

CCC PART 1 COME HOME TO GOD'S PLAN FOR YOUR LIFE

Come Home for Christmas Part 1

Christmas at Calvary is great! I love the music, I love the lights, the decorations, the wreaths, the flowers. All of them great symbols of Christmas.

One symbol that seems to capture the emotions of Christmas maybe better than any other is the symbol of Home – home for the holidays. So many people go through so much effort and so much expense and so much hassle to get home for Christmas. What is it about home and Christmas?

When home is working right (and granted a lot of people here did not grow up in homes that worked right) but when home is working right it is a place of warmth, it's a place of security, it's a place of comfort, it's a place of acceptance and understanding... a place of laughter and nurturing and forgiveness and healing and growth and encouragement and hope and love. Home is where we belong.

Those very same words can be used to describe the relationship you can have with Jesus Christ. Psalm 90 is a prayer of Moses. It uses the imagery of home talking about God. The Psalm begins with these words "*Lord, through all the generations, You have been our home.*" In other words, God's Word, the bible is telling us... Lord, You have been the place where we've have found security and comfort and love and acceptance and salvation. You are

our place of warmth, a place of acceptance and understanding...a place of nurturing and forgiveness and healing and growth and encouragement and hope. Home is where we belong. You oh Lord are where we belong. And if you're a Christian, you know that that's true.

But God, then, goes further than that and He says if you're My followers then I have an assignment for you. I have a purpose for your life, I have a plan for your life. And part of that plan involves this. Once you have found your home in Christ you need to point the way for others who are still seeking it. Once you have found your home in Christ, God says, I need you to go out and point the way for people who are wandering lost, who are still seeking that home. Because a lot of people are far from God. It's been true for thousands of years. Jeremiah 31:22 "*How long will you wander before you come home?*" There are

people in our neighborhoods and in our offices and in our worksites and in our schools and in our families who are wandering aimlessly through life without hope, without direction, without purpose, without meaning, without God, without His forgiveness, without His grace.

There are people in our neighborhoods and in our offices and in our worksites and in our schools and in our families who are wandering aimlessly through life without the security of knowing what lies ahead for them... they do not have the security that they can have an eternal home in heaven.

And God says if you're My followers, "I have a plan for you to fulfill," and it is this. **God wants you to live a maximum impact life by pointing people toward their home in Christ.** Nothing is more important than us doing that. Why? Because eternity very literally is hanging in

the balance. That's why Jesus said in Mark 16:15 "*Go everywhere and announce the message of God's good news to one and to all.*"

Not only will the result be that the whole bunch of people who today are wandering lost and aimless will find their home, that they will find heaven through Jesus Christ.

But another impact, another result of this is that the very process encouraging people in their spiritual journey, pointing them toward home will revolutionize your life as well. Nothing will stoke the fires of your spiritual life more than intentionally setting forth each day with the plan that if God opens up opportunities that you'll do your best to point people toward their home in Christ.

And when you're living on that kind of evangelistic edge that is when your prayer life is at its most fervent. Why? Because you're asking God to give you the words to say, to lead you and guide you. You say God, I can't do this on my own strength, own my knowledge and my own power. I need You to help me. Your prayer life is based on an urgency that maybe it didn't have before.

Your worship is more heartfelt because you're worshipping the God of the second chance. And even though you have lost people – spiritually lost and confused and wandering people who you love, you know that God loves them more than you. And He wants to bring them to heaven. And your worship of God takes on a new dimension. It's when your study of scripture takes on a whole new dimension, a whole new excitement. Why? Because you're not just looking for abstract theological

truths. But you're looking for answers that might help a friend in his spiritual journey toward home. It's when your dependence upon God is at its greatest.

Did you know that apart from the power of God, no life is ever changed? I can't argue anyone into the kingdom. I can't force anyone into the kingdom of God. I can't reason anyone into a relationship with Christ. But God can and will use us if we're dependent upon Him too.

So if you've been living sort of a dry Christian life – if the Christian life has been boring, if it's been plain vanilla, if your coming in here and kind of going through the routine of worshipping God, and really you even wonder now why do we sing so many songs and you kind of throw up prayers to God. It may be that yes, you've found home in Christ... but after you did you locked the

door and gotten into your La-Z-Boy chair and put it back and you've kind of lost sight of those people who are out wandering, you kind of lost sight of those loved one who haven't found home, you find yourself hoping they just have a good life now and your not as concerned about sharing your faith with them and they are out in the cold looking for home. And God says that's not the way the Christian life is supposed to be led. That is a formula for nothing but a frustrated Christian's life.

God says what you need to do is get up off the La-Z-Boy and open the door up and go back out into the world and to the people you know an the people you encounter you say, Are you looking for home? Are you looking for hope? Are you looking for encouragement? Are you looking for security? Are you looking for eternal life? There is a place where you can go. There is God who you

can know who can change your life and change your eternity.

You might be thinking, Isn't that Billy Graham ministry's job? Isn't that the job of the Calvary staff? Isn't that why we pay them the big bucks – to do this kind of thing? It's not for us average, ordinary, everyday Christians is it?

God says, “This is part of My plan for every single person who follows Me.” He doesn't want you to miss the excitement and adventure and exhilaration and thrill and the satisfaction of feeling like God has used your life to make an eternal impact – one that will last forever – in the life of another human being. He says I don't want you to miss that!

I was thinking about this not long ago when a friend of mine died. His name was Bill. I knew him for most of my Christian life. In a lot of ways Bill was your average

guy. He was an ordinary, everyday guy. He worked in the Heating and Air Conditioning trade. He wasn't rich, he wasn't poor. He lived in a rancher type house with a fence around it. He was married, had a family. In many ways he was your average guy. He was a born again Christian. He didn't have theological degrees. But he'd always been so grateful to God taking him off the path of self-destruction that he'd been on for so many years and turning his life around. He always had a great gratitude to God.

I went to Bill's funeral. It was the middle of the week and the middle of the day and when I got there I was first struck by all the people there. The place was packed with hundreds and hundreds of people. I was amazed. They did something unusual. They put microphones out in the aisles and the pastor got up and said, “This is what we're going to do. If you are going to be in heaven someday

because God used Bill to bring you the message of hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ, if He used Bill to point you toward the home you can have in heaven, come up to one of these microphones and tell us your story.”

As soon as he said that people started standing up, everywhere all over the place. People started going up to the microphones and pretty soon there were lines of 10+ people deep at each microphone and others still coming. I was blown away by that. People started telling story after story after story. I thought this is a tremendous lesson of just how God can use one ordinary mans life, if we will allow Him. I was so blown away by this.

So in these next few minutes what I'd like to do is tell you a few of these stories that people told that day. I think we can learn something from a guy like Bill who lived a maximum impact life by just living his life to point

other people towards home in Christ. Bill learned from Christ. And I think we can learn something from bill the way he followed Christ.

My feeling is if an average everyday guy like Bill could be used by God to change that many eternal destinations then I could do it too, and listen friends you can too. We just finished the series called “Winning the Battle of the Mind” and I want to encourage during today’s message don’t let the enemy bring thoughts in your mind that you couldn’t do this... God words tell you, “*You can do all things through Chris who will strengthen you...*”

The first person got up and he described how Bill had gone into Annapolis one to do some business. A panhandler came up to him – a homeless person named Robert. He said, “You have some money for some food mister?” I think Robert was blown away by Bill’s response

because Bill was thinking, “I’d like to fill this guy’s stomach but more than that I’d like to see his soul get filled with Christ.” Bill said, “How about if I buy you lunch?”

So Bill takes him to a restaurant and sets down with this homeless guy and he gets to know him and they build a little friendship. By the time the meal was over, Bill said, “The Fourth of July is coming up in a day or so. Why don’t you come out to my house in the suburbs and celebrate the Fourth of July with us? You can stay a few days and we’ll have a good time.” He gave him cab fare and said, “I’ll meet you at Rt 2 and Central Ave 3:30 on the Fourth of July.”

The Fourth of July comes. Bill goes to pick up Robert and the cab never came. I thought it was interesting what Bill’s response. Did he throw up his arms saying, “I

tried!” No. Bill got into his car and drove down to the city and began looking in the area where Robert would likely be hanging out. He couldn’t find him. But he didn’t give up. He kept seeking him out, kept going after him. Finally he finds Robert asleep on park bench.

Bill picked him up and cleaned him up and put him in his car and drove him out to his home. He fed him a meal and they celebrated the Fourth together. In the next days, they talked. And Bill told him about the fact that “Robert, you’re made in the image of God Almighty. He loves you. He cares for you. He wants to take you home to heaven with Him somebody.” Robert said, “I’d love that!” And he prayed and opened up his life to receive Jesus Christ as his forgiver and his leader.

I think the whole thing was divinely orchestrated because it was just few days after that, Robert died. Now

today, several years later, Robert is at Home (with a Capital “H” HOME). He’s at home in heaven because a guy named Bill was faithful to Jesus Christ. Bill said I’m going to see not a homeless person here but I’m going to see someone God has put in my path and this person is made in the image of God who I can bring a message of hope and eternal life to.

As this person was telling this story of Bill going from bench to bench searching and looking for Robert my thought was, WOW that’s like Jesus. Because Jesus said “You want to know what My mission is, You want to know My purpose in this world, why I was born on Christmas and came into this world to live a perfect life and die? It is to seek and save the lost.” I pictured Bill seeking Robert that he might save him.

I thought the first thing I can learn from Bill is this. Just like Jesus he had a tenacious love for people who are wandering far from God. God’s love is like that. God’s love pursues us. God’s love chases us. God’s love is after us. God’s love overwhelms us with its extravagance. Ephesians 2:4-5 *“But God is so rich in mercy [He loved us so much] that even though we were spiritually dead and doomed by our sins [in other words we’re like Robert on a park bench] He gave us back our lives again when He raised Christ from the dead – only by this undeserved favor have we ever been saved.”*

Jesus does not give up on us and that’s where Bill learned to have that kind of tenacious love for other people and not give up.

In fact Bill’s childhood friend, a guy named John stood up and described how he had gone through a midlife

crisis. He had divorced his wife and quit his job and moved away to some exotic place and when that didn't satisfy he moved back to the area. He said, "That's when Bill got a hold of me and would not let me go." He said Bill would come over to me every weekend and said, "Come on John. Let's go to church." Then Bill invited him into a little Bible study he'd have on Monday mornings and he learned more about God. And John said I ended up because of thatcommitting my life to Jesus Christ.

Bill wasn't through. Because I have a son and daughter, teenagers, Bills said he'd like to meet and talk to them. He built a relationship, a friendship, with those children.

Within six months John's teenage son and teenage daughter both became followers of Jesus Christ. This man

began weeping at the microphone and described how he and his two teenage kids were baptized together – immersed under the water together. He said all this came about because Bill was faithful and true to Jesus Christ. Three eternities changed because Bill did not give up on people. After that I sat there thinking how I sometimes I give up too easy on people. Sometimes I stop praying for people. Sometimes I stop looking for opportunities to point them toward home. Sometimes I give up.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever known somebody whose lifestyle was so out of whack, so immoral, so hostile to God, indifferent. They're just so far from Jesus that you just sort of write them off your list. You cross them off your prayer list.

The danger is we have to beware we don't develop an Us versus Them mentality.

What is this message all about today? What I'm telling you is you're going to see an opportunity this Christmas season. God is going to speak to each one of you this Christmas and show you people who you're going to be able to reach out and invite to church, people who you can tell about Home in Christ and maybe there going to say no. You're going to think you've failed. But you did not fail. You never fail when you do what Jesus tells you to do. Only fail when you don't try. Be encouraged today as He leads you and guides you that is where the adventure is. So if we could just say as a church we can be tenacious in our love this Christmas and not give up on people. We can look for physical ways we can reach out, material ways we can serve other people in the name of

Christ. We can keep alert for opportunities we can invite someone to come into this church where all of us know that God is going to do something at the Christmas Eve services. You're probably setting in a chair that somebody's going to come to Christ in this Christmas Eve. We can look for opportunities to bring people. We can stop and we can look at people's needs and we can pray, God help us to direct them to the source of meeting all needs who is Jesus Christ. We can do that.

Be Open Everyday to God's Leading in Your Life:

“We are usually surrounded by so much outer noise that it is hard to truly hear our God when He is speaking to us.

We have often become deaf, unable to know when God calls us and unable to understand in which direction He calls us.

Thus, our lives have become absurd ...

When, however, we learn to listen, our lives become obedient.”

Unknown Author

Prayer:

Father, I do pray that all of us who are Your followers will seize the opportunity this Christmas season. I think God if we ask You... You're going to use us. You're going to

open up opportunities. Give us the courage to invite someone to Christmas, to point someone towards home in You.

Now Father, for those who are here that would say I don't know Jesus that way, but I want to... just say in your spirit, Lord Jesus, I believe that You're the Son of God, that You died for my sins and I want to now turn away from the path I'm walking. I want to walk Your path from now on. I want to receive this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life that You offer. I want to follow You for now and forever. Take me to heaven with You. Father, we know as people pray that their lives will be changed and their eternities will be rewritten. Their new address of their home in eternity is going to be heaven. We thank You for that. In Jesus' name. Amen

If you prayed that pray for the first time I want you to mark it on your card I am committing my life to Christ I want to send something to you and pray for you.