

HOW TO MAKE CHRISTMAS

2 Samuel 7

Christian writer Max Lucado describes this experience about the time before Christmas:

He deserves our compassion. When you see him, do not laugh. Do not mock. Do not turn away or shake your head. Just gently lead him to the nearest bench and help him sit down.

Have pity on the man. He is so fearful, so wide-eyed. He's a deer on the streets of Manhattan, Tarzan walking through the urban jungle. He's a beached whale, wondering how he got her and how he'll get out.

Who is this forlorn creature, this ashen faced orphan? He is the man in the women's department, looking for a gift.

He has left behind the familiar habitat of sporting goods stores, food courts, and big-screen television in the appliance department and ventured into the unknown world of women's wear. You'll spot him easily. He's the motionless one in the aisle. Were it not for the sweat rings under his arms, you'd think he was a mannequin. But he isn't. He is a man in a woman's world, and he has never seen so much underwear. At the Wal-Mart where he buys his, it's all wrapped up and fits on one shelf. But here he is in a forest of lace. His father warned him about places like this. Though the sign above says "linger-ie," he knows he shouldn't.

Lucado goes on to explain how his father had given his brother and him sound advice to help solve this dilemma in a man's life. He father said, "The time will come when a salesperson will offer to help you. At that moment take a deep breath and say this phrase, 'Es-te`e Lau-der.'" Lucado thought he had the problem licked, all the years he gave his mother that gift. But then he got married and found out that his wife doesn't like Este`e Lauder.

Husbands aren't the only ones, however, who struggle to "make" Christmas. A mother gets excited to set up a perfect Christmas for her family—to clean up and decorate her house and prepare food for all her children who will be home. But despite all her efforts, the kids quarrel with each other. A working man who hopes to relax and enjoy some bowl games finds that problems at work mean he won't get the vacation he planned to have. A family gets the flu bug and spends the holidays in bed. A widow tries to put on her best face for Christmas, but still can't help but feel lonely. Parents buy all kinds of toys for their children only to see half of them broken a week later. We may have the best of intentions and the right "spirit" going into Christmas. But as we look back on it in January, will we have made it a good Christmas?

David had the best of intentions. He had conquered the enemies of God's people, especially the Philistines. There was peace. He had united the kingdom of Israel. He had established a new capital in Jerusalem with a palace for himself. But the Ark of the Covenant, where God's throne was on earth, was still housed in a tent, as it had since the days of the Exodus under Moses. In 2 Samuel 7:2 David wanted to build a permanent structure, a temple to house the ark, to be the house of God here on earth. He wanted to honor God and make a place worthy of Him.

David never got to do that, but his son Solomon did. The book of 1 Kings goes into great detail describing how that temple was built. It was a great structure. Yet 400 years later it was demolished by the Babylonians. Right before Jesus was born, King Herod built a new temple, one that was even bigger and grander than Solomon's was. Yet in 70 AD the Romans destroyed it. No matter how good a temple could be built, it would never be good enough to house God.

So it is with any of our attempts to please God. The old expression goes, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." It is like an alcoholic. He can stay on the wagon day after day. But he slips just once and he's caught back into the trap of his

disease. We are sinners. We are like a man trying to buy his wife that present. The task of giving to God what He is due is beyond us.

God told David through the prophet Nathan, “Are you the one to build Me a house to dwell in?” It would be like painting a picture for Da Vinci, composing a concerto for Bach, writing a poem for Milton, or making a statue for Michelangelo. But notice what God says:

*Now, then, tell my servant David,
“This is what the LORD almighty says:
‘I took you from the pasture and from
following the flock to be ruler over my
people Israel. I have been with you
wherever you have gone, and I have cut
off all your enemies from before you.
Now I will make your name great, like
the names of the greatest men of the
earth. And I will provide a place for My
people Israel and will plant them so
that they can have a home of their own
and no longer be disturbed. Wicked
people will no longer oppress them
anymore, as they did at the beginning
and have done ever since the time I
appointed leaders over My people
Israel. I will also give you rest from
your enemies. The LORD declares to
you that the LORD Himself will
establish a house for you. . . Your house
and your kingdom will endure forever
before Me; your throne will be
established forever.’”*

God was saying to David, “David, you got it backwards. You’re not going to build me a house. I’m going to build it for you. God was going to make of David’s family a dynasty, a house, which would last forever.

God also switches things around for us. Christmas is not what we make of it. It is not something we offer to God. It is God’s gift to us. Even when we didn’t do anything or even recognize Christmas, Christmas still happened, because it is God’s doing. God sent His Son Jesus into this world to do what we can’t do.

David’s son Solomon would build God’s temple. David’s descendants did rule in Jerusalem,

but only for a while. It could have looked as though God’s promise to David was not true. But God wasn’t talking about an earthly house. He was talking about an eternal kingdom. Jesus descended from David and set up an eternal kingdom. That was far beyond anything that David could have done or imagined to do.

God’s promises to us may seem not true when we face illness, loneliness, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about our future. But what is different because of Jesus is how we can approach God. As with David, nothing we offer to God comes close to being good enough. But because God first gave us His Son, Jesus, now anything we offer to God in love is received in love by God. Now we can prepare to celebrate Christmas and offer to God because of what we already have in Jesus.

Traditionally we greet each other this season with the words, “Merry Christmas.” “Merry” means a lot more than just “happy.” It means “blessed.” Christmas is not a matter of what we do or feel during this season. It is a matter of what God gives to us.

A husband or children may not know how to find that “perfect” gift for mom, but she receives it in love. It is precious to her. Why? Because it is given and received in love. So it is now with what we offer to God. We don’t have to “prove” ourselves to God. We know that in Jesus we are forgiven and loved. So we offer to God in love. He receives it in love. And then He gives it back to us. We can see that in Holy Communion. God has given us Jesus. We offer our bread and wine to God. He receives it and gives it back to us the body and blood of Jesus in, with, and under the bread and wine to forgive us.

Merry—Blessed Christmas to us all!

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman
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