

Under the lens

Shift perspective and rediscover the joy of Christmas

BY GARY R. ALLEN

“And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.”
Luke 2:8,9 (NIV)

Christmas morning, 6 a.m. The phone rang.

Jan’s voice trembled.

“Pastor, can you come over? Tim is dead.”

I quickly drove to their home.

Tim, Jan and their two preschool boys had attended church a few times during the past couple of months. They spent Christmas Eve with family and arrived home well after midnight. Jan put the boys to bed and went into the kitchen. Tim had been drinking heavily and was passed out on the floor. Jan proceeded to bed alone. Around 5 a.m. she awoke to discover Tim never came to bed. She went to the kitchen. Tim had choked to death.

Over the next several weeks before Jan moved away to be near her family, we worked intently to help her deal with Tim’s death and help the boys adjust to life without their father. Jan struggled with guilt. She had left Tim on the floor that night. It didn’t relieve her to know she could never have moved him by herself.

For Jan and the boys that Christmas was a nightmare. But Jan discovered God’s peace and presence. Over time, she and her boys rebuilt their lives without Tim.

Christmas is supposed to be about the joy of Jesus’ birth and the joy of His life-transforming power. All too often, however, life’s grief and pain intrude. The death of a loved one, the breakup of a marriage, a job loss or other financial crisis — none of life’s setbacks will automatically bypass you just because it’s Christmas.

In response, you may want to withdraw from the Christmas season and avoid the memories of the past and the joys of the present. You fear interaction with others and may at times even feel panic at being with others.

The shepherds dealt with fear that first Christmas. In fact, they were terrified. The first thing the angel said to them was, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy” (v. 10). God understands your fears and sorrow. He desires to speak the good news of hope and peace into your life.

The angel immediately took the focus off the shepherds. They and their fears were not under the lens; the focus moved to a “heavenly host ... praising God” (v. 13) and announcing God’s gift to the world in the form of Baby Jesus.

In a continuing echo of the angels’ proclamation, the local church family expresses God’s presence and peace here on earth. In this supernatural body of Christ you can experience comfort and encouragement as you worship, pray and interact with other believers.

The shepherds’ fear gave way

to joy, and they desired to “go ... see this thing that has happened” (v. 15). When God alleviates your fear and inspires you with His presence, you can move beyond your fear, grief and pain into positive, productive actions. What steps can you take this Christmas season to live above your pain? Here are a few suggestions:

- Ask God to help you honestly face your sorrow, pain, anger and fear.
- Be willing to listen to God speak peace into your life in prayer, through His Word and through the lives of Christian friends.
- Determine to make Christmas special for yourself and for your family in spite of circumstances.
- Find others who need your help (perhaps others who are grieving) and invest in them. So often, in the midst of our own pain, our greatest comfort comes as we shift our attention from ourselves to that hurting person within reach.

Christmas does not come with a trouble-free guarantee. But in the midst of your pain, the angels’ “good news of great joy” still rings true. Christ’s birth, death and resurrection are the greatest evidence in the universe of God’s love focused on you. You’re under His lens. Is He within your view? **tpe**

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