

5 Reasons Not to Let Misguided Spirituality Steal Your Christmas

My family and I live in Christmas ground zero—Branson, Missouri. The glory and wonder of the Christmas season in this tourist destination starts mid-October, successfully washing out the darkness of Halloween, and ignites the entire region in red and green. As I gaze through the window at Branson's downtown Starbucks, where I'm writing this article, I can see a massive Christmas tree at Branson Landing on the shores of Lake Taneycomo and a huge crowd of people, many in their pajamas, at the Branson Scenic Railway depot waiting to board The Polar Express. The joy of Christmas has arrived!

We absolutely love viewing the 6.5 million lights at Silver Dollar City, one of the nation's premier Christmas destinations. Holiday stage shows are numerous along Highway 76. Christmas lake cruises, drive through trails of lights, carriage rides and much more help make experiencing Branson one of the nation's very best Christmas family traditions.

I can't imagine not being fully immersed in the wonder of Christmas, yet many Christians have decided to eliminate Christmas from their lives. Humbug!

I applaud Christians who want to live pure, holy lives, but eliminating Christmas is not the way to do that. Christmas is truly the most wonderful time of the year as we exalt Jesus and enjoy family in ways that cannot happen at any other time, in any other way. I'm absolutely convinced Jesus loves it when we have fun, laugh, enjoy each other and rejoice.

5 Reasons We Decided to Celebrate Christmas With

Abandon

1. Jesus

Amy, one of my boys, Parker, and I just returned from Orlando, including a day each at The Magic Kingdom and Sea World. Both places, most probably for the only time all year, exalted Jesus through music and productions. I was excited to hear songs like “O Come Let Us Adore Him” and “O Little Town of Bethlehem” joyfully playing as I waited for my (way too big) ice cream sundae in the Main Street ice cream parlor at the Magic Kingdom. I was even more excited to see a living nativity called “O Wondrous Night” being produced at Sea World! Of course, Silver Dollar City here in Branson is unashamedly Christian based. Their mission statement declares that all they do is done “in a manner consistent with Christian values and ethics.” The majesty of Jesus and his birth are proclaimed throughout the park. In fact, in their epic Christmas production, Dicken’s *Christmas Carol*, Scrooge has a powerful, tear-inducing salvation moment that was the actual cause of his reborn heart.

You simply cannot escape the truth that Christmas exalts the King. Do many (most) people ignore this and focus on less spiritual Christmas experiences? Yes. However, even as they do, the name of the Savior of the world is proclaimed every time they mutter the word *Christmas*. They can’t escape the Christmas music that proclaims the love of Jesus or the spirit of giving that Jesus best exemplifies.

Most Christians who argue against celebrating Christmas do so because of supposed pagan roots or because they have determined that it’s “not really about Jesus,” and should therefore be avoided.

First, Christmas is overwhelming about Jesus. However, that being said, if Jesus had to be the subject of everything we celebrate, we’d have to eliminate birthday parties, watching

fireworks on July Fourth, Veteran's Day, New Year's Day and most other holidays and special events. Wedding parties would cease. So would graduation parties and other celebrations.

Second, unlike Halloween which is still very much a pagan, demonic celebration that should be avoided by every believer, Christmas is currently a glorious celebration of Jesus, life and family.

We pay attention to current status, not origins. Anything can be redeemed. The current status of Halloween is a world-wide celebration of Satan. The current status of Christmas is a world-wide celebration of Jesus!

Additionally, if we eliminated everything from our lives that had pagan origins, we'd have a hard time functioning.

Did you know that the following have pagan origins?

- Wedding rings.
- Wedding ceremonies.
- Funerals.
- New Year's and New Year's Eve.
- Statues of people and animals.
- Money has pagan designs on it.
- The days of the week.
- The months of the year.
- Eye makeup.
- Wind chimes.
- Saying "Amen."
- Baby showers.
- Making your bed.
- Birthdays.

In the first-century Church, gentile Christians were told to avoid meat that had been sacrificed to pagan idols (Acts 15:29). However, Paul told the Corinthians that they could eat meat sold in the public market even though that meat may have been sacrificed to an idol (1 Cor. 10:25). He told them

not to eat in the pagan temple. In other words, he told them to avoid blatant paganism, but they did not have to superstitiously avoid everything that paganism might have touched at some time in the past. –

2. Family and Memories

I'm 49 years old, and I still have a hard time falling asleep on Christmas Eve. I remember the Christmas mornings that my parents made so exciting and special in the 1970s and 80s. We'd go to sleep with nothing under the tree ... and then magic happened. When we woke up several hours earlier than normal, a bright light from an archaic movie camera blinded our eyes as we walked down the hallway from our bedrooms toward the living room. As our pupils adjusted to the light, we would witness what happened overnight. Presents wrapped in black and white newspaper (to save money for gifts) filled the room!

I'll never forget the disk drive I got for my Commodore 64. My parents were Christmas geniuses. The hour or so of unwrapping gifts, one at a time, led to one final, climactic moment when my brother and I excitedly and nervously wondered if we would get what we had hoped for. The adrenaline was pumping. The mystery was almost too much to bear! As I unwrapped that final newspaper- covered present, my eyes popped open wide as I saw it. I got my disk drive!

Both of my parents are with Jesus now, and that disk drive is long gone. However, the memories that I have will live forever. I could share story after story from my childhood to current times that are so special to me. Spending time with Amy and the kids looking at Christmas lights or visiting Christmas villages and festivals, hustling and bustling at shopping malls and enjoying holiday attractions is precious beyond compare.

In fact, I'll never forget the time, just a handful of years ago, my mom and dad filled their living room with presents,

mostly for our kids. Skylar and Parker had wanted a Nintendo Wii, but Amy and I weren't in a position to spend that kind of money that year. The last gift the kids opened resulted in jumping and screaming for what seemed like forever. They got their Wii. They played it all day. Grampy, dressed in his mismatched pajama bottoms and green T-shirt, spent some quality time bowling on the Wii with the boys. It was funny. I'll never forget it.

My dad died shortly after that. That memory still causes a tear or two to this day.

3. Santa Claus and Gifts

I'll never apologize for loving gifts. I have so much fun buying gifts for Amy and the kids each year. I love receiving gifts too. I make out my list and email it to Amy early every November—and then modify it several times. It doesn't mean I'm carnal or materialistic. It's my love language. Some of you need to be delivered from condemnation that others have heaped upon you for enjoying gifts. Did the wise men not bring gifts to Jesus?

Celebrate the spirit of Saint Nick who selflessly gave. Amy and I share the truth about Santa with the kids so there's no confusion there, and then we all celebrate the season with passion.

The true story of Santa Claus begins with Nicholas, who was born during the third century in the village of Patara. At the time the area was Greek and is now on the southern coast of Turkey. His wealthy parents, who raised him to be a devout Christian, died in an epidemic while Nicholas was still young. Obeying Jesus' words to "sell what you own and give the money to the poor," Nicholas used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and the suffering. He dedicated his life to serving God and was made Bishop of Myra while still a young man. Bishop Nicholas became known

throughout the land for his generosity to those in need, his love for children, and his concern for sailors and ships. ()

There's just something about the process of hunting for the perfect gift for the ones you love, finding the right size and color, sneaking it home, wrapping it behind locked doors and placing it in the perfect spot under the tree.

There's also the excitement that I talked about in the last point. Gathering around the tree to take turns opening presents is an experience that can't be duplicated any other day of the year. When I unwrap something from one of my little ones, no matter if it's homemade or something from the dollar store, I come alive inside. The same is true for every other gift someone gives me, or for every gift I get to watch someone else open.

It's the perfect opportunity to become childlike, to stop "adulthood" for a while and just have fun.

After the gifts have been opened, the rest of Christmas Day is spent playing with new toys, playing new games, eating Christmas dinner and enjoying new things in a room littered with torn wrapping paper, boxes and glorious chaos!

4. Music, Food and Fun

Is there anything better than a fire in the fireplace as Christmas music fills the room? Or, watching Rudolph on TV as a family for the hundredth time? Amy's birthday is in November, and this year, I bought her tickets to two stage productions: *Miracle on 34th Street* and *A Christmas Story Musical*. We'll have a wonderful dinner each of those two nights, and then head out to the show for a couple hours of Christmas fun.

Again, I'm growing older, but I am often the first one in our family to start watching the old Christmas shows on TV. I'll

go to sleep with Christmas worship playing in the bedroom. Compared to the rest of the year, it's nice that so much of the entertainment the world is offering is clean, family-friendly and wholesome. Christmas does that.

5. Joy and Peace

As the wickedness of Halloween dissipates in the atmosphere, the Christmas season slows things down and permeates the atmosphere with peace and joy. It gets dark sooner, it's crisp outside, the snow starts falling and life just gets a little quieter. As the anticipation of Christmas morning is before us all, we don't have to wait to experience all Christmas has to offer. We can bundle up and walk through the snow or drive through the neighborhood looking at Christmas lights and decorations. We'll put up the tree, hang the ornaments and relax as a family.

It's no wonder that joy and peace come with the Christmas season. After thousands of years of hopelessness, a little baby was born in a stable in Bethlehem. He brought peace to the storm and joy to the world. He changed my life. I celebrate him on Christmas. The joy and peace in my heart are his gift to me.

Amy, the kids and I pray that you and yours have a truly wonderful, love-filled, joyous and peaceful Christmas. Enjoy your family, create memories and become childlike in this beautiful, wondrous season! {eoa}

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