

Is Your Joy Dependent on a Picture-Perfect Christmas?

As we opened boxes of **Christmas** decorations, the excitement was building. This year would be different. Instead of pain, sickness and uncertainty, we would enjoy assurance, peace and joy. I expected a Christmas that resembled blissful holiday commercials. Due to several years of high-risk pregnancies and babies in the hospital, finances were strained.

So we had been overjoyed the previous year to receive a large, artificial tree from my husband's parents, which replaced our "Charlie Brown" tree. I had been counting the days until we could decorate the new tree; this season symbolized a new beginning.

Not a Beauty

As my husband, Kevin, sat on the floor and unpacked the Christmas boxes, a look of worry came over his face. I peeked into the living room after placing a sheet of cookies in the oven and asked, "Is everything OK, Hon?"

He rubbed his nose and replied, "Oh yes, everything is great, Pumpkin Duck."

My husband does two things when he's in trouble: He rubs his nose and starts calling me sappy names.

I walked over to where he was sitting and asked again, "Is everything OK here?"

He looked up and said, "Well, it seems we have half of two different trees." Somehow during spring-cleaning, he must have thrown away half of the new tree and half of the Charlie Brown tree, which was even more pitiful without its other part.

I looked around the living room as our three little boys tied

themselves up in Christmas lights. I noticed a few broken bulbs at the bottom of the box. Then I smelled the cookies burning in the did other families manage to pull off the picture-perfect holiday? It seemed to be an elusive dream.

Tree in Progress

My husband was determined to make things right, and since he is a gifted craftsman, he turned to his tools. In fact, he had visions of making a tree better than anything we could buy at the store – it would even rotate on a custom tree stand! In a matter of minutes, tools covered the living room floor. Kevin turned up the music and got to work.

Nighttime came, and our floor was still covered with branches, tools and sawdust. I kissed my husband and said, “Let’s go to bed, Honey. You’ve worked so hard, but we can let it go. We don’t need a tree this year.”

I went to bed thinking he would soon follow. But when I rolled over in the middle of the night, he was not there. I walked into the living room to see him on the floor holding the control to the lights like a boy with a remote control car. He stared up at his creation with wonder. I crawled into his lap and shared his amazement. Standing proudly in front of us was a mediumsized, full, beautiful Christmas tree.

Reason for Joy

My husband wrapped his arms around me, and we chuckled as we recalled the day’s events. Then we recounted all that was going right in our life. We had three precious babes sleeping down the hall. We had a roof over our heads. Most of all, we had access to joy whenever we had the faith to lay hold of it.

Isn’t it amazing how much stock we put into “the season”? In other words, if we have a year when work is too busy, finances too tight or health too frail, we say things like, “I don’t have much Christmas spirit this year.” Our focus shifts too easily to what is going on with us. How fragile we’ve become!

As a result, our emphasis on **Jesus** and the indescribable gift He provides for every season fades. Even if all our presents don't line up in a row, we have a reason for **joy**. **Christ** came to give us a glimpse of glory, to bring peace and to save our souls.

Next year will bring new circumstances that threaten to interrupt our hope and steal our joy. Whether we are in a season of comfort or one of struggle, we must remember: Peace came to earth and, as a result, joy came to reside in our hearts forever. That's much better than putting our hopes in half a Christmas tree.

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