


The Mystery of Christmas  
Part 1: A Survival Guide to the  
Dysfunctional Family Christmas

# TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



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**Talk** together about the glory of God's kingdom. —*Psalm 145:11*  
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. —*Joshua 22:5*

## Questions for Reflection

- How complicated—or even painful—has Christmas gotten for you, due to family dynamics?
- Pastor Lanier noted that peace-making is anything but passive! Matthew 5:9 says that the peace-**makers** are blessed—not the peace-keepers or the conflict-avoiders or the "go-with-the-flow-ers". Which of those three traps do you tend to fall into? Which ones have you escaped from?
- Read Jeremiah 17:5-8. Which man do you more identify with (v. 5-6 or v. 7-8)—and why?

Is it encouraging or discouraging that both situations experience "heat" (see v. 6 and 8)? Why?

**How** do you tend to "trust in" or "draw strength from" people—yourself or others (v. 5)?  
In what ways does that **in fact amount to** "turning your heart away from the Lord" (v. 5b)?

- Read James 3:8-18.  
According to v. 8, the tongue is "a \_\_\_\_\_ and full of \_\_\_\_\_"

In v. 9-12, **describe** what James finds **inconceivable**?

We usually think of **knowledge/information** as the proof that someone is wise and understanding, but according to v. 13-18, what **truly** is the evidence?

How can you apply this with your extended family this Christmas?

**Need help learning to love difficult people?**  
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## Application-Challenge

- Consider celebrating a quiet, early Christmas with your immediate family before the extended family arrives.
- Consider now how you can be a peace-maker at Christmastime. Be impartial, sincere, and merciful.
- Pray that God would help you see your family as he does: as beloved children in need of a savior. Pray that God will give you opportunities to share the good news of the Gospel with your family.

**Take One Step:** What is one small, concrete step of obedience you will put into practice this week?



# Sermon Summary

Christmas is widely known as the “most wonderful time of the year” and the “happiest season of all.” We are told again and again that it’s a season of joy, family bonding, and making memories that will last a lifetime. But we live in a fallen world and many things aren’t what they are supposed to be, nor are they even close. Here are three suggestions for surviving a dysfunctional family Christmas:

Protect your peace. It’s important to remember that your peace, joy, and contentment during the holiday season isn’t dependent upon others; it’s dependent upon you. It’s certainly easier when everyone around you says the right things, does the right things, and always bends to your will, but I don’t encourage you to hold your breath until that happens. The reality is that we are always going to deal with people saying unkind things, doing things that hurt you, and choosing to put themselves first. That’s the very nature of a fallen, sinful world.

As we read in Jeremiah 17:5-8, we should not allow our circumstances to affect our peace. Instead of going into Christmas placing expectations on the rest of your family, set yourself free, and set them free. Don’t place the pressure of a perfect Christmas on imperfect people. Walk in knowing that you are walking into a group of people who are hurting, who may be lost, and who God has called you to love. Scripture makes it clear that “heat and drought” are going to come for all of us. Are you going to waste away, or are your firmly planted roots going to continue to bear fruit regardless of the circumstances? In addition to adjusting some of your expectations, another way to protect your peace this Christmas is to celebrate your own meaningful Christmas with just your immediate family. If you are traveling all week to see family, take some time before or after to worship together, read the Christmas story from Scripture together, or celebrate any other meaningful traditions on your own.

Give the gift of peace. As followers of Christ, we must seriously consider the teachings of Scripture on what it means to be a peacemaker. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays out what seem to be some character traits of disciples. In Matthew 5:9, he says this: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Notice that Jesus doesn’t mention the peacekeepers or the conflict avoiders or the go-with-the-flowers. Peacemaking is not a passive undertaking.

What if this principle guided your interactions with family this Christmas? If instead of sticking your head into the sand, or just walking away during a difficult conversation, you tried to tap into wisdom that comes from heaven? When the family political debates inevitably get a little heated, rather than jumping in on one side or the other, you could instead ask that everyone put their debate skills to rest just for the day, and give a subtle reminder that Christmas is about more than politics. This Christmas, instead of taking the role of passive bystander, give your family the gift of peace by accepting your God-given role as a peace-maker.

Seek peace in prayer. There is nothing more encouraging as we prepare to engage in sometimes unpredictable, chaotic family gatherings around Christmas than Paul’s words on prayer in Philippians 4: “Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Some of us become anxious around family gatherings. We worry about what people are going to do or say. We worry about what we are going to do or say. The peace of God is exactly what we need this Christmas. We need the peace of God guarding our hearts and minds.

Instead of focusing on the negative aspects, we have a direct instruction from Scripture to focus on the beauty. Begin praying now that God would help you to find the beauty this Christmas. God sees your dysfunctional family members differently. He sees his beloved kids that He desperately wants to redeem and restore. He sees their brokenness and their pain and how sin has destroyed everything in them and around them. And God’s desire is to move towards them, not away from them. He continues pursuing and blessing and loving through it all.

So pray that God would give you just a glimpse of how He sees your family this Christmas so that you can continue loving them, rather than shutting them out. If they are valuable to God, they should be valuable to you. Pray for the peace that surpasses understanding. Pray to see the beauty. And pray that you would see your loved ones in the way that God sees them.

**Family visiting for Christmas? Any dysfunction in your family? ...or in you?  
How can we love difficult people (and become a bit more lovely ourselves)?**

**Monday**—Read Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10 (below), and then...

- Make a list of all the things that the godly man does, and does not, **do**.
- Make a list of all the things that the ungodly man (the “wicked”, “sinners”, “scoffers”) does, and does not, **do**.

**Tuesday**—Read Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10, and then...

- Make a list of all of the ways that the godly man is described, of things he is compared to.
- Make a list of all of the ways that the ungodly man is described, of things he is compared to.

**Wednesday**—Read Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10, and then...

- Make a list of the contrasting “blessings” and “curses” in these passages (make sure you include ideas even when the specific word “blessed” or “cursed” does **not** appear, such as in Psalm 1:6, “God ‘knows’ the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish”).
- Which of these blessings have you personally experienced? Which of the curses?

**Thursday**—Read Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10, and then...

- Write several “one word summaries” to show the contrast between the godly and the ungodly (for example, “fruitful” vs. “withered”).
- The word “heart” occurs three times in Jeremiah’s passage. Write down everything you can learn about the “heart”.



**Friday**—Read Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10, and then...

- Make a list of all of the things God is said to **do**, how he is said to **react**, for both the godly and the ungodly.
- According to Jeremiah 17:9-10, what do we **need** God to do for us?
- Begin making the words of Psalm 139:23-24 your daily prayer: **“Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.”**

**Saturday**—Read Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17:5-10, and then...

- List everything that is **not** different about the godly and the ungodly.
- From Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17, what must we **do** in order to be described as “godly”? Are you doing that? Why or why not?

**A Survival Guide to the Dysfunctional Family Christmas**

-  = godly attitudes, actions, and results
-  = ungodly attitudes, actions, and results

**Psalm 1**

<sup>1</sup> How blessed is the man  
who **does not** walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stand in the path of sinners,  
nor sit in the seat of scoffers!

<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
and in His law he meditates day and night.

<sup>3</sup> He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in its season  
and its leaf does not wither;  
and in whatever he does, he prospers.

<sup>4</sup> The wicked are not so,  
but they are like chaff which the wind drives away.

<sup>5</sup> Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.

<sup>6</sup> For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,  
but the way of the wicked will perish.

**Jeremiah 17:5-10**

<sup>5</sup> Thus says the LORD, “Cursed is the man  
who trusts in mankind and makes flesh his strength,  
and whose heart turns away from the LORD.

<sup>6</sup> For he will be like a bush in the desert  
and will not see when prosperity comes,  
but will live in stony wastes in the wilderness,  
a land of salt without inhabitant.

<sup>7</sup> Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD  
and whose trust is the LORD.

<sup>8</sup> For he will be like a tree planted by the water,  
that extends its roots by a stream and  
will not fear when the heat comes;  
but its leaves will be green,  
and it will not be anxious  
in a year of drought nor cease to yield fruit.

<sup>9</sup> The heart is more deceitful than all else  
and is desperately sick.  
Who can understand it?

<sup>10</sup> I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind,  
even to give to each man according to his ways,  
according to the results of his deeds.”