

## JOYFUL Series - Falling For Christmas

**It's easy to fall for the spirit of Christmas. And we all love it!**

We listen to carols that say: It's beginning to feel a lot like Christmas. It's the most wonderful time of the year.

We put up trees, we buy presents. **Some people decorate their houses with lights**, there are some really good ones by the way, and some really interesting ones! We work on Christmas sets at church, it looks nice and feels good!

We wish each other Merry Christmas, in the PC term: Happy Holidays. We create these surreal moments of joy.

As a Christian, As a Christ Follower, the battle is for our heart, our worship, and finding true joy

⇒ **Now I love Christmas**, I love all that goes with it. But often I need to almost pinch myself to be reminded that it's actually about Jesus.

That the presents, Father Christmas, Carols, Food, Holidays, etc..are not the main thing. **We have to know what we're up against.** Just about every advert, promotional Instagram post, Netflix Christmas movie (mostly cheesy) promises us a false reality. Yes there's a good feel around Christmas, and we love that feel.

**In fact, we start celebrating Christmas earlier and earlier** to extend the feeling. Shops are lambasted with decorations from October while that subliminal Christmas music seeps into our minds. We dream what it must feel like to have a white Christmas as those living in South Africa. For us, we love visiting family over Christmas, we love catching up, and that's important, but it can't be the main thing.

**I believe a question we should all ask ourselves is:**

- What do we truly want from this season? Do we want to allow God to change us through this amazing gift of Incarnation?
- Why do we put our hope in the season of Christmas? In the goodwill of people?
- **Deep inside**, we're all looking for eternal joy and purpose. And come Dec 26<sup>th</sup>, that circumstantial happiness often whittles away.
  
- The real good news of Christmas is summed up in one verse: Isaiah 9:6  
*"To us a child is born, to us a son is given" (Isaiah 9:6).*

I'd like to mention 3 areas that we can fall into a trap in

### 1) Falling for false HOPE

When we try and find the joy, the good within, It's easy to long for something that will never come. Why? Because we live in a fallen world.

Something is broken in all of us, all the way back from the fall. And it affects every part of our lives. I'm not advocating for us to remain in a place of depression because we're all sinners, but unless we can admit that we're sinful, we will never fully appreciate grace and forgiveness.

Brokenness is in the governments we run, the businesses we lead, the families we grow. We have no power to save ourselves.

### **Romans 3:21-26**

"But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."

⇒ Martin Luther saw this passage as the central point of Romans, in fact he saw it as the pinnacle point of the entire Bible

- **The Good News from this passage**, is actually bad news which turns into good news
- **Vs 24 is the hinge on which all of humanity turns.**

☉ **Story of me running 100 meters**, I always fell short, I was never going to hit the mark

☉ **It's like a game that you can't win. I have a friend who loves fast thinking games. I like Chess, I like Catan, I like to think it out and take my time.**

⇒ We need to consider our brokenness and sinfulness over this time. But instead of merely distracting ourselves with the lights and the tinsel and the trees — things which are not bad in themselves — If we're not aware of our sin, we will never be aware of our need for a saviour. But the motivation is one of love. Because he loved us

Tim Keller says: Fear-based repentance makes us hate ourselves, Joy-based repentance makes us hate the sin.

⇒ True hope is found when we realise our inadequacy and turn to Christ

## **2) Falling For False ANTICIPATION**

It's Bad news that makes the good news wonderful. The darker the room, the brighter the light appears.

**Christmas is built around anticipation.**

You roll out the lights outside, you put up the tree, you put presents under the tree...

**We need to rebuild anticipation.**

**As Christians** we believe that as the world anticipated Jesus first coming, we are now anticipate his second coming.

**I think the problem** in some way is that we try to try convince ourselves that we're having way too much fun for Jesus to return.

The jokes:

- Let me just get married first
- Let me just have kids first
- Let me just make it in my business
- Let me just see my grandkids

I don't think we begin to realise how good heaven really is. Being in the full manifest presence of God and in the complete absence. With all due respect, I think we'd give up anything on earth if we trully realised.

*2 Cor 4:18*

*"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." ... For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal."*

The problem with earthly Christmas, is that it's one day, often one meal, present that take 5 mins to open, and then it's over.

When it comes to finances, for those of us who are able to save for retirement, we can save for decades to ensure that we'll be ok for what 10, 20, 30 years. What do we invest into eternity?

Eternity with Christ is forever, let's anticipate eternity more often

### **3) Falling for False CONNECTION**

We all long to know and be known. 2 of our greatest desires.

The truth is that our deepest connection on earth, falls dismally short in comparison with our future connection and intimacy to God that we will enjoy.

*Phil 3:10*

*<sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.*

Amp says: [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly],

What does it mean for you to know God in a deeper way? Pause

**I want to introduce the idea of an dropping an anchor.** Within this seasons of commercialism and consumerism this Christmas season, in the hustle and bustle of buying and traveling and gathering, we need to drop an anchor. It's fine to celebrate Christmas, to sing carols, to open presents and to put up tree's. **It's fine when your anchor is secure.**

The anchor is our continual connection with Christ

- When your anchor is down, you find it easy to prioritise devotional time
- When your anchor is down, you're eternally thankful of God's gift to us
- When your anchor is down, you find complete joy in your walk with God
- When your anchor is down, you're aware of the daily promptings of the HS

Perhaps Christmas is about reflecting on Christ's vulnerability. This was we never lose track of our own brokenness and vulnerability.

### **Japanese Kintsugi Art - PICTURE**

This traditional Japanese art uses a precious metal – liquid gold, liquid silver or lacquer dusted with powdered gold – to bring together the pieces of a broken pottery item and at the same time enhance the breaks. The technique consists in joining fragments and giving them a new, more refined aspect. Every repaired piece is unique, because of the randomness with which ceramics shatters and the irregular patterns formed that are enhanced with the use of metals.

**There's a spiritual parallel** in that we need to stop covering up our past and brokenness. In Kintsugi art, it's the scars that become what to exhibit. It's the stories that go with the scars of how God came through, and his love and grace dominated our lives.

- © This coming Tuesday we're releasing our latest podcast, I decided to interview my best mate, Dave, who was visiting from PE. You know what I love about him is that he's so real and honest about the struggles of life and his own humanity. Take a listen or watch it on YouTube.

We're all building a life story, but it's the real and vulnerable stories that we can relate to most.

***The brokenness of our past is an integral part of our unique story and God's gloriously redemptive beauty***

What I love about the Bible is that it doesn't omit the characters weaknesses and their failures when it describes their victories. Just like in the art of kintsugi, the broken pieces weren't something to be thrown out, they were a part of the whole redemptive story

God never throws away the broken pieces of our lives; He redeems all of them.

**Why? Because of Jesus..Because God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whoever shall believe in him will not perish but inherit eternal life.**

God is building your life into a masterpiece, but it's a masterpiece of broken pieces that he has redeemed to make you whole.

## **CLOSE**

Tony Campolo tells about the time he was asked to speak at a Pentecostal college. Before the service, eight men had him kneel so they could place their hands on his head and pray. Tony was glad to have the prayer, but each of them prayed a long time, and the longer they prayed the more they pushed on Tony's head. And then they even seemed to wander in their prayers. One of the men didn't even pray for Tony, he prayed for some guy he was concerned about. He began to pray and said, "Dear Lord, you know Charlie Stoltzfus. He lives in that silver trailer down the road a mile. You know the trailer, Lord, just down the road on the right-hand side."

Tony wanted to interrupt and tell him that God already knew where the guy lived and didn't need directions, but he just knelt there trying to keep his head upright. The prayer went on: "Lord, Charlie told me this morning that he was going to leave his wife and three kids. Step in and do something, God. Bring that family back together."

With that, the prayer time ended and Tony went on to preach at the college chapel. Things went well and he got in his car and began to drive home. As he drove onto the Pennsylvania Turnpike, he saw a hitchhiker and felt compelled to pick him up.

Campolo said, "We drove a few minutes and I said: 'Hi, my name is Tony Campolo. What's yours?' He said, 'My name is Charlie Stoltzfus.' I couldn't believe it! I got off the turnpike at the next exit and headed back. He got a bit uneasy with that and after a few minutes he said, 'Hey mister, where are you taking me?' I said, 'I'm taking you home.' He narrowed his eyes and asked, 'Why?' I said, 'Because you just left your wife and three kids, right?' That blew him away. 'Yeah, yeah, that's right.' With shock written all over his face, he plastered himself against the car door and never took his eyes off me. Then I really did him in as I drove right to his silver trailer. When I pulled up, his eyes seemed to bulge as he asked, 'How did you know that I lived here?' I said, 'God told me.' (I believe God did tell me). When he opened the trailer door his wife exclaimed, 'You're back! You're back!' He whispered in her ear and the more he talked, the bigger her eyes got. I said with real authority, 'The two of you sit down. I'm going to talk and you two are going to listen.' Man, did they listen...that afternoon I led those two young people to Jesus Christ."

## **God can use anyone in any level of brokenness to bring about a miracle in any situation**

As I close, may our prayer and heartfelt desire be that instead of falling for the nice feelings of Christmas, we would fall for Jesus, that we would fall hopelessly in love with him. That we would seek him and know him intimately. May he soften our hearts, may we be thankful to him and never turn back.