

# How to Have a Merry Christmas

Pastor James Foley – Shared Sunday, December 8, 2019

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**Main Theme** – A message emphasizing practical items that facilitate merriment at Christmastime.

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## WORSHIP & PRAYER

## WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **Special Thanks**

My THANKS to the team of people who made ministry possible while Misty and I traveled to Florida. We had a wonderful time away—but it is always good to be home! Special thanks to Tim Lee and David Dahlstrom for leading while I was away.

- **Regular Events**

- WM – Tuesday Evening, December 10, from 6:30–8pm
- MM – Saturday Morning, December 14, from 9–10:30am

- **Special Events**

- Friday, December 20 – Christmas Gathering w/ the C.Y.C. Children
- Sunday, December 22 – Christmas Service (Invite Friends & Family)

- **Annual Business Meeting**

The 2019 Annual Business Meeting will take place on Sunday, January 19, 2020 following the Sunday Service (January 26 in case of inclement weather). Nomination forms necessary to nominate individuals for the elected office of Deacon on our Church Board whose terms expire at the Annual Meeting will AGAIN be distributed today after service. The completed forms must be placed in the designated box located on the table in the front foyer by no later than Sunday, December 15, 2019. Also, the deadline for the submission of Ministry Leader Reports is Sunday, December 29, 2019.

## **MORNING OFFERING**

**NOTE** – I want to call forth our ushers. TWO offerings will be collected:

- 1) The 1<sup>st</sup> offering goes to support this local work and community outreach
- 2) The 2<sup>nd</sup> offering goes to support our regular missionaries (foreign/domestic)

May the Lord bless you as you give! May you experience His faithfulness in kind!

**Luke 6:38 (NIV)**

38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

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- **CHILDREN DISMISSED FOR CHILDREN'S CHURCH**
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## INTRODUCTIONS

As always it is wonderful to see you. I look forward to these moments of corporate worship and instruction. I pray that you are ready to receive what the Lord has for you today. Please have your Bible at the ready and be prepared to take some notes.

## SETTING THE STAGE PT. 1

The Christmas Season is upon us! As the old song goes, this is the “most wonderful time of the year”—or at least it SHOULD be. However, for many, this is a season associated with everything BUT a sense of merriment!

**KEY** – Rather, this is a season commonly associated with increased/heightened STRESS levels.

I did a little bit of research before my recent travels, and I found the following QUITE interesting:

**NOTE 1** – One study reveals that 88% of people report high degrees of stress during this time of year, and the average couple will have seven major arguments throughout the season. Merry Christmas!

**NOTE 2** – The underlying CAUSES of stress and conflict are as follows:

### 1) Overwhelming **Financial** Demands and Expectations

**FYI** – Industry experts expect the average American to spend \$920 on holiday gifts in 2019. Yet, 40% of Americans cannot cover a \$400 emergency expense according to those very same experts.

### 2) Knowing What to Get People for Christmas (Gift Ideas)

### 3) Taking the Time to Do Gift Shopping, Navigate Crowds/Lines, etc.

### 4) Cleaning (People Feel the Pressure of Ready'ing their Homes for the Holiday)

### 5) Cooking (People Feel the Pressure of Making the “Perfect” Family Meal)

### 6) Negotiating the Interpersonal Dynamics of Family (i.e., Family Drama)

### 7) Keeping Up Health Habits (Tough to Maintain the Summer Body)

## SETTING THE STAGE PT. 2

**KEY** – A time of the year that is supposed to bring joy brings many to tears. This should NOT be (particularly amongst those who claim Christ as Lord and Savior). Thus, this morning I want to help you to RECLAIM the joy of the holiday season. This morning I want to give you some potential responses to the following question:

**Q. What can you do to make this a truly MERRY Christmas? (SLIDE)**

**KEY** – Hear the voice of the Lord through your pastor today, and heed the principles of Scripture...

## PRACTICE FORGIVENESS

**Q. What can you do to make this a MERRY Christmas?**

**A.** You can PRACTICE a biblically mandated FORGIVENESS.

Very few things SAP joy and merriment like a spirit of unforgiveness. Show me a person given to bitterness, anger, hostility, and resentment toward others, and I will show you one who CANNOT be a conduit of God's abounding joy. **Q.** Ever look at the face of such a person? It looks like a smile might actually cause their face to crack!

**NOTE 1** – God commands us to forgive because unforgiveness is SO toxic to the human soul. Consider the wisdom in this saying: "To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."

**NOTE 2** – Christians are under obligation to HEED the following:

### **Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)**

32 Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

### **Colossians 3:13**

13 Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

### **Mark 11:25**

25 And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

**NOTE** – “But Pastor,” you say, “You don’t know how much people have harmed me.” I didn’t want to go here, but you’ve made me! Consider the words of Christ in Matthew 18 and let them speak to your heart!

**Matthew 18:21–35**

21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?”

22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

23 “Therefore, the kingdom of heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him [FYI – 1 talent was worth 20-years wages. Thus, 10,000 talents was worth 200,000 years wages]. 25 Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

26 “At this the servant fell on his knees before him. ‘Be patient with me,’ he begged, ‘and I will pay back everything.’ 27 The servant’s master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go.

28 “But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins [FYI – 1 denarius was worth 1-days wage. Thus, 100 denarii was worth 100 days-wages]. He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

29 “His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’

30 “But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt. 31 When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened.

32 “Then the master called the servant in. ‘You wicked servant,’ he said, ‘I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. 33 Shouldn’t you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?’ 34 In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

35 “This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

**KEY 1** – Do you want to experience a merry Christmas? Let go of bitterness and forgive others.

**KEY 2** – Do you want to experience a merry Christmas? Send out an olive branch and reconcile.

## **GRIEVE AS NECESSARY**

**Q. What can you do to make this a MERRY Christmas?**

**A.** You can allow yourself the time/space to GRIEVE as needed.

**KEY** – We all know the pain of LOSS...

We all know the loss of meaningful connection with those who are departed OR with those who no longer play an active role in your life. **FYI** – this is a tough point for me at the moment, as one of the hardest things I have to do is grieve the loss of a person is still alive (foster daughter). Such losses are heightened at Christmas. We can't help but think of those who are no longer part of life and living.

**Q. But who says we AREN'T allowed to think on such things and feel?**

**FYI** – Though it might seem backwards to grieve in order to make room for merriment, grief CAN open the soul to divine comfort and, thus, joy. There is NO benefit in denying our emotions—particularly when they are so real. Rather, there is a place for the grieving PROCESS.

i.e., It is as we go through the process of grief that our soul finds RELIEF and we are able to treasure precious memories, etc., without the sting of pain. Few things in life will HINDER joy than unrecognized or unconfessed grief. The following narrative serves to illustrate:

**ILL** – The home of Paul Laurence Dunbar, noted poet, is open to the public in Dayton, Ohio. When Dunbar died, his mother left his room exactly as it was on the day of his death. At the desk of this brilliant man was his final poem, handwritten on a pad. After his mother died, her friends discovered that Paul Laurence Dunbar's last poem had been lost forever. Because his mother had made his room into a shrine and not moved anything, the sun had bleached the ink in which the poem was written until it was invisible. The poem was gone. If we stay in mourning, we lose so much of life.

**Q. Do you realize that even Jesus felt the sting of grief/loss?**

**John 11:35**

35 Jesus wept.

**Q. Do you realize that even Jesus took the time to grieve?**

**Matthew 14:13** (CONTEXT – Following John the Baptist's death—death of a relative]

13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.

**NOTE** – ALLOW yourself to grieve the loss of loved ones as the holiday season approaches and tap into the comforting power of the Lord who cares for you. REMEMBER the following:

**Psalm 34:18**

18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted  
and saves those who are crushed in spirit.

**Matthew 11:28**

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

## **ENJOY INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS**

**Q. What can you do to make this a MERRY Christmas?**

**A. CONNECT** with beloved family and friends (God’s gifts).

There is biblical precedent for celebrating key moments—particularly God-centered moments—together. You could consider the OT holy days (i.e., national moments to be observed in joyful, reverent community). You could consider the NT Communion (i.e., the sharing of the Lord’s Supper is done amongst believing family and friends).

**KEY 1** – I think the same could be said of Jesus’ BIRTH!

**KEY 2** –I believe that God rejoices when we rejoice TOGETHER in Him. It’s a good thing!

**Psalm 133**

1 How good and pleasant it is  
when God’s people live together in unity!

2 It is like precious oil poured on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
running down on Aaron’s beard,  
down on the collar of his robe.

3 It is as if the dew of Hermon  
were falling on Mount Zion.  
For there the Lord bestows his blessing,  
even life forevermore.

**NOTE 1** – Like the oil used to anoint Aaron for priestly service (2), unity—togetherness—is sacred.

**NOTE 2** – Like the dew of Mount Hermon on Jerusalem (v. 3), unity—togetherness—is refreshing.

“But Pastor,” you say, “My stress is about gifts, shopping, cooking, cleaning, etc. for these people”

**Q. How can I POSSIBLY enjoy them?**

**A.** You may not like my A. but here it is:

**KEY** – IF the gifts, shopping, cleaning and cooking for loved ones are hindering your enjoyment of them, **STOP** doing all that stuff and work toward actually enjoying them. In the end, Christmas is **NOT** about the perfect gift, meal, house, etc. It is about loving-connection. You can...

- 1)** Give of Your Time
- 2)** Give of Your Affection
- 3)** Give of Your U. Attention

**NOTE** – IF—after these things are given—you want to offer the meal, gift, etc., **THEN** feel free!

“But Pastor,” you say, “That’s unrealistic and SO counter-culture!” Oh, I am so sorry! I forgot Christians are supposed to be shaped by **CULTURE** v. being shaped by **CHRIST** and biblical principles. My apologies!

## **SHOW CHARITY TO THE LESS FORTUNATE**

**Q. What can you do to make this a MERRY Christmas?**

**A.** Show **CHARITY** to those who are less fortunate than you.

**NOTE** – There is a wonderful teaching of Christ that His Church does **NOT** often obey/apply. Note:

### **Luke 14:12–14**

12 . . . Jesus said . . . , “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

**Q. Why isn’t this something that we do? Hindrances? Worthy of prayerful reflection...**

**ILL** – I have seen this teaching illustrated in the life/ministry of Pastor Dan Condon (good friend and fellow pastor). Many years back, he decided to open up his home to a few teenagers from a program in Worcester that dealt with troubled teens. He and his dearly departed wife, Sharon, enjoyed this so much, they decided to do it again the following year. But the next year, rather than invite 2–3, they invited 10.

In time this grew to an annual feast that blessed 80–100 such children and teens. I was a part of this ministry, as was Misty, my parents, the Andrejczyks, etc. Each child was fed a meal fit for a king/queen. Each child received a gift loving packed by a believer in Christ. Only heaven can measure the impact of such an event, but make no mistake—God took note (cf. v. 14)!

**Q. Who can you bless this Christmas? Who can you serve? What can you offer/freely give?**



**FYI** – One of my FAVORITE holiday stories is *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. I have read the book numerous times and each year I try to watch EVERY possible movie (e.g., black and white film, Muppets, Disney, modern, etc.). I love the story of Ebenezer Scrooge who—when confronted by the legacy and end-result of his greed—is moved to a lifestyle of CHARITY.

FOLLOWING his encounter with the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present and Future, he comes to understand the essence of Christmas and declares the following: “I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me.”

And the book ENDS with the following: “Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world.”

**Q. Why can't the same be said of us?** Let Christmas be a time to consider our service to others!

## **KEEP CHRIST AT THE CENTER**

**Q. What can you do to make this a MERRY Christmas?**

**A.** It sounds very cliché—but keep the CHRIST in Christmas.

“To perceive Christmas through its wrappings becomes more difficult with every year.” i.e., Each year it becomes harder and harder to remember WHY we celebrate Christmas at all. Consider the following:

**ILL** – Two women who were having lunch in an elegant hotel were approached by a mutual friend who asked the occasion for the meal. One lady replied, “We are celebrating the birth of my baby boy.” “But where is he?” inquired the friend. “Oh,” said the mother, “you didn’t think I’d bring him, did you?” What a picture of the way the world treats Jesus at Christmas.

**NOTE** – Christmas affords us the opportunity to glorify Christ and remember His Incarnation (marvel of marvels—i.e., that God would become man). Though I will NOT condemn FAMILIES who involve St. Nicholas, etc., WHY would we squander this amazing opportunity to spotlight fantasy when we can revel in world-changing REALITY!

### **Colossians 3:1–2**

1 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

**KEY** – IF you want to have a Merry Christmas, make it all about Jesus Christ and His Coming:

- 1)** Revel in Christ-Centered Carols and Hymns
- 2)** Read through the Gospel-Narratives (Matthew & Luke)
- 3)** Start a Christ-Centered Family “Tradition” (i.e., Misty’s Family)
- 4)** Take the Chance and Invite a Relative, Friend or Neighbor to Church
- 5)** If You Do Not Know Jesus Personally – Today is a Great Day to Believe!

## **CONCLUSIONS**

**Q. What can you do to make this a MERRY Christmas?**

- 1) Practice Forgiveness
- 2) Grieve as Necessary
- 3) Enjoy Relationships
- 4) Show Real Charity
- 5) Highlight J. Christ