

Let Every Part of the Holiday Season Raise Your Mind to Heaven

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Hi, I'm Mallory Smyth, and I'm so grateful that you are joining me for this session on how God wants to use everything in the holiday season to call your heart to praise and worship Him. So let's start in a prayer.

Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord God, we just thank you that you create specific times of year where you call us to ponder your mysteries, all the more deeply, where you call us to think about who you are and what you've done for us in a new way. Lord, you know every person that is joining on this call, you know every person who they are, who you created them to be in a way that other people cannot know them.

And I just ask that you use this time to speak words to them that only you can speak. To give them comfort that only you know they need, to dispel lies and to bring about truth that helps them to know just how much they are loved and just how much you are worthy of all of their praise. We pray this all in your holy name, Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

A Christmas Without Jesus

So a few years ago, I walked into an old friend's house around Christmas time and her house was decked out in Christmas decorations. It was absolutely beautiful. Her tree was filled with all those little twirly things that you stick in, right? Her mantle was completely decked out. Beautiful stockings, presents perfectly wrapped, right? It looked like a Christmas commercial, except for the fact that if I didn't know that Christmas was about the birth of Jesus Christ, I would've had no idea that that's what we were celebrating, right?

She had snowmen and reindeer and Santa Claus and elves, but no sign of Jesus or a manger or wise men or angels. And as I walked away that night, I was saddened. And if I'm being honest, I was a bit judgmental because why are we celebrating Christmas in the first place? Why is it that we go crazy in the month of December? Why do we get time off from work? Is it just because we want to celebrate fictitious characters, right? That were made in 1950s movies, or is there something deeper? And it broke my heart that it seems like our culture moves forward forgetting that there is something deeper to celebrate here.

Only a few weeks later, I was driving through a Christmas light display and it was the same thing, right? There were Santa and elves and gingerbread men all lit up and there was no sign of the birth of the Savior of the world. And as that familiar feeling came back as that sadness, and yes, that like despairing judgmental-ness about our culture started to enter into my heart, I heard God's voice. I heard Him speak to my heart, to quell that sadness, to turn it into hope, and to

remind me that I don't actually have to be judgmental. And I heard it in the form of Psalm chapter 19.

Psalm Chapter 19

And so at the beginning of Psalm chapter 19, it says this. It says, ***“The heavens are telling the glory of God. And the firmament proclaims his handiwork, day to day pours forth the speech and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words. Their voice is not heard yet their voice goes out through all the Earth and their words to the end of the world”***

The heavens are telling of the glory of God, the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Creation is trying to call us, call our attention to God. And as I started to think about that, Psalm, Romans chapter eight also came into my head, which tells us that creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. Because creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God, right?

A Call to Prayer and Worship

Scripture tells us that all of creation cries out to the glory of God. It cannot help but cry out. That's what it does. That's why it exists. And so whenever we take a trip into nature, and it almost seems like that nature is ringing out, it is ringing out to tell us that God is absolutely magnificent. This was a wakeup call for me because yes, our culture could be reminded of its deep roots in Christianity.

We need to be reminded that Christianity is the reason that we do so much of these things, that so much of our world is special, but for those who believe in Jesus, everything should remind us of Him. Everything around us can be a call to prayer and worship, even those things that don't seem to have anything to do with him in the first place, right?

Why is it that our entire society goes crazy in December? Why is it that we put up the lights and celebrate shows that were made in the '50s and get together with family and bake more, right? Where everything is supposed to be magical. And the nostalgia for this idea that family can be perfect exists in all of our hearts, right?

Creation is telling us that something different is going on. It is calling our hearts to pay attention. And the thing that we are called to pay attention to is the fact that at this time, we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ, the word made flesh, entered into the human experience as a baby, grew up, lived a perfect life, and died so that we could live in relationship with God.

Christmas: A Season for Worship

Something is different in December, Advent is a time whenever we are called to slow down and to ponder the mysteries of the incarnation, but our culture makes that really hard, right? Right, there's so much to do. It gets so busy, the marketing machine comes at us and tells us to buy all of these things, right? We have to go to parties, we have to have family over, we have to cook more. Our schedules just get busier and busier. And while we may be called to say no to those things, and we probably should say no to some of them, we should probably try to clear our schedules just enough to where we don't lose the heart of this season.

I do not believe that we have to look at it as an impediment to our worship, because the fact is that we cannot get rid of the hustle and bustle in our lives, right? Presents have to be wrapped, parties must be attended, cookies must be baked, movies must be watched, like some of those things we just can't get rid of. And so instead of looking at them as the enemy, maybe instead we should look at them as an invitation to worship right where we are, right?

Corinthians 10:13

So how do we do that? How do we actually focus ourselves so much on the fact that everything cries out to the glory of God, that whenever we notice it around us, we cannot help but cry out to the glory of God, right? And maybe those moments drive us into silence. Those moments drive us to find time to be alone and to think about what God has done, right? The answer for us lies in one Corinthians 10:13. So ***“whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all of it for the glory of God”*** right? Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all of it for the glory of God, right?

And so what is the call? The call is to wake up and say, "God, I give you everything. And whether I am at the mall, where it's harder to think of you, right? Or I'm headed to the chapel where I'm going to ponder you. I'm going to let both of those things set my heart on you because there is a reason that this time of year is different."

I remember once Father Mike Schmitz saying that like creation must glorify God. It is involuntary. It just by its nature glorifies God. But that the only thing that God created that he didn't make automatically glorify Him is the human heart, right? He gave us freedom. He gave us the ability to choose whether we would join in with the rest of creation and sing praise and glory to Him. Or if we would go our own way, right? And choose not to glorify Him and serve our own desires, or just allow ourselves to get so overwhelmed by the environment that we're in, that we forget that we are called to worship Him at every moment, that we are called to cry out to His glory by our life.

Look For Him This Advent Season

Pray More Advent Retreat 2023 - Transcript

Jesus is the reason that December is special. All of the extra, all the time off, all the hurriedness and busyness really is a cry out for Him. And so over the next few weeks, I'm inviting you to look for Him in everything. If you are driving through a neighborhood that is beautifully lit up, right? Thank God that those lights exist because He came to this Earth and let it remind you that our God is the light of the world, right? And even the darkness is not dark for Him, right? If you are spending extra time with family, and maybe it's actually difficult, right? Maybe it brings about loneliness. Let it remind you that that desire for perfection, that desire for harmony, that all the commercials bring for us, remind us that God came so that we could actually have that perfection one day in heaven with Him, right?

We are called to enter into the beauty of advent, right? And our culture will always be at odds with us a little bit. But if we know Christ, we can put on a different lens and we can see Him in everything. And everything can become an invitation to worship, to ponder, and all of a sudden, everything around us starts to have a little bit more wonder to it.

Closing Prayer

We're going to take a minute, we're going to close in prayer. It's going to be a bit of an extended prayer, and we're going to pray through another verse of the Bible that reminds us that He is always with us and He's always around us. So let's close up.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Lord, you tell us in Acts 17:28, right? That ***“in you, we live and move and have our being.”*** I'm going to say it again. Acts 17:28 tells us, ***“for in you, Lord God, we live and move and have our being.”***

Lord, this is so easy to forget this. It is so easy to walk through our lives, especially when things get busy. And forget that you have made your presence available to us at every moment. That in you, we live and move and have our being.

Lord, you make that available to us in the Eucharist. When you come to dwell within us, you make that available to us through the presence of the Holy Spirit who never leaves. And if we have eyes to see and ears to hear, we can look at the truth of this life that you use everything in it, whether it's directly related to you or not, whether it's good in our eyes or not, that you use all of it to draw us towards you, to make us holy.

And so, Lord, I ask that you just etch this verse on our hearts, that in you, we live and move and have our being, and that as we go forth from this talk, as we walk out of this retreat, that we would have a renewed sense of the fact that you were always calling us deeper into the mystery.

The mystery that you came to save us, and then that began on Christmas night. And that you invite us in this advent season to let everything draw our attention to you, that we would join all of creation, that we would not hold our hearts back, but that we would give into the reality that we were made to glorify you. And that all of creation cries out to your glory.

Pray More Advent Retreat 2023 - Transcript

Lord, I pray that you would give us the discernment to know what to say no to during this advent. Where to clear our calendar, where to find silence, right? Where to maybe reject the busyness that is coming our way.

And I pray that you give us discernment for whenever we should. Just accept what has been placed in front of us and let it remind us to praise you for your great goodness and your glory, and for what you did for us as we approach Christmas morning. Amen.

The name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Thank you so much for joining.