

“Can You Have an Artificial Tree and a Real Christmas?”

2001 Christmas Eve Devotion by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor

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Two boys were talking and one asked the other, “Does it bother you that you have an artificial Christmas tree?” The other replied, “No, not as long as the presents are real.”

Christmas is a combination of the artificial and the real, isn't it? So is life and wise is the person who knows the difference. Why?

The real side of Christmas can feed your spirit. It can draw you closer to God and others. It can bring you great joy and happiness. In other words, it can satisfy some of your deepest needs.

I know it is Christmas Eve, but it is not too late to tap into the real side of Christmas if you have not yet done so. There are things you can do tonight and tomorrow to experience an authentic Christmas. Let me mention some.

Offer God your **sincere gratitude** for the gift of salvation through His son, Jesus. You can breathe this prayer before you leave this service.

Spend time with your family this evening and tomorrow. Lay aside the responsibilities and burdens of this world and focus attention upon your family. Strengthen your relationship with them by praying and playing together. Stand around a piano and sing Christmas carols. Read the Christmas story in Luke 2:1-20. Exchange compliments along with gifts. With every gift you give, tell the recipient what you appreciate about him or her. Play games that involve children and adults interacting with each other.

Light a candle in remembrance of loved ones that have gone to be with the Lord. Share a Christmas memory of them as you do.

Light another candle in memory of those that **died on September 11** and voice a prayer for their families.

When you bless your meal, ask God to bless our **military personnel** and their families.

Call a friend from years gone by and reconnect with them.

Write a note to someone that has inspired you this year and tell him or her why.

Take some of your **Christmas dinner** to a shut-in or friend that lives alone.

Finally, **eat some chocolate**. No, eat a lot of chocolate. It is the official food of Christmas.

It really is not too late to experience an authentic Christmas. Ask Ebenezer Scrooge.

Some of my happiest childhood Christmas memories occurred every December 15. That was the date the Christmas tree was delivered to our house. My dad ordered a flocked spruce from his florist friends and it was always beautiful. I can still see the delivery man carrying it in and setting it in the living room. As soon as he left, we would start decorating it.

When I was twelve years old, things changed, abruptly changed. That year, my mother decided she wanted one of those new aluminum trees. You remember those trees, don't you? Someone had the bright idea of taking aluminum foil, cutting it in strips, curling the strips and sticking them on a pole. Of course, the tree came with a rotating light that I now refer to as the “Wheel of Fortune.”

Needless to say, the aluminum tree was not a big hit with anyone except my mother. Looking back, I now realize why my mom liked that aluminum tree. It did not shed its needles or get dust over all the furniture. She probably did not like it any more than we did, but when you had four boys to rear, the appearance of the Christmas tree was not a high priority.

Was Christmas ruined for us the year we had the aluminum tree? Certainly not. To my knowledge, none of my brothers is in counseling over that. The reason Christmas was not ruined for us that year was because the tree might have been artificial, but everything else was real. The family, friends, food, faith and gratitude were genuine. And the spirit of the Lord was there, too, even if we could not put the lighted angel on the aluminum tree for fear it would electrocute us.

Merry Christmas to you. Even if you have an artificial tree, I hope you have a real Christmas.