

THE HERALD

Newsletter of the Orrville Grace Brethren Church

Make This December Different

By Paul David Tripp

I love the sights, sounds, colors, and tastes of Christmas. I enjoy the gifts, decorations, and delicacies unique to December as much as anyone. You could say that Paul Tripp goes “all out” this month! It’s innocent in many ways, but perhaps I love it too much; or, maybe I enjoy this holiday for some of the wrong reasons.

If you pay attention to the messaging of our culture, Christmas has become a season focused on the acquisition of created “stuff.” Isn’t that a blatant contradiction to the gospel message? The glory of Advent is that the Creator himself becomes a man to rescue us from our bondage to the creation!

Yet here we are, indulging in Christmas in a way that reveals our hearts are still prone to worship and idolize the created. We’ve turned the message of Christmas on its head, which once again exposes how much we need the daily rescue of the Savior.

Here are some practical tips to help you and your family re-focus your attention on the real reason we should celebrate Christmas: the incarnation of Jesus Christ.

Start early. You can’t start early enough or

tell the Christmas story often enough. Consumerism and self-centeredness have been preached at us for months already. Don’t wait until Christmas Eve to talk about our need for the birth of Christ.

Stay focused. Your calendar will be loaded with exciting activities and parties this month. Enjoy them, but before you know it, a week could fly past, and you may have forgotten entirely to meditate on Christ. So be quick to return to the gospel story at every opportunity, every day.

Read Christmas-related Scripture. The Tripp family used to memorize and recite Luke 2 together every Christmas. This planted into our brains the beauty of the coming of Jesus as our Savior. Don’t forget Old Testament passages that point to the arrival of Christ too.

Go and see a performance of Handel’s Messiah. No single piece of music more powerfully demonstrates the need for Jesus to come, how he came, and the consequences of his coming on our lives. I have been going since I was a little boy, and I can’t recommend a better annual tradition to remember the beauty and glory of the coming of Jesus than this.

Emphasize the spiritual over the material. Look for opportunities to embed the Advent story everywhere, particularly if you have children. Two metaphors that you can use are:

Gifts: While shopping for, requesting,

and giving gifts, remember that Christmas is about one Gift. But on the first Christmas, something radical happened: The Gift was the Giver.

Decorations: While decorating, remember that we will always be tempted to “decorate” our lives with beautiful things that we hope will satisfy us. Christmas is about the birth of the only One who can fulfill our longing hearts.

Look for opportunities to give and serve. Christmas is primarily a consumer-centric holiday: what can I ask for, what can I get, what parties can I go to, what delights can I taste and see. Yet, let us never forget that Christ gave up everything to serve and minister to others at Advent. What if you made a new tradition to give this holiday season?

We can do so much more than just giving people presents from their wishlist. Identify someone in need, and identify someone lonely. Jesus came because God cares about isolated, desperate, lonely people, and so should we. Find opportunities to give these people gifts—not merely physical items, but the gift of your time, presence, and encouragement, mainly using hospitality and a meal.

The birth of Christ is the ultimate solution to the isolation and loneliness that began in the Garden of Eden. So, this Christmas, incarnate that love of Jesus. If you do, this holiday will be rich with spiritual blessing—much richer than any created “toys” can provide!

This content was originally posted by Paul Tripp on www.paultripp.com

Spiders

By Pastor Del Miller

My wife and I walk early in the morning for about 3 miles, sometimes before the sun is up. On My 31, 2018 we walked a little later than usual. On our return trip, as the sun began to climb over the low clouds, we saw a young, 7 or 8 year old boy, wearing red shorts and a football jersey coming out a long driveway, on foot, carrying a white jug with a coiled hose attaching it to a sprayer handle. As we walked toward him, we could see him begin to aim the sprayer nozzle at the black mailbox at the end of the lane. He sprayed the front, the back and even the post as we kept coming up the road. When we were 20 feet away, we called out “good morning” to him. He greeted us in response and we slowed our pace a bit.

My wife asked his name and he answered “Ryan.” He kept on aiming and spraying what looked like soapy dishwater as he talked to us. “What are you spraying,” my wife asked. “Home Defense,” he replied, motioning to the bold label on the jug in his left hand, “there’s a spider in there and all the girls are afraid of it.” He did look like he was on defense all right. Even the number 24 boldly displayed on the front of his football jersey could make one think of a linebacker ready to defend on a 4th and 1 situation. My wife, who believes that the only good spider is a dead spider, inched a little closer as young Ryan opened the mailbox door. “There he goes,” he exclaimed, as my wife who had

half expected a tarantula to come forth, looked hard to spot the unwelcome mailbox invader. A small grey spider skittered out the door and vanished quickly amid the shower of suds as linebacker Ryan blasted away at his quickly moving target. "My sister screams when she sees one of those," he offered. "You keep up the good work," my wife cheered as we started to resume our walk. "You protect the ladies from those spiders."

We resumed our walk and Ryan kept on shooting streams of "Home Defense" at any part of the mailbox and post that was not yet thoroughly doused. About a 10th of a mile down the road we looked back and he was gone. We chuckled as we concluded that he must have run out of spray.

Here was a good example of someone defending his family in a small way. His determination and zeal were so very cute but it was also very commendable. A wise parent had sent him to do a work of defense and compassion aimed to both help his mother and sisters and to help him realize that he has an important role to play in guarding and defending against danger.

That day he saw a menace to the postal service and his family. He hosed it down and won a fairly easy battle. It was a good start for a young boy. Someday he will find out about other battles that can be won, which will require much more than squeezing a spray bottle.

"Home Defense" may be the name of an insecticide but it should also be a goal of ours as we guard against many varied attacks from the enemy of our souls.

There needs to be much defense of our souls, our homes and our marriages.

We need to guard against "spiders of the mind." "Spiders of the mind" are those invaders with negative impact that gain entrance into our minds through very small openings. The ever present spider of pride, the demanding spider of selfishness, the sneaky spider of discontentment and the poisonous spider of resentment are some of the spiders that will try to invade your mind.

When a spider gets into your house there is not a great deal of thought given as to how you will deal with it. They are generally eliminated as soon as possible with whatever means is available. Most people have a policy of zero tolerance when it comes to spiders. We should have zero tolerance with spiders of the mind.

When the ever present spider of pride starts to spin a web in your head, stamp it out with a dose of humility from the Lord. When the demanding spider of selfishness creeps into your thoughts, eliminate it with caring and giving to others. When the sneaky spider of discontentment starts working on you by comparisons to others and grumbling about your circumstances, come down hard on it by thanking God for all He has done for you. When the poisonous spider of resentment urges you to hold a grudge and not forgive others, remember how much God has forgiven you.

Overcome those evil spiders of the mind with good and the truth of God's Word. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21)."

FUNNIES

The new preacher at Gulch Community Church was so nervous about delivering his first sermon that he'd not gotten much sleep for several nights. Matter of fact, he was so tired he could barely make it up the steps to the pulpit. Fortunately, he found his text and began preaching. But nervousness soon overtook him, and the outline flew right out of his mind.

Now, in Bible school he'd been taught that if a lapse of memory occurs, it is wise to repeat your last point. And so he did. "Behold," he quoted, "I come quickly," but his mind was still blank. He tried one more time, still no memory of what was to come next. Another attempt, but no results.

Finally he stepped way back, made a lunge toward the pulpit, shouted out, "Behold, I come quickly," tripped, and fell into the lap of a little old lady in the front row. Flustered and embarrassed, he picked himself up, apologized profusely, and started to explain what had happened.

"That's all right, young man," said the kindly old lady. "It was really my fault. You warned me three times that you were on your way down here. I should have just gotten out of your way."

 The best way for a stay-at-home mom to get a few minutes to herself at the end of the day is to start doing the dishes.

The young bride called her mother, sounding discouraged. "I don't think I'll ever get these flowers planted," she moaned. "It says to plant in full sun, but it's been cloudy for four days."

A three-year-old walks past with a hammer. His father asks, "So, what are you going to make?" The son answers, "Noise."

During the pastor's closing prayer, one Sunday morning, there was a loud whistle from one of the back pews. Gary's mother was horrified! She pinched him into silence and after church asked, "Gary, whatever made your do such a thing?"

Gary answered soberly, "I asked God to teach me to whistle—and He just then did!"

The pastor was invited over for dinner and asked to lead in prayer. After a brief prayer, Little Freddie said approvingly, "You don't pray so long when you're hungry, do you?"