

This Year, Unwrap Christmas

During the Christmas season, our faith intersects with the culture around us in a very grand way that doesn't happen at any other time of year. Through Christmas musicals, holiday decorations, caroling, Nativity scenes, special religious events and more we have opportunities to express our faith to neighbors and friends.

But sadly, much of the Christmas spirit is now routine, and across the country we've settled for mere holiday celebrations and focused more on the commercial side of the season. When my daughters were in public high school, they were constantly amazed at how few students knew what Christmas was actually about. I'm afraid our culture is rapidly becoming illiterate about the real purpose of the holiday.

Although the true reason for Christmas has taken a beating, it's far from gone, and this year we have the opportunity again to remind the culture what Christmas is all about. Here are a few tips about how you can do this.

1. Don't be afraid to express your faith. Whether in the community or public square, you can speak up and tell others about Christ. Recent court rulings about church and state have caused many Christians to shy away from anything remotely religious at Christmastime.

Your personal faith is something you have the right to express, and when you decorate your yard, go caroling, or send out cards, use those times to let people know the true story.

If you have questions about staging a major event on public property, ask a Christian attorney for advice or contact the American Center for Law and Justice at for information.

2. Be gracious when sharing your faith. Too many Christians become bullies when they're expressing their faith. Stop arguing with people and try developing relationships of compassion and trust with them.

Growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in the South, I didn't know anyone of a faith different from my own. Today I don't have to go far to meet people with a multitude of different religious beliefs. If I'm going to be an effective witness in today's world, then I have to begin with a gracious relationship and act out of genuine love.

3. Share with confidence and courtesy. This is a wise practice, especially when sharing your faith at your office or school. Be respectful of your employer's or teacher's time and do not hamper your witness by expressing your faith when you should be working or attending class.

The fine legal line about expressions of religious belief at our workplaces and public schools is often difficult to navigate, but in many cases people who crossed the line did it without asking for advice or counsel. Talk to the school principal or choir director and ask for their policy on singing Christmas carols at the school play. Or ask your boss if you can set a Nativity scene or another religious object on your desk.

I've discovered that when we approach people in a spirit of love, God often works in those situations for our good. And

even if your request is rejected, how you handle that rejection can sometimes be a greater witness than what you hoped to accomplish in the first place.

Finally, it's not Santa's fault that Christmas is a highly commercial holiday. Obviously he isn't the reason for the season, but don't rob your children of the joy of giving and experiencing the wonder and excitement of the big guy in the red suit.

Let's lighten up and enjoy the anticipation of the sound of hooves on the roof at midnight. But let's also never forget to teach our children, our grandchildren-and our culture-the story of how God gave the entire world His greatest gift.

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