

# AN ELF-ESQUE CHRISTMAS VACATION MIRACULOUS TEACHING SERIES ABOUT A WONDERFUL LIFE HOME ALONE ON 34TH STREET

*Elf on a Shelf* | Chad Bruegman | 12.18.16

## START

To get things started, go around the circle and answer these two questions:

**What three words best describe you, and why?** *(If possible, take time to go around and each member answer this)*

## SHARE

Welcome to *An Elf-esque Christmas Vacation Miraculous Teaching Series about a Wonderful Life Home Alone on 34th Street*. For this series, we decided on a simple and easy-to-repeat title, and we hope you like it!

Christmas season is upon us and ready or not, we find ourselves in it once again. For many of us, that brings great joy and anticipation. For children: even more so. However, for those of us who are older, it can bring stress, pressure, and sometimes a real depression amidst the seemingly endless cycle of office parties and family obligations. Meanwhile, we know deeply that somewhere in all this chaos, we are supposed to be experiencing peace and joy ... that eludes many of us. Our Christmas season can feel exactly like the title of the series: just a long mixed up notion of what Christmas is all about.

As you read this today, remember these simple statements: God is with you. Christmas is simple. We remember the birth of the savior of the world. God sent his only son as a helpless baby into the middle of nowhere to be cared for by two nervous teenage parents who could only find a barn to have their first child. Jesus came into the world to save us. We celebrate God's goodness to us and remember our savior who arrived beneath that starry night sky so that we might have a relationship with God, his father.

This season, as we hear the song *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, allow God to speak to you. Emmanuel or Immanuel means "God with us." It's not just a song, but a daily cry of the heart, that we might know that God is truly with us and that is the best gift we have that money can't buy.

This week, Chad talked about the easy temptation to slip into thinking that if we behave rightly, then we will not struggle in this life. He spoke of debunking a false "Naughty or Nice" theology we sometimes hold concerning the way the Lord works. If we see others behaving badly, then we understand why they are struggling. Yet, if we work hard to behave well, then we feel entitled to good things. When hardship and a season of difficulty come our way, it can feel confusing, and cause us to wonder, "Lord, where are you? Why are you not helping me?" or "Why would you let this happen to me, or to them? They have served you and loved you well." Deep feelings of abandonment and pain can set in if we are not careful to cling to the truths of Christ.

Let's read Luke 1:5-7

**What initially stirs for you as you think that even though those two individuals were blameless, they were suffering the unfairness of not being able to have a child?**

**Can you think of a time in your own life when you thought, "Lord, I am doing everything right. Why won't you give this to me/do this for me/make this happen/take this away/(add your own)? What was that tension like for you? What did it do to your closeness with the Lord?**

**What role does the false theology of a "Naughty or Nice" God play in your life? How does that impede your view of him?**

**G R O W**

The Christmas season stirs up a myriad of emotions. Often during this time, we are looking back over the

year, replaying the highlights, and replaying the lowlights of the months that passed. It is probably safe to assume that at some point in the year, the confusion that life can bring most likely appeared in your circumstances or relationships. When we reflect back to Mary, a teenager going about her life, and living her life in a way that caused the Lord to have favor on her; it is astonishing to believe that her life changed in one heavenly and confusing moment.

Let's read Luke 1:26-33

As Chad pointed out, in the angel's message to Mary, he did not warn her of the earthly consequences that would follow from the Lord's heavenly favor. He spoke of the ultimate glory and plans that would evolve from this Immaculate Conception. The angel's message was visionary, prophetic, inspiring, and it was announcing the most radical birth this world would ever know. All of that sounds absolutely amazing and perfect, right? Right! It was. It was amazing, it was perfect, it was supernatural, and beyond our comprehension. And it also brought Mary great suffering and pain to experience while she walked in the Lord's favor.

It can be deeply confusing to feel as though we are walking right with the Lord, hearing from him, obeying his direction, and then to experience great suffering. Opposition can feel like an intimate attack. The euphoria of hearing from, or from walking justly with him is quickly dashed when problems arise. For those who have been following him for many years, it can be easy to forget the faithfulness of his character and his leading. For those who are new to a relationship with him, it can feel as though there is not enough rapport or trust built to be experiencing hardship. Whatever your situation is, it is imperative to separate out the belief that life with the Lord means a life of ease. Life with the Lord is relationally and intricately rich. It is beautiful and meaningful, and we are so undeserving of living a life with his love. Yet, the Bible is blatantly honest about the difficulty we will experience. We are not excused from pain and hardship, and as Mary showed us, at times his favor elicits these experiences so that he may be glorified.

**When you think about the notion that the Lord's favor and direction for your life can bring hardship and pain, what comes up for you?**

**What false truths have you believed when you have experienced pain or a difficult season in your life?**

**Is it difficult for you trust the things that you do not understand? How might the Lord be challenging you to grow in your trust with him?**

## **M O V E**

When we can grasp and accept that this life is hard and we will experience pain on this earth, it helps to ease the confusion and offense that can arise when we do encounter those things. Some pain is a result of living in a fallen world with broken people. And some pain is allowed so that growth may occur. Yet the Bible tells us that the Lord uses every single thing for his good. He is a good and kind God. No circumstance or person, loss, or struggle, mistake, or situation will thwart his plan. His glory will reign and it will prevail.

Let's finish by reading Romans 5:1-5

*We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings.* Have you ever been around someone who rejoices in his or her sufferings? As Christians, we are harsh critics and can sometimes discount the validity and authenticity of their disposition. We think to ourselves, "Well, they are in denial, wait until that sinks in; then they are in trouble!" However, we should be encouraging them, we should be rejoicing with them, and asking the Lord to develop that ability in our own hearts. We serve a God who has overcome the world. Overcome the world! When we live in that truth, and live from the desire to bring glory to God with our lives, then rejoicing in our sufferings doesn't seem so crazy after all.

**What does it mean for you to live in the spectrum between glory and suffering, as Chad talked about?**

**What does it tangibly look like for you to rejoice in suffering?**

**How does choosing to trust and rejoice in suffering and hardship impact your relationship with the Lord?**

**How does it impact the way you live your life?**

## **P R A Y**

As a group, spend some time praying for each other and the struggles we all face. If you are in a co-ed group, consider breaking up into men and women's groups to talk more freely.

## **T O G O**

**Matthew 1:22-23**

*All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "the virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"---which means, God with us.*

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