

"A Charlie Brown Christmas" was the first "Peanuts" animated TV special. I can remember as a kid waiting impatiently for that once-a-year chance to see this CBS special at Christmas time. Today, with the wonder of VHS, you can watch it any time you want.

And I still enjoy watching it today. It's a classic holiday favorite. It's about Charlie Brown of course. Distressed by the commercialism he sees around him, he tries to find the true meaning of Christmas. And with the help of Linus—and his Biblical exposition from the Gospel of Luke—Charlie Brown helps the gang (and even Snoopy) learn what the season is all about.

This "Peanuts" episode is all about Charlie Brown's search—for a decent Christmas tree and for the true meaning of Christmas. And if you think about it, we spend most of our Christmas season searching too—searching for the perfect gift, searching for bargains, searching for a parking spot.

To be honest, I spend almost every day searching for something. Actually, I have a disease. It's known as F.M.S. ("Frequent Misplacement Syndrome"). Does anyone else suffer from this? It attacks the area of one's brain that has to do with memory and common sense. And it causes one to misplace or lose things on pretty much a daily basis.

I am constantly looking for things that I have lost. It seems, not a day goes by that I am not searching for my wallet, or my car keys, or my children at the mall!

You can ask my wife this, I have a daily ritual of leaving the house, saying goodbye to

everyone, giving out kisses to family members. And then I walk out the door. And it never fails I always remember something that I forgot. One day it's my keys, the next day it's my wallet, or it's my backpack, or my sunglasses. I almost always walk back in the door to get what I forgot and then I have to do the whole goodbye thing and kisses all over again.

I'm not kidding when I say this is a disease. The reason my hair is prematurely grey is because I drive myself crazy. And this has been going on for years. I haven't changed much. I am always searching for something I've lost or misplaced.

Quick story: A few years ago, my wife, Danette, left town for the weekend. And just after she left I lost my set of keys. I couldn't find them anywhere. This was on a Friday. Fortunately, we have a spare car key at home, so I was able to drive around and run errands and do what I needed to do until my keys showed up. But I searched all over the house that weekend, I checked every coat pocket, every drawer, every nook and cranny of the house and couldn't find them. I was convinced they were lost, stolen, the dog ate them, or they had literally dematerialized!

But on the way to church Sunday morning, a funny thing happened. You know, the Lord has a sense of humor—don't you? On my way to church, I was discouraged, I was feeling sorry for myself. And as I drove east down the street, early that Sunday morning, the sun was just coming up over the clouds on the horizon and it was a gorgeous sunrise. Now I don't know about you, but a beautiful sunrise or sunset always makes me think of God.

(Usually, it's a beautiful sunset, because I don't get up early enough to see too many sunrises).

Anyway, on this day—it was a sunrise. And that bright sun peeking over the horizon, made me think of God. And at that moment I realized—I needed prayer. I needed to pray that God would help me find my keys. I hadn't done that yet. All that weekend, I never once thought of asking for God's help. So that's what I did. I was driving so I didn't close my eyes and pray, but I just said a quick prayer and said, "God, I don't know where my keys are at but You do. Would you please help me find them?"

As soon as I said, "Amen," the sun suddenly became very bright. And being low on the horizon, it was shining right in my eyes. And since I'd forgotten my sunglasses, I reached up to pull the sun visor down to shield my eyes. And as I did...CHING! PLOP! My keys fell right in my lap!

I kid you not. I am not making this up. I started laughing out loud. It was an answer to prayer that literally fell right into my lap within seconds after I prayed to find my keys. God's got a sense of humor. My point is, not to reveal how absent-minded I am, but to point out that **all of us are searching for something**.

The sermon series I'm taking you through is titled: **"The Christmas You've Always Longed For"** And today, I want to ask the question: **"What Will You Find At Christmas?"**

Let me just say right up front, you can only find something, if you actively search. You don't find things by accident very often. No matter what you're looking for: What you find, is normally the end result of a search that you embark upon.

Many people, at the very first Christmas, didn't find anything. They missed Christmas because they were too busy. They were looking for other things. The politicians missed the first Christmas. The innkeeper missed the first Christmas. Even the religious leaders missed it. They were looking at or looking for other things.

The only people who enjoyed the very first Christmas, 2000 years ago, were the people who were looking for it.

Luke 2 records these words: *"The angels told the shepherds, 'You will find the baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.' And the shepherds said, 'Let's go and see!'"* They found Jesus because they said "let's go" and began to search. They were seeking Him.

Later on, another group—the wise men—found Jesus because they were seeking Him.

They said, *"Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east, and we've come to worship Him."* The wise men were paying attention and their curiosity led them to seek Christ.

And there is irony in this story. The Jews who had for many years announced that they were awaiting the Messiah, were clueless to His coming. The Jews who were considered God's "chosen people" missed the signs. The religious experts, the theologians, the devout—they missed it. But these "foreigners"—the Magi—saw it, understood and responded.

The parallel for us is that we too can be so wrapped up in the trappings of the season that we miss the Christ child. We can be so familiar with the events and traditions of Christmas that we run on "auto pilot" and

never pause to think about the events in Bethlehem.

That's why I ask you this morning: **What are you going to find this Christmas?** Well, here's a hint.

The Bible says, *“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”*

You see, in our society today, everyone is looking for something. You may not realize it, but there's a growing emphasis on seeking spiritual truth. There's a whole ton of research showing that Americans are as religious as ever—perhaps more than ever. Of course the religious pursuits of Americans may not be Christian pursuits, there is no doubt that people are seeking spiritual answers. They're searching for something more than what this world has to offer. They're looking for meaning, purpose, and knowledge.

And that's what Christmas is all about. Jesus came to earth to clear up the confusion. There's no better time than Christmas to become a seeker like the wise men were. Wise people still seek Christ.

In fact, as you seek God this Christmas, He wants you to find Him. And there are three specific things that you find in Christ if you seek hard enough. You can have these gifts for yourself if you seek after them and simply ask God for them.

In your search for Jesus...

1. You Can Find Forgiveness.

In the book of Isaiah (I want you to turn there). In chapter 9 there is a well-known passage of prophetic Scripture that describes who this

child, born in the manger really is. Turn to Isaiah 9, and listen as I read verse 6:

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”

If you look at what Isaiah says the Messiah is to be known as, the first two things that he mentions is that He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, and Mighty God. I think these two names by which Jesus is known, are a perfect description of someone who offers forgiveness.

Now my wife is a counselor. She has a Master's degree in counseling psychology. And as I think about what she does as she works with her clients, I asked myself: “What is it that makes a good counselor? Of course, there's the obvious: you have to be a good listener, you can't be judgmental, you have to give good advice—and Jesus does all those things.

But a good counselor does more than that. For help, I went to the local expert, and I asked my wife, what are the most important things for you to do as a counselor?

You know what she said? She said, **“A good counselor has to prove to their client that it is safe for them to tell their story.”** I turned into the analyst at that point and said back to her: “That's interesting, talk about: safe.” She explained that: **“Counseling is more than just solving their problems but getting to know your client. It means being approachable.”**

Folks, I think that is one of the greatest qualities of Jesus: He is approachable. Which is something that goes against many people's idea of how we are to relate to God. Think about it. In most religious traditions FEAR is

the primary emotion when one approaches God. Even the Jews associated fear with worship. Philip Yancey explains it very well in his book *The Jesus I Never Knew*...

The burning bush of Moses, the hot coals of Isaiah, the extraterrestrial visions of Ezekiel—a person “blessed” with a direct encounter with God expected to come away scorched or glowing or maybe half-crippled like Jacob. These were the fortunate ones: Jewish children also learned stories of the sacred mountain in the desert that proved fatal to everyone who touched it. Mishandle the ark of the covenant, and you died. Enter the Most Holy Place, and you’d never come out alive.

But Jesus is different. He’s approachable. In Jesus, God had a way of relating to human beings in a way that did not involve fear. The new approach—the New Covenant instituted by Jesus Christ was an approach that did not emphasize the vast gulf that separated God and man, but instead would bridge that gulf and allow us to know God to approach him without fear.

That’s why Jesus is a Wonderful Counselor. We see it in the way he lived his life and how he related to people. He got in touch with people’s hearts, with their pain. And he touched people—lepers, the demon possessed, prostitutes, tax collectors—in a loving and compassionate way He physically reached out and touched people that society said were untouchable, unclean, and unworthy. But Jesus ministered to them. When you approached Jesus—you felt safe.

But you know what? There’s one thing that sets Jesus apart from every other counselor, therapist, or psychologist who’s ever lived. As the prophet Isaiah tells us, he is also the Mighty God.

And because He is God he can offer forgiveness. No human counselor, no matter how good they are can offer that. They can offer advice, they can offer empathy, comfort, compassion, and all the rest. But no human being can offer forgiveness from sin. Only God can do that. Only a Mighty God—Jesus Christ, can forgive sin.

So in your search for Jesus this Christmas, understand that: You can be forgiven. That’s the most priceless gift you can get—the gift of a clear conscience. You can’t buy that at Neiman-Marcus or Sharper Image. It’s priceless. Yet Jesus Christ—the Mighty God, offers it to you at Christmas time (and every other time of the year as well). To have your past forgiven, wiped clean, you can start over, brand new—that’s good news! It’s GREAT news—forgiveness.

The second thing you find in your search for Jesus is this...

2. You Can Find Peace Of Mind.

Peace is a word that our world uses a lot but the world doesn’t have the foggiest idea what it’s like to experience real peace. For many, peace of mind means drinking enough until I’m so drunk that I’m numb and I no longer feel the pain anymore and I’m at peace.

For other people it means hopping from one relationship to the next hoping that someday, somebody will fill the void in my life. And they don’t. They never do.

For some it means being busy and staying busy all the time so at night I kind of collapse into bed so I don’t have to think because any time I’m quiet, those haunting thoughts, and fears and sense of loneliness come caving in on me and I don’t like that feeling.

For other people it means becoming a workaholic and over achieving so I can get all

these accolades and rewards of success to prove to the world, "I'm somebody!" But inside I'm thinking, "Who am I kidding? I have no life outside my job."

For other people it's trying some new age gimmick, sitting in a lotus position and contemplating the mysteries of the universe and chanting "Ahhhhmmmm." That's not peace of mind.

Look again at Isaiah 9:6. The verse says that the Messiah—Jesus, will be called the Prince of Peace. Real peace of mind is having a relationship with Jesus Christ, God's Son, and becoming friends with Him. Real peace is knowing that no matter what I do, God will never stop loving me. And He will never leave me by myself. He'll always be with me.

Real peace means no matter what happens in the future, I know that God is going to give me the strength to handle it. Real peace is living by God's word, the Bible, so I can avoid a lot of the needless hurts and hang ups and habits that mess up my life. That's what Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and do in your life.

But there are three things I can tell you that will rob you of your peace. These are the three great destroyers of peace of mind.

First, of all...

Guilt – You don't have to walk out of here with guilt. When you've got a guilty conscience, it's hard to live life with any sense peace in your heart or mind. And what God says is: "I sent a Savior to wipe away your sins so you can be forgiven". You can have a clear conscience. Like when you shake an etch-a-sketch and all that junk is cleared away—you can be clean. Secondly...

Grief – If the truth were known, some of you are in major pain right now. Christmas time

brings up all kinds of hurtful memories. You're grieving the loss in your life: the loss of or a parent or spouse who abandoned you or a divorce you went through or a death of a spouse or child. You have grief and that robs you of joy and peace of mind. If that's the pain you're carrying, I'm sorry about your loss. I really am.

But more than that, God cares about your hurt. He sees it, He knows it, and you were never meant to carry that grief all on your own. Never! God says you are to cast all your cares upon Him because He will care for you. (1 Peter 5:7) Do that today and receive the gift of peace. Cast all your burdens on the Lord. And third...

Grudges – That's being resentful. We feel guilty when we hurt others. We feel resentful and hold a grudge when others hurt us. You will be hurt in life, it's a fact of life. How you respond to that hurt though, will determine your level of happiness in life. For your own sake, for your own peace of mind, you've got to let go of that hurt. Some of you are still letting people from your past hurt you today. And to have peace of mind you've got to let go of your grudges.

But you say, "I can't. They hurt me too much. I can't forgive them." And you know what? You're right. That's why you need Jesus Christ. Only He can give you the power to let go and stop holding on to that grudge. Why let go? Because they deserve it? No, but for your own sake so you can get on with your life and not stay stuck in the past over a grudge or a hurt from the past. You can find peace of mind if you're willing to trust Christ to provide it for you.

Finally, in your search for Jesus....

3. You Can Find Eternal Life.

Have you ever thought about what it would be like to live for ever? That word eternal... it kind of hurts your brain thinking about it doesn't it? It's one of those things as finite human beings that we can't wrap our intellect around—we can't grasp the concept of God (or anything) being eternal (never having a beginning or end). Nothing in this world is eternal. As they say: All good things come to and end. Well, almost all...

Look one last time at Isaiah 9.

The verse says that Jesus, will be called the Everlasting Father. Now I know if you were paying attention, you probably thought I skipped over that one, but really I was saving it for last.

Here are some facts of life that maybe you've never considered seriously:

1. We're all going to die someday. Now I know that's not a pleasant thought. (I wouldn't suggest you bring this up on Christmas morning at your family gathering). Nor should we always be worrying about it, but the fact is we are all mortal. We are all going to die some day. Tomorrow, next year, ten years from now we don't know. But knowing this is true, we need to consider the fact that...

2. We're going to spend far more time on the other side of death than we will living on this side of it. Think about it: You may get 60, 70, 80, maybe 90 years here on this earth if you're lucky! But on the other side of death you'll be living in eternity. And everyone will spend eternity in one of two places: Heaven or Hell. That's the inevitable choice we all have to make.

And only a fool would go all through life totally unprepared for something they know is inevitable. That doesn't make sense. You're not ready to live until you're ready to die.

Fortunately, the good news is, that's what Christmas is about too. That's why God sent Jesus Christ.

Romans 1:17 says: *"For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith..."* In other words: God has revealed to us Jesus Christ. He was sent from heaven to save us from hell. And by faith, you too can be saved.

What this is really about is called God's plan of salvation. Anytime you hear that—God saves me, Jesus saves me—it means He clears up my past, He takes care of my present and He secures my future. You can't lose or be robbed of the gift of eternal life once God gives it to you. That's eternal security. And it's the kind of gift you'll never get anywhere else. You can't find it under the Christmas tree.

You can only find it by looking at the cross, where Jesus, the Everlasting One died and rose again—to pay for your sins and provide for you eternal life.

He says, seek for Me and you will find Me. Two thousand years ago wise men sought Christ. You know what? Wise men still seek Christ. I challenge you to be a wise man or a wise woman and this Christmas seek Christ, because when you seek, the Bible says: You will find. That's a promise.

If you want to find Jesus today and receive His free gift of eternal life, you can do that as I finish up here. I invite you to pray with me. Let's all bow our heads and close our eyes for a moment. If you'll seek for it this Christmas you will find a new and a deeper understanding of God, of your own life, and of the problems that you're facing. Why don't you pray this in your heart? You don't have to pray it out loud. Just close your eyes and in your mind say this with me:

"Dear God, thank You for bringing me here today. I've known for a while that something was missing in my life but now I know it was You. Thank You for seeking me even when I've ignored You. God, today I believe that you died on the cross to pay the penalty for my sin. I ask you to forgive me of my sin. And I put my trust in You. I accept Your gift of forgiveness. And I accept Your gift of eternal life."

With every eye still closed. Friend, if you prayed that prayer with me just now, would you just raise your hand so I can see you. Is there anyone here today who is saying: "Yes, I found Jesus today!"? Just look at me and raise your hand so I can see you...

Prayer of Response

Can I just encourage those of you who raised your hand this morning. Let somebody know. Please, come talk to me. Talk to another pastor, or church leader. (I'll be the fireside parlor after the service if you want to let me know). Or talk to the friend who brought you. Talk to a family member. Just tell somebody that you put your faith in Jesus today. We'd love to know about that and help you begin your new life in Christ.

Song

Benediction