

“The Day After Christmas”

Pastor Dale Campfield - December 26th, 2010

Intro:

Matt 28:19 “Go and make disciples of all nations...”

ECC Process of Discipleship: Making an IMPACT...To Love...To Grow...To Serve

We have 3 priorities – To love...which is expressed in our Sunday morning celebration and connection groups. To grow...which is expressed in our Path to Discipleship. To serve...which is expressed in our daily lives in the places we live, work and play; as well as through the local church. The vision of E.C.C. is to gather together weekly for corporate worship, loving God and each other; then to come together in small Connection Groups for discipleship and fellowship, and are regularly involved in reaching out to others with the love, acceptance, and forgiveness of Jesus Christ through community outreach. To Love...To Grow...To Serve!

Intro:

Let me begin by thanking you as a church for what you did for Christmas in making an IMPACT in the lives of people this year.

What we did as a church during the Christmas holiday...

- 61 businesses were given donuts to eat.
- 24 families adopted providing Christmas presents for them.
- 101 children were given scarfs, hats and gloves.
- Our “Go” Children’s ministry gave out dozens and dozens of cookies to the local fire and police departments.
- Through your giving we were able to give an extra \$1,000.00 to each of our missionaries.

THANK YOU!

Now...It’s the day after Christmas. Did you get everything you wanted for Christmas yesterday? Was everything you ever dreamed of under the tree? Were all of your expectations met and you’re as happy as a clam? I got a new Jack Bauer from the TV show 24 doll. I got a marshmallow machine gun. And other stuff.... How about you?

Now, forget the gifts.... What about the circumstances that surrounded your day yesterday? Was the expectation of your family being together and united met? Did you get to be with your family? Was there a loved one missing due to distance or possibly death? Was the day the best day ever? Is any day?

Probably not.

If your expectations were in getting as much as you could and getting everything you wanted, then more than likely you'll be quite disappointed this morning. If you're expectations were to have the "perfect" Christmas, more than likely you're a bit bummed out right now.

There always seems to be a letdown following Christmas. For several weeks we have all of the lights, the decorations, all of the reminders of Christmas and then in a matter of just a few hours it is over. None of the decorations mean anything now. Christmas is gone. Hardly anyone listens to Christmas music following Christmas. All of the sales at the malls will be entitled, "After Christmas Sales." In just a day or two all of the lights and decorations will be removed until next year. To have a Christmas party now would be anti-climatic. The tree will be removed and returned to the attic. The lights have been placed back in the boxes along with the balls, and other decorations. The array of Christmas cards have been placed in a box somewhere. The house no longer has the appearance of Christmas. Christmas is over, or at least most of these things will happen in the next few days or so. For some of you, you took down your tree last night! We usually do, but it's still up today.

How about the other days of 2010? This is the last Sunday of the year, a time to look back on what took place this year. You went into the year, at the end of 2009 with great expectations. What happened? What about those times when you truly had an expectation to receive something and it didn't happen? For example, a healing in your body that you haven't received yet. A job that you haven't gotten yet. A relationship in your family that has yet to be restored. A particular HOPE that you've held on to for a long time only to find that hope disappearing, becoming less likely all the time. You find your hope deferred.

Question: Did you know that today is known as "BOXING DAY"?

We use to celebrate this day every year with Alun and Joanna Crewe, who now live in Denmark. Boxing day originated from the day after Christmas, when you would take the empty boxes you now have from the Christmas presents you've opened up; fill the box with a tasty treat or fun item, and take it to your friend or neighbor or family member to say "thanks". Today is Boxing Day! Happy Boxing Day.

But the fact is, Boxing Day will come and go just like Christmas did. Every day upcoming will come and go. Even your birthday, with all of the excitement and anticipation moving towards that day will come and go with many hopes and expectations unfulfilled.

How do we deal with the unfulfilled expectations? How do we deal with our hope being deferred? What do we do the Day after Christmas?

Check out this poem I found...

Twass the Day After Christmas

Twass the day after Christmas, and all through the house,
Every creature was hurtin' even the mouse.
The toys were all broken, their batteries dead;
Santa passed out, with some ice on his head.

Wrapping and ribbons just covered the floor,
While upstairs the family continued to snore.

And I in my T-shirt, new Reeboks and jeans,
I went into the kitchen and started to clean.

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,
I sprang from the sink to see what was the matter.

Away to the window I flew like a flash,
Tore open the curtains, and threw up the sash.

When what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a little white truck, with an oversized mirror.

The driver was smiling, so lively and grand;
The patch on his jacket said "U.S. POSTMAN."

With a handful of bills, he grinned like a fox.
Then quickly he stuffed them into our mailbox.

Bill after bill, after bill, they still came.
Whistling and shouting he called them by name:
"Now Dillard's, now Lazarus, now Sears and Pennys.
Here's K-mart, Wall Mart and Target aplenty.
To the tip of your limit, every store, every mall,
Now chargeaway-chargeaway-chargeaway all!"

He whooped and he whistled as he finished his work.
He filled up the box, and then turned with a jerk.
He sprang to his truck and he drove down the road,
Driving much faster with just half a load.

Then I heard him exclaim with great holiday cheer,
"ENJOY WHAT YOU BOUGHT.....

YOU'LL BE PAYING ALL YEAR!"

Some of you have to now pay for all of those Christmas presence; and soon our "*Ho! Ho! Ho!*"
turns to "*Oh! Oh! Oh!*"

The Fact is:

Everybody has dark days. Days where your hopes have not been fulfilled.

You don't want to get out of bed. You're afraid to face the world. You don't feel like it's worth the effort. You just want to throw in the towel. You don't want to see anybody. We all go through dark days.

Check out this verse...

Proverbs 13:1

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick. But when the desire comes, it is a tree of life.”

After the first Christmas, even Jesus and His parents had to deal with dark days.

Text: Mathew 2:13-15

Wow... the day after Christmas for these parents was tough! Talk about hope deferred! I'm sure they would have preferred to take their baby home, rejoice and have a nice life! No way! It didn't happen.

Psalm 34:18

"The Lord is near to those who are discouraged, he saves those who have lost all hope."

I want us to look this morning on the light of Christmas for your dark days. We all have dark days. So how do we deal with them. Let me give you four of them.

HOW CAN JESUS DISPEL MY DARKNESS?

1. He will encourage me when I'm disappointed.

WE ALL HAVE DARK DAYS OF DISAPPOINTMENT

Job 30:26

"I hope for happiness and light but trouble and darkness came instead."

Have you ever felt that way? Hoping for one thing but was disappointed.

We can all probably look back at this year of 2010 and remember some of the disappointments that we've experienced. Things that we thought would happen but didn't.

The fact is, life is disappointing sometimes. Things don't always work out as planned. Situations don't always work themselves out.

Illus: Presents you thought were something else.

Presents you got at Christmas, you saw under the tree, and you thought you knew what they are -- some of you have experienced some big disappointments. As a little boy you look and think, "I can tell that's a basketball!" You open it up and it's a globe!

I imagine Mary experienced disappointment in the very first Christmas. Here's she been told, You're to bear the Messiah, the Son of God. And she has to in the stable. I think that would be disappointing. Not in the Holiday Inn, not in the Hilton, not even a Motel Six. She has the baby in a stable.

Life is disappointing sometimes. We go through dark days of disappointment.

But God, He will encourage me when I'm disappointed.

Psalm 34:18

"The Lord is near to those who are discouraged, he saves those who have lost all hope."

The first way God encourages us is He says, "I'm with you." *"The Lord is near"*-- He's not left you. Some of you had tough times this year. Maybe in 2010 it was a disappointing year. You didn't get the promotion you thought you were going to get. You didn't close a sale, you thought you were going to close. You didn't complete the project that was delayed. Your hopes and dreams and the things you'd hoped would happen didn't materialize.

Where is God in all that? He's where He's always been. He hasn't left you. Immanuel -- God is with us! He encourages me in disappointing times by reminding me, I never go through anything alone. He is with me. The darkest part of the night is when the light shines the brightest. He's with me.

He encourages me by helping me realize He's got a design, a plan, a purpose for my life.

Jeremiah 29:11

"The plans I have for you, says the Lord, are plans to prosper you, not to harm you, to give you hope and a future." Circle "hope" and "future". God says, I don't want to hurt you. I want to help you. I created you. I have a future and a hope for you.

God uses disappointments to get your attention. It's like a red flashing light. He wants to say to those of you who have been through disappointing experiences recently, "Yes, you have had pain and problems. But my purpose for your life is far greater than the problem that you're facing and there is a purpose behind it." He encourages me when I'm disappointed.

2. He will strengthen me when I'm distressed.

WE ALL HAVE DARK DAYS OF DISTRESS

That's when you feel overwhelmed, when you're stressed out, stretched to the limit, frustrated. You've got too much to do and you don't have enough time, you don't have enough money, you don't have enough energy.

David experienced stress.

Ps. 22:1

"I cry desperately for help but it still does not come."

Have you ever felt that way? Help me, somebody! I'm overloaded! I've got too much to do! I'm stressed out." But nobody helps me. Dark days of distress when you're stretched to the limit.

My guess is that some of you are in dark days of distress right now.

You may be stressed out financially.

There's too much of the month left over at the end of the money. [I heard of a guy that went to a creditor and said, "We're having trouble with your easy payment plan. Do you have an easier one?"]

You can be stressed out physically.

Your get up and go has got up and went. You don't feel good and you don't feel like doing anything. You get stressed out physically.

You can be stressed out relationally.

Your marriage isn't working out right. Your relationships aren't working out right -- with your kids, your friends, your boss. When your expectations in a relationship aren't met you get stressed. Some of you have desired to get married, and it hasn't happened yet.

Illus: The talking parrot.

Someone once bought a parrot. The only thing it said was "Let's make out!" He went back to the owner of the pet store. "What you need to do is buy this other one that all it says is 'Let's pray!' Maybe the good guy will influence the bad guy." So he bought the "Let's pray" parrot and took it home and left it in the cage together for a week. The first parrot was still saying, "Let's make out" and the second one had started saying, "My prayers have been answered!"

This is a great verse.

Philippians 4:13 (Amplified)

"I have the strength for all things in Christ who empowers me. I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses inner strength into me."

Some of you need to put this verse on your refrigerator. *"I have the strength for all things..." I'm ready for anything and equal to anything.*" I am competent, I am capable, I am able to handle no matter what comes my way. On my own power. No way! But with the power that God puts in my life through Jesus Christ. Nothing can devastate me in '05 no matter what happens because I can face it. Not on my own, but He will strengthen me when I'm distressed.

Psalm 23:4

"Even though I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me."

The darkest part of the night, that's when the light shines the brightest.

There are 150 Psalms in the book of Psalms. The theme of Psalms in one sentence: Life is tough, but God is good. That's the theme of Psalms.

When you start trying to say, "Life is good and God is tough" you're off base. Life is tough, but God is good! He says, I will not only encourage you when you're disappointed but I will strengthen you when you're distressed.

There are 365 fear notes in the Bible. That's one for every day of the year. God is saying "Get the message! Don't be afraid. I will strengthen you when you're distressed."

3. He will guide me when I'm doubtful.

WE ALL HAVE DARK DAYS OF DOUBT

John 12:35

"The one who walks in the dark does not know where he is going."

He's drifting; no clear objective. Do you ever lose your way? Do you ever feel like you're up in a cloud and your head is in a fog? When you look at your past you get disappointments. When you look at your present, you get stress. When you look at your future, you get doubtful and worried.

The fact is there are plenty of reasons for us to have doubt and uncertainty as we finish 2010 and begin 2011. Will the economy take care of itself? Will it turn around? Will I have a job 5 months from now? What about the threat of terrorism? Will our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan come home? So many questions that lead to doubt.

Dark days of doubt. The one who walks in the dark doesn't know where he's going. Have you ever felt like that? What does my future hold? Where am I headed? You're in a fog.

Illus: Man driving in the fog, runs into car.

One night after church he was coming out of church and he couldn't see two feet in front of him. He pulled on onto the road and all he could see were the tail lights right in front of him. He followed real closely, about a foot behind. He figured the guy knew where the road was. About five minutes later the guy stops dead cold and the guy ran into him. "Sir, what are you doing just stopping like that?" Other guy said, "Well, sir, this is my driveway."

You've got to know where you're going.

Illus: Friend in College driving Motor Cycle in the Fog from Portland to Seattle

A friend of mine in college was on his motor cycle driving from Portland to Seattle, the fog was incredibly thick. So...he followed the white line on the side of the road. He ended up taking almost every off ramp between the two cities! It took him forever, and every time he thought he was getting somewhere, doubt crept in!

He will guide me when I'm doubtful.

When I'm confused, when I don't know which way to go.

John 8:12

"Jesus said, 'I am the Light of the world. So if you follow me, you won't be stumbling through darkness, for living light will flood your path.'"

What are you worried about? What has got you uptight? What is it that is keeping you awake at night, keeping your stomach churning? You're going to have to make some major decisions in 2011. I don't know what they are and you don't either. But I guarantee you, you will have to make some major decisions in 2011.

On what basis are you going to make those major decisions? "I thought/felt it was the right thing to do." Feelings are highly unreliable. You might have just eaten a bad pizza the night before. It's not a good way to make decisions just on feelings. "Everybody else is doing it" is not a very good reason either. The majority is often wrong.

When you face doubts, there is a reliable source that you know will always give you the right advice and never steer you in the wrong direction. Is there any place in the world you can get that kind of advice?

Yes. It's called God's word. It won't steer you the wrong way.

Ps. 119:105 (LB)

"Your words are a flashlight to light the path ahead of me and keep me from stumbling."

It is the only reliable guide for life. It's a flashlight. It illuminates. It keeps you from stumbling, helps you to see things clearly.

It's was fascinating to watch the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Recently, I read this quote from Gorbachev that was in *Time* magazine, "We, in the Soviet Union, have changed our opinion on some matters such as religion. The moral values that Christianity has generated and embodied for centuries can help in the work of renewal for our country." That's not Billy

Graham, that Gorbachev saying that. That puts him ahead of a lot of politicians in America who wouldn't say that. What kind of an upside-down world do we live in? He's saying, We admit it! We were wrong! For 74 years the Communist regime tried to stamp out, snuff out any spark of spirituality in the Russian people and the people of the other republics. They failed because the moment they let it happen again things blossomed. We sent a team of people over there many times in the past and so have many other churches. There's a spiritual revival, a spiritual awakening going on in that nation. Why? Because darkness cannot stamp out the light no matter how hard it tries. It can't extinguish it.

4. He will change me when I'm depressed.

WE ALL HAVE DARK DAYS OF DEPRESSION

That's when everything seems to cave in. When you're depressed you feel like, "What's the use?" You feel like giving up.

In World War II, Winston Churchill said when the war started in Europe, "The light has gone out in Europe."

Some of you may feel that WAY about your life. The light has gone out of my life."

Lamentations 3:19-20

"...the thought of my pain is bitter poison. I think of it constantly, and my spirit is depressed."

Psalm 34:18

"The Lord is near to those who are discouraged, he saves those who have lost all hope."

Some of you faced a major crisis this last year in '10. Maybe it was a divorce, a death of a loved one, a defeat, maybe you got laid off, or maybe you faced a major illness

The fact is, you don't feel like being happy at the holidays. The happiness at the holidays only intensifies your pain and your loneliness. Maybe you feel like David said in...

Psalm 88:16

"Lover, friend, acquaintance -- all are gone. There is only darkness everywhere!"

When you're in that kind of situation, you wonder, "Does anybody care?"

If you don't get anything else, get this: God cares. He cares about you because you matter to him. Your pain matters to Him and He cares about it.

Conclusion:

We all experience Dark Days...

- * Dark Days of Disappointment
- * Dark Days of Distress
- * Dark Days of Doubt
- * Dark Days of Depression

So where do you turn in your dark days. What's the antidote? **1 Samuel 22:29** *"You Lord, are my light; you dispel my darkness."* How does Christ do that? He says, *"I'm the light of the world."* He came to light up our dark days. How does Christ dispel the darkness? How does He light up my life?

Because of Christmas you don't have to stay in the dark. Jesus Christ wants to do four things in your life.

He will change me when I'm depressed.

Did you know that when you get depressed, God doesn't want to just pat you on the back and say, "Cheer up!" He wants to change you. In fact, He wants to use the depression to help you learn some new attitudes, new thoughts, new approaches, new choices. He doesn't want to just keep you going; He wants you to change. He can change you. He says, Don't drive out the darkness, just flip on the light.

Ephesians 5:13

"It is possible for light to turn the thing it shines upon into light also."

When the light of God shines in on my life, it brightens me up and it takes me out of that pit of despair and the light of God fills my life and I start glowing, I start being a bright person shining out.

Ephesians 5:9

"The light produces in people all that is good and right and true." When you allow Christ to fill your life with His spirit, it brings out the best in you.

He can do for you what maybe years of therapy haven't done. He dispels the darkness in my life. He is the light. Not anything or anybody else.

Now that Christmas is over, you may feel overwhelmed. Now that the year of 2010 is almost over, you may have great disappointment. Maybe you're going through one of these dark days -- the dark day of disappointment, or distress or doubt or depression. The good news is because of Christmas, and the fact that we have Christmas because of JESUS being born - there is now a light in the world that can drive away that darkness.

1 John 2:8

"The darkness in our lives disappears and the new light of life in Christ shines in." It shines in our lives!

When I think about the first Christmas, it's amazing to me about the star the wise men saw to follow from the east. I'm sure many other people saw it. It was in the sky, anybody could see it. Probably millions of people saw that bright, unusual light. But they didn't do anything about it. Millions did nothing about it. But wise men followed the light. That's why they were wise! It's one thing to know there's a light in the world. It's another thing to follow the light. The point is, you can choose darkness or light. You can choose to live in the dark nights of the soul, or the "winter of discontent" as Shakespeare called it. You can live in those dark nights. Or you can choose to live in the light. God shines the sun on everybody. But you can go live in a cave. It's your choice. God shows you the light but you can choose to go blindfolded or say, "I'm going to close my eyes. I'm not going to look" and enforce darkness on your own life.

If you want to get out of the dark days, then you must choose to start living in the light. That's your choice. The fact is, even though Christmas is over, 2010 is over, your past is behind you, and your brightest days are yet ahead of you! I usually say it as your GREATEST days, but today, it's your BRIGHTEST days. You watch, you wait, you'll see!

Your Brightest Days are Yet ahead of You!