

Stop Whining About the 'War' on Christmas

This year I am celebrating Christmas like I always do: I hung a pine wreath on my front door, put fake candles in my front windows, displayed a manger scene on my coffee table, sang Christmas carols at church on Sunday, purchased gifts for my family at local shops and said "Merry Christmas"—with a big smile—to every store clerk I met. Many of them said "Merry Christmas" back, and nobody frowned or called the cops on me.

I also purchased U.S. postage stamps that feature an image of the three wise men following Bethlehem's star. And the U.S. Postal Service delivered my Christmas cards without opening them to check for religious messages.

Many people in my neighborhood have lighted manger scenes in their front yards and no one has been jailed. Hundreds of thousands of churches will host special Christmas services this week without any harassment from the government. Many Christmas movies including *The Nativity Story* will air on cable networks this week, and the FCC will not censor any of the programming.

In spite of what you may have heard from some nail-biting naysayers, Christmas is still alive and well—and legal—in the United States.

Yes, I know the ACLU has fought to keep manger scenes off some government properties. Yes, I know some schools have told teachers to stage "holiday" plays with no specific songs about the baby Jesus. But before we call this a "war" on Christmas, let's consider what it's like for our Christian brothers and sisters in other parts of the world who don't share our legal blessings.

Did you know that 75 percent of the world's population lives

in countries that do not enjoy religious freedom? Consider what it's like to celebrate Christmas in these five nations:

1. North Korea. Christmas celebrations aren't allowed in North Korea, the most repressive government on earth. The regime of Kim Jong-un forbids Bibles, Christian meetings, missionary activities and even Christmas trees. Pastors there have been thrown in prison camps or tortured to death. A brave believer named Brother Simon recently told Open Doors that the miracle of Christ's birth is celebrated only "in the heart of the Christian" in this dark place.

"For fear of retribution it is necessary to keep your faith hidden from neighbors," Brother Simon said. "It is sometimes possible to hold a meeting in remote areas with a group of 10 to 20 people. Very occasionally, it is possible for Christians to go unobtrusively into the mountains and to hold a 'service' at a secret location."

2. China. Christianity is growing rapidly in China, and some observers believe there are already 100 million believers there. But the government routinely raids or closes churches and arrests pastors, and a large church in Wenzhou was bulldozed in May because it was "too large" and "built illegally," according to the government propaganda department. Christmas has become a popular secular holiday in China, but some Chinese intellectuals have warned that Christmas should be banned because of its harmful Western influence.

3. Syria. There are 45 churches in the Syrian city of Aleppo, but most stand empty today because of the war that has torn this country apart, killing almost 200,000 people. Half the Christians in the city have fled to neighboring countries, Europe or the United States. Bishop Antione Audo told *The Telegraph* this week that believers won't have big Christmas meals this year because they have no money, and they can't have Christmas services at night because it's too dangerous to be on the streets. "Everybody is tired," the bishop said, "but

everybody is doing what they can to live, looking for the light coming from heaven, not from earth.”

4. Pakistan. The world cringed this month when Taliban terrorists barged into a school in Peshawar, Pakistan, on Dec. 16 and killed 132 children in an effort to inflict revenge on the Pakistani army. As a result of the bloody massacre, the Christian minority has announced they will not celebrate Christmas this year. They will pray and mourn for the parents whose kids were shot with automatic rifles. Christians are a persecuted minority in Pakistan—their properties are vandalized, their women are abducted and raped, and they all face discrimination in the workplace—yet this Christmas they chose to show solidarity with those who are grieving for lost loved ones.

5. Iran. The population of Iran is 98 percent Muslim, yet, ironically, many Iranians are buying Christmas trees and setting up manger scenes because they are intrigued by the Christian holiday. The government has not cracked down on this trend yet, but police are still arresting pastors and closing house churches. In 2012, Pastor Saeed Abedini was jailed for planting a network of churches. He recently penned a letter about the first Christmas from his prison cell in Karaj, Iran:

“Why did God choose [for Jesus] to be born in a manger in a stable, which is very cold, filthy and unsanitary with an unpleasant smell? Why did [His] birth have to be in such a way that it was not only hard physically, but also socially? It must have brought such shame for Mary and her fiancé that she was pregnant before marriage in the religious society of that time. Dear sisters and brothers, the gospel is not only the story of Jesus, but it is the key of how we are to live and serve like Jesus.

“We should be able to tolerate the cold, the difficulties and the shame in order to serve God. We should be able to enter into the pain of the cold dark world. Then we are able to give

the fiery love of Christ to the cold, wintry manger of those who are spiritually dead. It might be necessary to come out of the comfort of our lives and leave the loving embrace of our family to enter the manger of the lives of others, such as it has been for me for the third consecutive Christmas. It may be that we will be called fools and traitors and face many difficulties, but we should crucify our will and wishes even more until the world hears and tastes the true meaning of Christmas."

Let's put things in perspective. There may be isolated people in our government who hate Christmas, but this hardly constitutes a "war." We are still the freest people on earth when you view life from our Iranian brother Abedini's cold prison cell. Let's stop whining about our puny little problems and pray for those who are truly persecuted.

J. Lee Grady is the former editor of Charisma. You can follow him on Twitter at [leegrady](#). He is the author of several books including *The Truth Sets Women Free* (Charisma House.) You can learn more about his ministry, *The Mordecai Project*, at [.](#)