

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

Building a Testimony | Shawn Johnson | 12.04.16

START

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

You are having a dinner party and are able to invite two of the most intriguing people in the world. Who do you invite and why? *(They have to be alive today and can't be family)*

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, Shawn kicked off the series talking about a time when a few friends of Jesus didn't understand why Jesus didn't come to help them sooner. They felt that God was not "with" them when they needed him most. God's timing does not always make sense to us and waiting on him can be difficult when we think we know what is best, but we must trust God during the difficult times knowing that he has a plan, even when we don't see it and can't feel it.

Let's read John 11:1-16.

Jesus loved Lazarus, yet delayed coming to him. What does the story tell us about Jesus' timing?

Do you have an example of a time when you struggled with God's timing, or maybe you are currently dealing with the frustration of what seems like God's delay in helping you?

G R O W

Waiting on God is tough. The only thing harder than waiting on God ... is wishing you had waited on God.

As Mary and Martha waited on Jesus, he was more active than they could possibly imagine, even during the worst of circumstances. God knew how this whole thing would turn out and it would not only be miraculous, but was building a testimony for Mary, Martha and Lazarus that only God could give them. Jesus' timing seemed odd. Yet his timing was for the glory of God and the building of a story that is still told to this day. To this very day, we still read their testimony in the Bible about God's power, perfect timing,

and ultimately his heart for each one of us who experience pain in life.

Let's continue reading John 11:17-37.

In Borchert, G. L. (1996). *John 1-11* we realize that the death of Lazarus was a big deal for this family and it was difficult for them to understand why all this happened:

The sisters' home was Bethany (11:1), which here is described as lying "fifteen stadia" (in the Greek text), or about one and three-fourths miles, from Jerusalem (11:18; the NIV "less than two miles" is an appropriate approximation; a stade was about 607 feet). The mourning events for the family of Lazarus apparently drew a significant number of Jews ("many," 1:19). The use of the "Jews" here does not seem to carry the usual political overtones of Jesus' opponents. The reference to "many" may suggest that Lazarus had been a person of some influence. But perhaps its primary significance for John was to indicate to the reader that this work of Jesus was witnessed by many people and therefore could not be dismissed easily by the authorities (cf. 12:9; note also the interesting contrast between the Jews and the authorities at 12:9-10). The statement at 11:20 clarifies the fact that Jesus had arrived in the vicinity of Bethany (perhaps the outskirts of Jerusalem) but had not yet come to the house of the sisters itself. Having heard of Jesus' nearness, Martha arose and went out to meet him...

11:21-22 Martha expressed the pathos of that experience: "Lord ... if you had been here." Those words were hardly a condemnation of Jesus for not being present when Lazarus was ill. The stark reality of this fact becomes clear almost immediately. The words are those of a grieving person who desperately wished it could have been different but who has recognized that the inevitable had come to pass. Moreover, her subsequent words, "even now ..." (11:22) must not be read as her belief that Jesus could reverse the reality of death (cf. 11:39). Instead, her statement should be understood as indicating a strong confidence in Jesus' relationship with the Father and that in spite of her resignation to Lazarus's death, somehow Jesus would understand the plight of the mourning sisters as well as the general nature of Lazarus's future hope.

Most scholars believe Lazarus was a man of influence due to the large gathering of people. The miracle Jesus would perform was going to have an impact on a huge group of people. Have you ever thought that God wants to use your own story to affect the hearts of those around you?

Jesus was deeply moved by the death of Lazarus and the pain that Mary and Martha were experiencing. How do we know this?

What does Jesus' reaction say about his heart for us when we experience pain and loss?

M O V E

Jesus was moved to tears by the situation and by the pain Mary and Martha were experiencing. God understands our pain and sympathizes with us when we are going through a dark night of the soul. Even though Jesus knew how the story would end, he identified with the pain of those who mourned Lazarus and openly showed that he too felt pain because of sin and death. Although he knew someday he would conquer sin and death once and for all on the cross, it didn't at all change his compassion and intervention in human lives and in the lives of those around them.

Let's finish by reading John 11:38-45.

Jesus allowed difficulty, pain, and uncertainty in the lives of his beloved friends that he might display the Glory of God to them and do a mighty work in their lives, and ultimately in the lives of all of their friends around them.

What has pain and difficulty taught you that comfort couldn't?

How do you think you can be more intentional in sharing your own story of pain and difficulty to point those around you to Jesus' intervention in 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.