

For sure, some true Christians forget what they have and need a refresher course on what is provided for them, but on the main you will notice that true Christians have joy that is bigger than circumstances. I'm not saying this about pseudo-Christians, of course.

If a person is related to God through His Son Jesus Christ, then joy, that deeper happiness that is more than a facial characteristic, is a birthright blessing. The true Christian should be joyful because his sins are forgiven, his place in heaven is secure, his life is in-dwellt by God's Spirit, and he has an open door to God's throne room. No matter what happens, he always has reason to rejoice because the big things are taken care of, and the Spirit in him promises to help him through all the rest. In a word, his joy is not based on circumstance, but on huge unchanging facts and an even bigger God behind the facts.

When the angels sang about Christ's birth, they said that they were bringing tidings of "great joy." Great joy?—yes, joy for every person who will come to Him by faith. It is in the relationship with God through Christ where joy is found.

Even joy based on family can elude you. Everything is moving, changing, shifting. You cannot rest on anything to bring solid, stand-against-all-odds joy but that which is permanent. And that which is permanent is God.

the church-goers who really don't know Christ.

Christmas then is not the season to be jolly, as if the other seasons are the opposite. But it is the *reason* to be joyful. Christ's coming to the earth, His perfect life and sacrificial death as a substitute for sinful people like us, is certainly a reason for joy to all who will come to Him by faith.

Is that you?

If you are one of those who has not come to Christ, then the best you can do this season is to hope for good circumstances and a kind of naïveté about your actual situation before God. But things could be different and the coming of Christ that you are singing about this holiday time could become the best news you have ever heard—good tidings of great joy!



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This "reality" is much more troubling than the list mentioned above—the depression, sickness, sulking, and aggravations. The reality for a person with out Christ is a permanent state of non-forgiveness, alienation from God, separation from the true people of God forever, and hell. Those are the matters that make happiness hard to come by and what makes laughter so fugitive for the thinking person.

I think the diversion is worth something, mind you, But when the reality is so strong, do we have the right to call even Christmas a source of true happiness?

Can tinsel and presents, carols and candy really bring happiness? Not often, and not much. And if our happiness is based on circumstance, is it a true happiness? Isn't it just a playful escape, a temporary delusion? Does a little thin paint on the outside eradicate the rust beneath? Do cosmetics on a corpse make the death go away?

Sickness may invade the home, jobs may be lost, anger and sulking may pervade the atmosphere, death may stalk a family member, drugs and alcohol may faint family togetherness, divorce clouds may darken the skies, disappointment may rule a child's spirit, and depression may turn you pensive and silent. And so it goes behind the closed doors or in the inner space of so many. The Bible says that even in their laughter there is sorrow.



## 'TIS THE SEASON TO BE JOLLY?

By Jim Elliff

"'Tis the Season to be jolly?" Well, maybe.

The business of Christmas, that is, the hard and cold commercial trade of the Thanksgiving to Christmas sales window, is a measure of how well America is doing. It's the thermometer in our corporate mouths.

Needs are created through the media in order to entice the buyer into purchasing more this year than last. No one is to be disappointed at Christmas, after all. The manipulation is as blatant toward children as adults. And who can bring themselves to crush the psyche of anyone by not giving them all they want?

The end result of all of this is "happiness." The receivers of the presents are happy and the merchandisers are happy. The media people are happy and the credit card people are happy. Everything is happy during Christmas.

Happy is what it is supposed to be, that is. But sometimes things go south. The economy may well not cooperate.