



CAPTIVATING Thoughts

MERRY CHRISTMAS

From your friends at C2C

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All the Feelings by Kristi, Wildflower

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete."

John 15: 9-11 (NIV)

As the holiday season approaches, we can find ourselves in a state of sadness, depression, or even despair. Oftentimes the circumstances that we have endured becomes our focus during what is supposed to be the most joyous time of the year. Our mind races with thoughts of the death of a loved one, being disconnected or physically distant from our family, and feelings unworthiness.

If you are familiar with the character Charlie Brown, you know he expressed his feelings about Christmas to his friend Linus, on a Charlie Brown Christmas. He states, "I think there must be something wrong with me, Linus. Christmas is coming but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel. I like getting presents and sending Christmas cards and decorating trees and all that. But, I'm still not happy! I always end up feeling depressed."

Regardless of what narrative resembles your feelings around the holidays, the joy that the Word of God references is



not based on your current circumstances. Nor the situations that you have experienced that have brought you to extreme sadness. Remember that God sent his only begotten son to save the world. The ultimate sacrifice of Jesus dying on the cross created an everlasting covenant that washed away our sins. This selfless act also brought peace and restored the relationship between God and mankind. Joy was brought to the world and the earth received its King. Now every heart can prepare room to receive Jesus in their hearts.

Jesus will never leave or forsake you. Romans 8:38-39 states, *"For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus Lord."*

So during the holiday season and even as the new year starts, focus on the joy of the relationship that you have with Jesus. You have made great strides in your relationship with Christ. And some situations we need not to worry about, because they may or may not ever change. However, those very hard situations help us grow and increase our faith when we don't succumb. We may get weary in all that we have to endure, but Jesus loves us through our wounds and wants us to experience a joy that no one can take away. Keep pressing on and don't forget you have an irreplaceable role in His narrative, my beautiful princesses. ♥

“ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion! Shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious...”

Zechariah 9:9

“ Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!

II Cor. 9:15

The Illusion of the Perfect

by John Eldredge

Scrooge was haunted by the spirits of Christmas Past, Present and Future and it led to his redemption. I am haunted by the illusion of the Perfect Christmas. May it lead to mine.

How many cookies must I bake for my home to feel as sweet as a Bavarian Bakery?

How many rooms must I decorate with sprigs of evergreen and boughs of holly before a chorus of Fa La La La La's lighten every heart?

How do I think of, select, and wrap the perfect gift that conveys, "I see you. You matter. I've been paying attention"?

How many twinkle lights will fill my home with the Light I am after?

And how do I ward off the feeling that I am failing miserably to do any of this?

I don't know. You would think that after all these years I would have given up but I haven't. My longing to convey love is not diminished though the number of cookies I bake is. The number of rooms I decorate has lessened dramatically but my desire to recapture something of the holiness of Christmas this side of Paradise and make room for the tangible Presence of God has only increased.

How about you?

Here's an idea. Let's take the pressure off. Pressure kills. It kills relationships. It kills joy. It kills our ability to enjoy the partial that we are given to relish. It'll kill our Christmas celebrations. Pressure even numbs our awareness of the glory of Emmanuel – Christ with us. Pressure takes us out. And we want to be present – to offer the gift of our presence to those around us is actually the greatest gift we can give them. The loved ones in our lives don't want a marvelous gift from a harried and pressured giver. They want us. They

want our love given with a free hand that is an alluring fragrance of our Jesus.

Holidays – Holy Days - are not given to us to rise to the mandate of perfection but to rest and remember – to enjoy the gifts our holy God has given to us by his free hand and to receive his gifts with humbled awe and gratefulness. We can't wrap enough presents to respond in this way, we can only ask for the grace to wrap our hearts around this truth. God wants our hearts open and ready. He invites us to live from a place of trust and rest, not a place of pressure and demand.

We can demand so much of ourselves, can't we?

So let's just get it out in the open. No one's Christmas is going to be perfect. But perfection IS COMING. On that day our longings and desires will be met with a filling that is currently incomprehensible.

Our Christmas on this side will not be perfect but it can be holy. It can be glorious. It can be good. I'm being invited to lay down the illusion that I can pull this thing off. Instead of that pressure, I'm being invited to rest in the love of God and remember that he alone is perfect and he loves perfectly. This babe in a manger, this Lamb of God, this Lion of Judah, this God of angel armies, this Savior of the World has come. He is coming today.

And when he comes in all his glory, every dream will come true for the richest among us and the poorest. For the most healthy and the most infirm. For the most seemingly blessed and the most horrifically oppressed. Jesus is coming again. Justice is coming. Love has already won and on that final and first day of Ultimate Triumph no illusion will shadow our hearts. And so we wait eagerly as we hope earnestly.

We welcome you, Jesus. Into the depths of who we are. Into our celebrations. Into our Christmas day and into all our days. Into our hearts, our homes and our world. Oh come, oh come Emmanuel.