strong and bring happiness to our homes.

“Deliver us! Then our homes will be happy.

Our sons will grow up as strong, sturdy men
and our daughters with graceful beauty,”

Psalm 144:12 (The Passion Translation)

When God in eternity past scribbled His divine notes on the architectural plans of what is a happy and perfect home, family was His idea. He created us as a couple, “So God created mankind in His own image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.” (Gen. 1:27). And it was God’s plan that the family and home would be blessed, “God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it’” (Gen. 1:28). God did this so that everyone would know He is a good, faithful, loving, and holy God who planned for us in this world to be born and grow up in a home. His desire was that we would prosper and spread through the earth. And when God instituted marriage it says in Genesis, “The Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be **alone**. I will make a helper suitable for him’” (Gen. 2:18). “Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her to the man. The man said, ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.’ That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.” (Gen. 2:21-24).

So there we have it. God is so good; He planned for us to be born into this world through families. God is the only one who can put the feeling of home into a family. It was His perfect plan and design to have happy homes. God’s great plan for family and its purposes would bring happiness if we follow His rules. We long for the perfect family, but the reason it isn’t that way for us is not because of God. Instead of blaming God and getting angry at Him, what happened? Why is it that we feel grief, loneliness, sadness in being single, hurt by those who are our brothers and sisters? Is it God’s fault that the home isn’t the way He originally designed it?

Home-ology help #2: It was our sin that put the emptiness and grief into our homes! One of the greatest tragedies that we find, even in those most enlightened of all ages, is the utter failure of millions of men and women ever to discover why they were born. It’s “sin-amnesia.” It forces them to cry out, either silently within themselves or often with audible frustration, “I don’t even know even why I was born.” Again, let me take us back to the first family in the human race: the man named Adam and the woman named Eve.

Adam had a fall, and he received a terrible spiritual bump; involved with him in

the catastrophe was Eve, his wife. Then, when they tried to shake the fog out of their minds, looking at each other, they realized that they no longer knew who they were, and they did not know why they were alive- to worship and enjoy God. They did not know the purpose for their existence. A. W. Tozer, in his wonderful message on “Whatever happened to worship,” reminds us that we were born to worship. *“The Creator God made the chief end of man to be to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. How could the Creator’s desired will for all the sons and daughters and families of Adam be so thoroughly frustrated, so completely ruled out? In this day of rampant sin, violence and transgression, we must point out that there is an almost universal denial of the willful and sinful fall of the human race. What a tragedy! Created to be a mirror to the Almighty, Adam and Eve forfeited the glory of God. Made in God’s image, Adam and Eve were more like Him than the angels above. God had created man so He could look into him and see reflected there more of His own glory than He could see reflected in the starry skies above. But now the mirror was dimmed and blurred. When God would look at sinful man, He no longer could see His own glory. Disobedient man had become sinful man. He had failed to fulfill the purpose of His creation- to worship his Creator and thrive in a family of beauty of holiness.”* (Born to Worship, pg. 47-48)

Men and women in our time, tired and guilty and lost, are too engaged with the tragedies of their own families and their own societies to look back at the great, overwhelming tragedy that we call the Fall. When God came to Adam and Eve, they were full of guilt and shame. “Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves” (Gen. 3:7). They then tried to blame and lay the sin on one another. “And God said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’ The man said, ‘The woman you put here with me—she gave me...’” (Gen. 3:11-12). And it passed to their children Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1-10). God warned them that their sin was their responsibility. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? “If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it” (Gen. 4:7). The result was the first murder and hate which has passed down through every family ever born.

No human parents are perfect, and all siblings have issues to work through. But every person was created and designed for life in a caring and supportive family. Yet, we live in days where families have broken and been destroyed by our own sins, that society now preaches the message “Your family is who you want it to be, and who you want to care for.” And even though that is true in a sense to help those who have grown up with horrible family situations, we still know God provides us with a spiritual family called “our church.” If you are not the man you ought to be, you are likely to blame your wife, or your family, or perhaps the place where you work. If you are not the young person you ought to be, you can always blame your parents. If you are not the wife or

woman you ought to be, you may blame your husband, or children, or many lines of relationships we try to replace a husband with. Sin being what it is, we would rather lay the blame on others. We blame, blame, blame. That is why we are where we are with our families. That is why disease fastens on and drags us to death. That is why accidents come. That is why there are jails and mental hospitals, and graveyards. Yes, all because of the great tragedy and disaster that we call the fall of man into sin. We need to realize that no matter what we do to fix or form what we ultimately want to be as a family, will be doomed to always fail, if God is not in it. That is why the uninvited guest of isolation, emptiness, grief and loneliness come. We are the ones responsible. So don't get amnesia and blame God. Because this third help is most important.

Home-ology help #3: A 'birth' puts life and hope into our homes again.

You know how Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus? What brings healing and life to a broken and empty home is the birth of a child. And spiritually, the only way one can find the solution for home is to be born a second time. Only by being "born-again" can we find healing, forgiveness, redemption, and hope for our families and homes that have been ruined by our sins. We have wonderful news for families at Christmas. It is the good news that the God who created us did not give us up. He did not say to the angels, "Write them off and blot them from My memory." Rather, He said, "Oh, I still want them! I still want them to be a mirror in which I can look and see My glory. I still want to be admired by My people. I will want My people to enjoy Me and the presence of My family forever."

So, God sent His only begotten Son through the miracle of the Christmas Incarnation. When Jesus walked the earth, He was the reflected glory of God. "The Word became flesh and made His dwelling [true-home] among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). When God looked at Mary's Son, He saw Himself reflected. (Heb. 1:3). God was glorified in His Son, even though at His Son's death the glory was terribly marred. Sinful men plucked His beard, bruised His face, tore out His hair. They nailed Him to the cross. There He groaned and sweated and suffered for six hours before He finally gave up His spirit and died.

The bells in heaven rang out because lost man had now been redeemed. The way of pardon and forgiveness had been opened for sinners. On the third day, Jesus arose from the dead. Yes, worship of the loving God is man's whole reason for existence. That is why we are born, and that is why we must be born again from above. That is why we were created, and that is why we have been re-created. That is why there was a genesis at the beginning, and that is why there is a re-genesis, called regeneration. "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.' 'How can someone be born when they are old?' Nicodemus asked. Jesus answered, 'Very

truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again." The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). Remember Jesus' most loved verse when Nicodemus asked what we need most for families? "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son" (John 3:16-18).

That is also why there is a church. The Christian church family exists to worship God first of all, and everything else follows. God loves His church, and it is the family place for learning truth and loving our God together. Encourage those who have left church to return home for Christmas!

In Europe generations ago, the dear old saint of God, Brother Lawrence, was on his deathbed. Rapidly losing his physical strength, he witnessed to those gathered around him: "I am not dying. I am just doing what I have been doing for the past forty years, and doing what I expect to be doing for all eternity!" "What is that?" he was asked. He replied quickly, "I am worshipping the God I love!"

Worshipping God- that was the primary life goal for Brother Lawrence. He was also dying, but that was secondary. He knew why he had been born into this world- and he knew why he had been born again.

And loved ones, even though we struggle through the loss of loved ones through Christmas, Brother Lawrence is still worshipping God. Yes, he died, and they buried his body somewhere, but his was a living soul, created in the image of God. So, he is still worshipping with all the saints around the throne of God. So, loved ones, I remember Frido, and Gail, and my dad! Sad, sad indeed, are the cries of so many today who have never discovered why they were born. It brings to mind the poem that D. L. Moody shared in his book on heaven entitled: "What! Almost Home?"

"What! Almost home?" "Yes, almost home," she said,
And light seemed gleaming on her aged head.
"Jesus is very precious!" Those who near
Her bedside stood were thrilled those words to hear.
"Toward His blest home I turn my willing feet;
Hinder me not; I go my Lord to meet."
Silence ensued. She seemed to pass away,
Serene and quiet as that summer day.

“SPEAK,” cried through tears her daughter, bending low
“One word, please beloved mother to me, ere you go!”
She spoke that word; that last she spoke on earth,
In whispering tones- that word of wondrous worth:
“JESUS!” The sorrowing listeners caught the sound,
But angels heart it with a joy profound.
Back, at its mighty power, the gates unfold-
As though the open portals entered in
Another soul redeemed from death and sin.
As from earth the spirit passed away,
To dwell forever in the realms of day,
Those who were left to mourn could almost hear
The strains of heavenly music strike the ear
And to their longing eyes grace was given,
In such a scene, as twere, a glimpse of home to heaven.”

And I love what Moody said: “If there is one word above another that will swing open the eternal gates, it is the name of Jesus! There are a great many passwords and by-words down here, but that will be the countersign up above. Jesus Christ is the ‘Open Sesame’ to heaven. Will you say His name?” (Heaven, pg. 45).

So loved ones, will you be able to help and pray for those who want to go home for Christmas this year?

Pray with me,

“Faithful and Wonderful God, we can trust and hope in You. You have a plan to take care of us, if we will turn our lives over to You. Through Jesus, we have the promise of everlasting life in an amazing place called heaven, a place that is just as real as the air we breathe. Holy Spirit, give us the hope to keep us moving forward, one step at a time. We place our lives into Your hands, knowing You are a sovereign God with a perfect plan- a plan to bring us home. We ask for that sense of home to come to those today who have experienced the unwanted visitors of isolation, change, emptiness, brokenness, and grief. So many people are hurting, and many pretend that everything is fine. Christmas is about Christ’s coming to save the world from sin and suffering, and give to us that security and feeling of true home. Draw them into Your loving arms and empower them to walk forward in this life with You. May they speak and find comfort in the Name of Jesus who is the greatest Christmas name anyone could speak. We pray in our Wonderful Counselor’s name. Amen.”

Pastor Corvin ⇐

Quote: “Come Adore on bended knee, Christ the Lord, the newborn King.” ... James Chadwick