



A Quiet Christmas

Part 4 – Let Your Heart be Light

Pastor Ted Cunningham

We're going to talk today about how to have a merry little Christmas. But before we do, I want to find out how many of you went to Sunday school growing up, so I'm going to sing a song. You finish the song. *"I've got the joy, joy, joy, joy..."* *"Down in my heart."* *"Where?"* *"Down in my heart."* *"Where?"* *"Down in my heart."* Very good, excellent. That was very forceful. Now let's find out how many of you grew up Baptist because every time we sang that song in the Baptist church... Every song we had in Sunday school in the Baptist church had at least one verse about the devil. *"And if Satan doesn't like it, he can sit on a..."* *"Tack."* *"Sin on a..."* *"Tack."* What did you say? Ouch! I forgot about the "ouch" part. Some of you are like, "That's it; we're out of here. We got the candles; we got our Christmas; we're gone."

Sing this with me. *"Have yourself a merry little Christmas. Let your heart be light. From now on your troubles will be out of sight. Have yourself a merry little Christmas. Make the Yuletide gay. From now on your troubles will be miles away."*

Today, we're talking about what is this true for a lot of you. Will troubles be far away, and what do you do when troubles hit you? As we talk about what it means to let your heart be light, we know this is a times of year where the heart can be heavy. We want to look today at five weights that make the heart heavy. And whenever the pressures of life and trials hit you or these five weights that we're looking at today hit you, it can weight down the heart. You and I get to choose which direction we're going to go, which choice we're going to make. We can either move toward hope or we can move toward doom.

Let me just see. When troubles hit, how many of you are quick to move toward hope? Okay, just a few of you. How many of you are doom? I'll raise my hand on that. I made my dad raise his hand in the first service on that one. I can quickly, if I'm not careful, move toward doom, but today, we are talking about how when these weights hit us and weigh down the heart, this is the question I want you to ask yourself. "What makes your heart heavy?" "What's weighing down your heart today?" We're going to look at five weights and how you can move toward hope and not be one who is quick toward doom.

1. Loss and setbacks. This is an interesting week. This week, things start to slow down and we're with family and friends; we're gathered around the tree. Then next week, we start preparing for the new year and we start going back to plans and dreams and goals again. Many of you have a heavy heart because the things you planned on this year, the things you dreamed about, the goals you set didn't happen. You have a heavy heart because year after year after year after year, it seems you're experiencing these losses and setbacks.

For some of you, it's a job you were hoping would come through and it didn't, and that was a setback for you. For others, it's you were convinced that this Christmas, you would have a man, you would have a woman, and another season goes by and you don't. For some, it gets very serious. You've been trying to get pregnant; you've been trying to have a child. Your heart is heavy because that hasn't happened.

The scripture speaks directly to it. It's almost like the Proverb is speaking like passing by on this conversation when it says in Proverbs 13 - ***12 Hope deferred makes the heart sick...*** When you hope for something that doesn't come true, it makes the heart sick, but then the last part of the proverb says, ***...but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life.***

Years ago, we took down a big, huge oak tree in our back yard. I brought a guy out to take it down. The very first thing he said to me was, "I'll have to bring an arborist out here to tell me if it's dead."

I said, "Will you be charging me for that? Because it's June and there are no leaves on this tree. Now, I didn't go to school for this, so I'm not saying I'm an expert on trees, but I think it's dead and I prefer not to be charged for a guy telling me it's dead. Take the whole tree down."

He said, "Well, the reason we bring an arborist out is because maybe we could cut out parts of it and the rest of it would come to life."

I said, "Take the tree down. It's dead."

Some of you get this. I once had a dream and I gave up on this dream years ago. I'm not even pursuing it anymore. I thought for sure in my late teens that one day you would see me on the stage at the Grand Ole Opry. Guess what? It never happened. It still ain't gonna happen. Some of you are like, "I don't know; maybe you can take a tour and stop by." No, it wasn't that type of thing. I thought I'd be singing up there. But that's a hope and a dream that went away.

A longing fulfilled, something you were hoping for that comes true, you get excited and it's like life coming to you.

This guy told me if we bring an arborist out, we can cut out some of the parts and see if any life is left. Some of you are there right now with your dreams and your plans and your goals for the future. You're wondering if there's still something that can be saved. This season, some of you are going to die to those dreams, those goals, and those plans.

A couple of weeks ago, I read... And I encourage you... If you're looking for a devotional this Christmas season, I recommend John 14-16. Jesus is comforting the disciples because he's speaking to them about his eminent departure. He is going to be leaving them. Now, you have to get into the minds of the disciples to understand this text. They have spent time with Jesus. They've been eating with Jesus. They've been watching Jesus perform miracles. They've been walking down the road with Jesus. They've not only been with Jesus one on one, but they've been a group with Jesus. Jesus is telling them, "I'm going away. Not only am I going away, and not only are you going to be scattered, but the world is going to come against you. Don't forget, if they hate you, remember they hated me first."

John 14 – **1** *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God... You say you believe in God; believe also in me.* When you get to the end of those three chapters in verse 33 of Chapter 16, he says, **33** *“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace.* Don’t overlook what’s being said there. He’s not saying so that you have peace. He’s saying, “So that *in me* you have peace.”

Maybe you’ve seen this on mugs or in Christian bookstores or maybe a meme has come across your social media feed that says “He won’t calm the storm, but he’ll calm you in the storm.” You’ve seen that idea. We have to be very careful. Sometimes, he actually calms the storm. How many of you are wanting the storm calmed right now? How many of you know though that he may not calm the storm, but here’s what you can be guaranteed of: whether he calms it or not, in him there is peace, in him you find peace. He’s saying, “Guys, whatever you go through, in me you have peace.

“In this world you will have trouble.” The word *trouble* there actually means pressure. Tribulation is going to come against you; count on it. This is a guarantee. Many of us spend too much time in our lives trying to escape this. Jesus said, “This pressure will come upon you. **But take heart! I have overcome the world.**” I grew up reading the King James Version. In the King James Version, it says, “Be of good cheer.” That means be confident and courageous. When pressures come against you, be confident and courageous.

In just a moment, we’re going to talk about when you’re not confident and courageous in your faith, how you need to be surrounded by people who are. For some of you right now, your confidence in Christ is wavering because of the loss and setbacks in your life. Today, in this season, we talk about putting hope in Christ.

2. Grief. There is a second weight on the heart that many in here are experiencing right now and it’s the weight of grief. I talk about death a lot. I know, I tell my kids, “It’s part of my job.” I haven’t talked about it for a while. You have to admit that if you’ve been going to Woodland Hills. I haven’t talked about death for the last couple of months, so give me Christmas. I am going to talk about it right now. For some of you, this is the first Christmas without your mom. For some, it’s your first Christmas without your dad, without a spouse. A dear friend lost her husband last week. I’ve been texting with her in California, just knowing that this is going to be a difficult season. You want to talk about a heavy heart. She has a heavy heart right now. Her heart is weighted down.

The verse that we’ve been focusing on for *A Quiet Christmas* comes to us from 1 Thessalonians 4 - **11** *...and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.* In the verses following that, Paul’s going to address this with these new believers, many of them brand new in the faith. They don’t know what happens when a believer dies. Where do they go? What happens to them? Remember he sent Timothy back. Timothy comes back to Paul loaded down with questions. What we’re reading in 1 Thessalonians are Paul’s answers to these questions. When the heart is gripped with grief, even in that moment, you move toward hope or doom. There are only two ways to grieve. You grieve without hope or with hope. What Paul is going to tell them is, “Be comforted. You are to grieve with hope, not like the rest of men who grieve with doom.”

In the next two verse of 1 Thessalonians 4, it says, ***13 Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. 14 For we believe that Jesus died and rose again...*** And all God's people said... Amen. ***...and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.*** He is comforting them there. He's letting them know, "Listen, be settled even in this." Remember that's what it means to have a quiet Christmas: be settled in who Christ is and be settled in who you are in Christ. Find that settlement in your life.

Again, I'm not so concerned today about where you start, but it's where you end up, it's where you settle on beliefs. Some of you that are quick to doom. The more you mature in your faith, that you would be quick to hope. I'm going to share in a moment that in the meantime, find someone that will come along and have that confidence with you and that courage with you in Christ. He's sharing here with them the hope of seeing loved ones again. He's letting them know that your body sleeps, yes, but your soul goes to heaven. Your soul is with the Lord.

Back in November, I had an event in Houston. Alex Himaya's father-in-law... If you are new to our church, Alex speaks here often throughout the year. His father-in-law has been battling cancer. I get invited to a lot of hospitals to meet with people. I get there and I'm going in and I'm supposed to minister, so I'll chose a passage and I'll be ready to pray. But most of the time, the person who is battling cancer with hope is a huge ministry to me. This why I don't fear death. And that's why I can talk about it. I've told my kids, "My funeral is going to be fun. We're going to put the fun back in funeral at my funeral. Show times at 3:00 and 8:00; you will want to be at my funeral. You can only do that with hope.

I heard that Alex's father-in-law, just a week before checking himself back in, he was on his way out. But he had tickets to Larry Gatlin and the Gatlin Brothers. Alex's father-in-law, C.E., lives in Van Buren, Arkansas, so they came up with their friends. C.E. didn't have the energy to do anything in Branson other than go to that show and he was going to go to that show. Alex texted me after the show, and, as his father-in-law was being checked into MD Anderson. He said, "My father-in-law keeps talking about this song that Larry did at the end of the show called, "Mostly Fair Winds." It's brand new; you can't find it anywhere. It's not on iTunes. We've google searched it and it's nowhere. Ted, you're from Branson; you know people. My sister in law thinks she's going to find it, but, Ted, don't let my sister in law beat me to getting him this song." I pulled out as many stops as possible and I hate to do this today at our Christmas service, but I've got to take it online. Larry, I need that song. I'll take it on a CD, a flash drive, a down loadable. C.E. wants to hear that song.

A month ago, I go into... If you've been to MD Anderson, it's huge. About 90% of C.E.'s bone marrow is taken over now with cancer. They give me his room number when I get to the front desk. His room number was like 172,463. I'm not kidding. It's a five or six digit number. I was preparing myself to walk into a man at the end. They had him on such strong steroids that he was sitting up, laughing with Meredith, Alex's wife, and C.E.'s wife. I had a great visit with him. He said something last week that I just want to share because some of you are going through grief right now because you're preparing for your own death. There are two ways to do that. You can do it with hope or you can do it with doom.

C.E. is a great example to us of preparing to meet the Lord with great hope. He wrote this last week: *"I'm finishing up two days of chemo and blood transfusions. This is a strong chemo that I haven't had before. It maybe a chemo of last resort. Praying it provides other options in three weeks..."* This last verse is why so many of you in this church have ministered to so many of us as we've watched you with confidence and courage in the Lord walk through this. It's a simple line. He said, *"But my hope in Christ gives me the courage to accept the alternative. I'm hoping I get to do more chemo and that this cancer goes away, but my hope in Christ gives me the courage to take the other choice, the other alternative, the other option."*

I've walked through this with many of you. You've walked through it with many folks that they get that diagnosis and they move toward hope or they move to toward doom. Today, maybe for you, if you've never placed faith in Jesus, today is the day. There's no better time than at Christmas to give your life to Christ so that you can live this life full of hope, that you are confident and courageous in the future, whatever the Lord has planned.

3. Anxiety and worry. If you are new to our church, we've talked about this a little bit. We want to remind you of something next week. We're going to do something very different. We've never done this at our church before, but we're going to have a panel up here next Sunday with some counselors. Travis is going to be a part of the panel as well. We're going to be talking about mental health, anxiety, depression, suicide, brought on by stress and trauma. We want to help you if you're struggling with this, but we also, because we believe every member is a minister, want to help all of us be good ministers in helping people who are struggling with this. That's the goal of it, that we know what to say, what not to say.

Look what the scripture says about this in Proverbs 12 - ***25 Anxiety weighs down the heart, but a kind word cheers it up.*** Some of you this season are going to gather around family and friends you know are struggling. In years past, you've been a voice of doom. We don't need any more voices of doom; we need voices of hope. Be the one who speaks the kind, encouraging word over the one who is anxious, over the one who is struggling.

For those of you who are struggling with anxiety, it's time to dump your friends of doom. It's very simple. Surround yourself with those who chase after hope. Surround yourself with those who are confident in the Lord. That's where some of you are shaky right now as you move toward doom. You just need a follower in Jesus to step alongside. This is why the scripture says rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

For those of you are back to the second weight and you're grieving this season, you need other believers to grieve with you so when you start to grieve like the rest of mankind, you have those who remind you... We have to be careful with this that we don't become trite, we don't become a burden to people, but we help those who are mourning, we help those who are grieving with a kind word, not a cliché, but a kind word. Surround yourself with people who chase after hope.

My wife, for the last three years, has wanted a fence in our backyard. I mean like holes, posts, a fence, a real fence. She hadn't gotten that fence because we have this thing in our yard, I don't know about you, called limestone. We've got about six to nine inches of dirt in most of our back yard, but I was hopeful. I've watched enough of Goldrush to think I can get through this.

My brother just retired after 31 years. He's a skilled tradesman from Chicago. He just retired down to Branson. When he got here, I thought Amy might get her fence. I rented an auger. I love it. It's my second major piece of equipment in the last month. I'm walking through with the guy and this guy, with boldness and confidence, tells me this auger will dig 20 holes an hour for me. When I look over the top of my glasses, that means I don't believe you. "You ain't going to drill no 20 holes in an hour." We get there and I told Amy the guy told me 20 holes an hour. We drilled and sure enough, we hit limestone nine inches down. My very first thought, because I told you I move towards doom quickly, my first thought was, *Well, I'll go in and break the news to Amy that we're not getting a fence.* That's immediately where I went: no fence. We had 36 of these holes to drill. I was hoping this thing would drill through the limestone and I'm here to tell you it doesn't. That was way too much expectation on \$80.00 a day, I can tell that.

My brother is standing over the hole. He just knows all this. He knows the hacks, he knows the ways to do it, he knows the right way to do it and how a post will work. He goes, "No, don't got tell her that. It won't be a problem." This is a major problem. This couldn't be worse than what we're dealing with right now. He goes, "What we have to do is drill wholes in the limestone and put rebar."

And I said, "Let me say it again, I'm going to go break the news to Amy." Because not only are we not able to dig 36 holes; I ain't drilling four holes in 36 post holes. I've got this thing called... I want to watch my children grow up. I ain't got time to drill holes in the limestone.

But the whole time, nothing shakes my brother. He's just confident when I had absolutely none. Guess what? This was a week ago. We have 36 posts that won't budge. Now, we haven't had any winds yet, so we'll see in a little bit.

I walked away from that thinking had Andy not been here, I would have given up because there was no way I was doing it. I don't have the tools. I have little cordless drills at my home. I had no idea how he was going to drill holes. He has a jackhammer drill that if you just stand there for hours drilling these holes... But he had the confidence when I did not. That's what a kind word does when someone is anxious and full of worry. You need someone that comes alongside you and sees the possibilities and says, "You're making this way more than it really is."

Some of you right now, if your family and your friends and your work environment is all doom, doom, doom, would you please find someone who knows how to share a kind word? Would you please find someone who can cheer up the heart? The scripture says a cheerful heart is good medicine to bring life to it. There are two more weights I want to share with you, and these get far more serious.

4. Enemies, foes. I want to take you to the Psalms 3 and 4. Most scholars believe these Psalms are linked together. They are both lament psalms. They are ascribed to David. Psalm 3 is during his flight from his son, Absalom. We read about that in 2 Samuel 15. Many of his friends are turning to foes. It's very emotional. We know that about it as we've studied the lament psalms; they're very emotional. But I want you to see the tone change, the tone change from doom to hope in this text.

In Psalm 3: 1-6, we read, ***1 Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!*** You'll notice that's not a question. This is a passionate declaration. ***2 Many are saying of me, "God will not deliver him."*** So, they are coming against him and they're even telling him on a regular basis that God is no longer on his side. Many of you have friends like that; you have family members like that. When you go through a difficult time, they want to remind you of the doom. Watch the tone change in Verse 3. ***3 But you, Lord, are a shield around me, my glory, the One who lifts my head high. 4 I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain. 5 I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the Lord sustains me. 6 I will not fear though tens of thousands assail me on every side.*** Here it is again. God gives me peace and rest during troubling, distressing, and difficult times. The peace is in Him, not in the stress, not in the trials.

When you get to the end of Psalm 4, you get the same things again. A person, through very difficult times, heart very heavy over enemies on the attack, can rest at night, can sleep at night. ***7 Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound. 8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.*** This has been a sacred echo of our church since October.

We've said, **Talk to God about your enemies more that you talk to your enemies.** Take it to the Lord. Find confidence in peace in him, not the changed behavior of those coming against you. Some of you have been waiting on the changed behavior. It's never come and it ain't coming. But in Him, he is steadfast; he is a protector; he is a provider; find it in him.

This is very important. **Many of you need to resign as general manager of the universe.** It was never your job in the first place. Everybody in here right now, for Christmas, it will help you get through the holidays, raise your right hand and repeat after me. Do it right now. "I, (state your name), do hereby resign as general manager of the universe." Do you feel the heaviness lifting? Give it up. That needs to be part of your prayer every night. If you're having a hard time sleeping because you're trying to control things, guess what? If you want a good night's sleep, give it up.

If you want a good day... I learned this from Adrian Rogers, Pastor of Belview Baptist Church, years ago. He said before his feet hit the floor, he puts his hands palms down. He wants to drain himself of everything that's him. Don't let your feet hit the floor before you do this. And then he turns his hands up and says, "Lord, fill me." I'm dealing with a lot of difficult people today called Woodland Hills Family Church... Not that's not true. I'm dealing with challenges with Branson. There are going to be drivers that come against me. As soon as my car pulls out of the driveway, I'm going to be dealing with Iowa right away. It can't be me; it can only be you. Don't let me ride their bumper. I want to be filled with the Spirit as I drive. Isn't that powerful though? To drain yourself, empty yourself and to be filled. Resign. Find peace in the Lord in the midst of whatever you're going through.

5. **Sin.** I'd love to leave you with a lighthearted Christmas message, and it is if you follow the Lord's teaching on this. The fifth weight that we don't talk about often... and next week, we're going to continue with this. We're going to pick up on this because obviously all heaviness is not a result of sin, but let's not be quick to say sin doesn't weigh down the heart, because it does. Yes, the scripture says God gave wine to cheer the heart, but some of you are going to take that too far this holiday season and you're going to get drunk. Your body is going to have a physical response to that called a hangover. The sin is in the drunkenness and your body responds to that. Have you ever pushed away from a table where you ate too much? This is a terrible thing to do at Christmas but let me just say that's called gluttony and that's a sin too. Your body has a physical reaction to that.

Sin does weigh down the heart. In Psalm 32, we read this from David, and many believe this is the lesson he learned. And if you're new to studying the Bible, it can be confusing because it's not laid out in chronological order, but Psalm 51 is David's prayer for restoration, his prayer for pardon after his sin with Bathsheba. He waited a year for that. When you get to Psalm 32, this is like the follow up. This is what he learned because he waited a so long. Like us, he thinks delay will make the sin go away and delay will make the consequences go away. He said, "That's not what I learned at all."

Psalm 32 is the weight of sin on the heart. ***1 Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*** Do you know what it means to be blessed? It means to be happy. May you have a cheerful heart, the one's whose transgressions are forgiven, sin taken away, whose sins are covered. That's just the basic understanding and meaning of atonement. ***2 Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.***

Here's the lesson. ***3 When I kept silent...*** This is stubbornness, believing that it will fix itself. For some of you, right now, the heaviness in your life, the heaviness in your marriage, the heaviness in your family... That heaviness is because you think the silence helps, but the silence is crushing you. The silence is weighing you down. He says, ***...my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*** The delay meant greater suffering. ***4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*** We all understand that one. ***5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.***

A cheerful heart, a happy heart, a light heart because I receive the message of the gospel. Because Jesus died and rose again, I place faith in Jesus. My sins are forgiven. For some of you, you're making the mistake right now. You're sinning against your spouse, against your family. You're sabotaging your marriage and your family and your future. You're going to talk to other believers... Too many Christians today... We could do a whole message on this, but there are way too many Christians today that are looking for validation for their sin rather the confession of it. Please, I just implore you because I'm dealing with this too much. People come in for counseling and just want us to wink at it like it's no big deal. We will not keep silent about sin because we know what it does and how it weighs you down. Stop asking for validation and start confessing.

I was just talking to Rex, one of our care pastors, about this. I asked if he was shocked at how many people sin, sabotaging lives and marriages and families, and then they come in and within five minutes, you're the one with the problem? That's someone who doesn't understand confession and acknowledging sin. You want to find freedom? You want to find a light heart this season? Confess it, rather than getting mad at family and friends who don't receive it.

We read, in Matthew 1: 21, the message of Christmas. ***21 "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."*** For those who are in Christ, there is no condemnation.

I don't know about you, but I love sleeping. How many of you love sleeping? Sleeping is fun, except for all the young people. Young people, you send them to their room for a nap and they think it's punishment. For us, we're like, "Thank you."

Some of you are losing sleep over one of these weights. If the weight is sin and you're tossing and turning at night, resisting the Lord's heavy hand on you, I'm just going to invite you to the front here as the prayer team gathers. I'm going to invite all of you to stand with me right now, as we close out our service. If you've never placed faith in Jesus, we want your heart to be light this season and it starts with the message of the gospel.

If you've never placed faith in Jesus, come forward and a member of the prayer team would love to meet with you. If you have sin that you need confessed and just want to talk through that with someone, if you're lacking confidence and courage right now and you need someone to just speak into a situation in your life, the prayer team is up here for this. If you're grieving and you're mourning and you haven't heard anything that is helping, let the prayer team mourn with you. If you're dealing with a loss or a setback, let them walk through that with you.

As we close, I'm just going to pray Romans 15: 13 over you as the worship team did earlier. This is a prayer over you right now. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In the name of Jesus, everyone agreed and said... Amen.

Merry Christmas from Woodland Hills. We look forward to seeing you next Sunday. Have a great week with your family.