


A Christmas Plea

Part One

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS



A publication of , the adult discipleship ministry of Triangle Community Church.

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

Triangle Community Church aims to be a “transforming church”. We exist to be used by God as He transforms ordinary people into extraordinary followers of Jesus Christ. TCC believes not only that life-change is possible—but that it is to be expected. Growth is God's will for his people. But transformation does not happen by accident. It requires intentional, intelligent, action. 1 Timothy 4:7 instructs you to “discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.” Since “**Talking Points, Walking Points**” is intended both for individual reflection and for group discussion, questions vary in degree of vulnerability required. Generally it is best to begin group discussions with questions which involve less personal disclosure—but don't linger there. Be sure to “dive deep” too! The questions which require the greatest openness and honesty, as well as those in the section entitled “**Suggestions for Digging Deeper in your Daily Quiet Time**”, are perfect for private reflection.

Questions for Reflection

- **Why** do you think we so easily crave **things from** God rather than **relationship with** God? What biblical passages can you come up with to support your answers?
- Tell us about something you once “just had to have”—which now no longer satisfies.
- What do you know about Saint Augustine? (He *didn't start out* very saintly!—read about him in wikipedia.) Augustine wrote: “Our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” What helped him learn this lesson? **How well** would you say you're learning that lesson? **Why** do you think that?
- Read Psalm 37:4 and James 4:3. How can you reconcile those two biblical teachings? What do you desire most in this life?
- Why do you think so few people desire God above all else? What helps you desire God more? What diminishes your desire for God?

Need help and hope this Christmas season?
Let a biblical counselor help!
counseling@tcc.org

Application-Challenge

- This Christmas season, put the focus on Christ rather than on material consumption, and let joy and worship replace anxiety and guilt.
- With the money you save, let's give more to those who are truly needy in our community and around the world.

Sermon Summary

This week I took some time to read the Christmas story out of Matthew's gospel. And I marveled at the wise men's response as they contemplated the wonders of God's love in sending the Christ child. Their experience should be ours as well. As they gazed upon God's incredible gift to mankind, they were filled with wonder and joy. They were so overwhelmed that they fell to the ground and began to worship the baby Jesus, which is, after all, the natural and expected response when confronted with deity, even if that deity is just a helpless child. Contrast their experience of Christmas with ours. For most of us, the Christmas season is characterized more by stress and anxiety than it is by joy and worship. We offer our gifts, not to God or to the needy in His name, but to people who don't really need anything. Rather than joy and wonder, for many people guilt is the primary emotion they experience during the Christmas season. We feel pressure when our neighbor's Christmas tree goes up before ours. We feel guilty when someone brags that they have finished their Christmas shopping when we've barely begun ours! A season that should be marked by joy and worship is characterized by anxiety, guilt and depression. Let's change that this year! Rather than focusing on the commercial, materialistic side of Christmas, let's determine to focus on the relational, spiritual side of Christmas. This Christmas, let's worship more, and spend less. Ok?

God created us in such a way that possessing material things will never satisfy the human heart. Only a growing personal relationship with God can truly satisfy. But the Bible teaches, and our experience verifies, that there is within our hearts a stubborn desire to possess and covet things. For many of us "Things" have become necessary to our happiness. Many of us are trying to find life and fulfillment through our "stuff". God's gifts have replaced God himself, and as a result, the whole course of nature is upset by this monstrous substitution. God's greatest gift to us is the gift of Himself (John 3:16; 6:35; Matthew 11:28-30). This holiday season, let's determine to worship more and spend less. Let's seek to find our satisfaction in Christ rather than in all those things that advertisers tell us we can't live without.

What does it look like to "delight yourself God" (Psalm 37:4)? We delight ourselves in God by contemplating God's greatness. When is the last time that you stopped to consider how awesome God really is? He created and sustains the universe (Genesis 1; Colossians 1:16-17). He is omnipotent (Jeremiah 32:17), omniscient (Isaiah 40:14), omnipresent (Psalm 139:8), holy (Isaiah 6:3), just (Deuteronomy 32:4), and sovereign (Isaiah 45:9-19). To delight in God involves not only contemplating God's greatness, but also pondering God's goodness. He is merciful and gracious (Psalm 86:15), gives good gifts to us (James 1:17), died for us on the cross (Romans 5:6), is forgiving (Ephesians 1:7), adopts us into his family (Romans 8:15), protects our salvation (Hebrews 7:25), he gives us his Spirit (Romans 8:9), promises to meet our needs (Philippians 4:19), responds to our prayers (Acts 12:5), he disciplines us when we sin (Hebrews 12:5-12), and works all things together for our good (Romans 8:28).

In Psalm 73 the writer confesses that he almost bought into the rampant materialism of his own culture. Like us, he too was tempted to define life in terms of his possessions. But as he entered the temple to worship he came to his senses. He realized that a man's life does not consist of his possessions, but rather by the richness of his relationship with God (Psalm 73:25-26). Paul said essentially the same thing in Philippians 3:8. Let's determine, at least in our homes, to make Jesus the center piece of Christmas. Let's distinguish ourselves this holiday season by our worship rather than by our consumption. This Christmas let's not allow ourselves to get caught up in all the anxiety that so often accompanies the commercial side of Christmas. In a word... Let's worship more and spend less this Christmas.

Talking To God About This Week's Message

"Heavenly Father, today I want to be a 'doer' of the Word, and not just a 'hearer'. Amen."

Suggestions for Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

"Five Question Bible Study" (see page below) is a simple way to study any passage.
We can use it to explore the Christmas Story...

Monday— Mark 1:1 & John 1:1-18

Tuesday— Luke 1:1-25

Wednesday— Luke 1:26-38

Thursday— Luke 1:39-56

Friday— Luke 1:57-80

Saturday— ***In preparation for worshipping your risen Lord tomorrow with your church family,*** study 1 John 3:16-18.

Need blank copies for doing more

"Five Question Bible Study"?

e-mail: Dan.Clement.TCC@gmail.com

Bible Text: _____

Date: _____



What idea particularly strikes me from this text? [Note in which verse(s) it is found.]



What question does this text raise in my mind—and how would **this text** answer it?



What about Jesus Christ—his character and/or his redemption—relates to this text?



What action must I take as a result of this text? Be concrete and specific.



With whom will I share what I learned from this text?