

Christmas Redemption

By Pastor D. Keith Walker



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Nostalgia: a sentimental longing or wistful affection for the past typically for a period or place with happy personal associations.

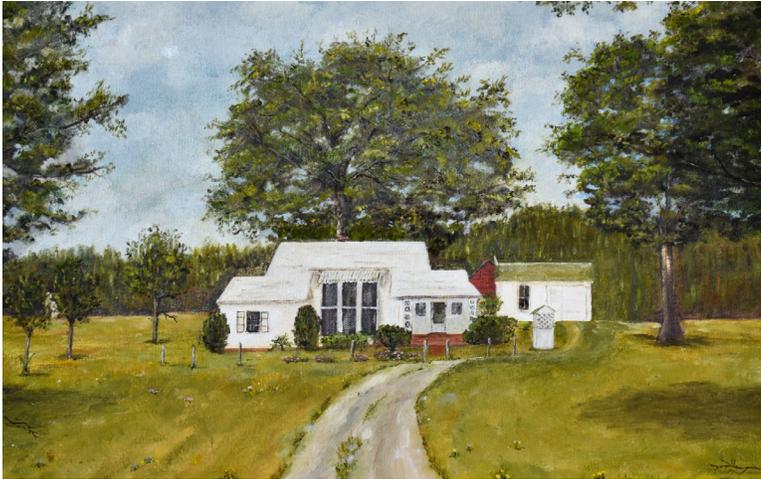


In my experience most nostalgia tends to be idealized—it has its roots in actual occurrences, but time has scrubbed most of the unpleasant details from our memory. The result is that we now warmly remember those times as... *the good old days*.

We have Norman Rockwell memories of events like holiday dinners. Again, these may be solidly based on things that were real—a place in time where two or three generations of family actually gathered around the dining table to share a feast that was painstakingly prepared hours (and even days) in advance. Were these good times? Yes! I am sure they were! I *know* they were for me and my siblings! Even so, now that my life has been stretched out by decades, I am also certain that there were underlying tensions and interpersonal conflicts that were going on even among those gathered at that table.

It is not my intention to do an exposé that tarnishes the sweet memories of such special times. It is the purview of tabloid trash to broadcast tell-all stories that sully reputations and destroy families and relationships. Such things have no place in the family of God. At the same time, honestly acknowledging human imperfections does play an important role in the Good News of redemption.

I want to invite you to walk down memory lane with me as I reflect on how God has been at work in my own life and the lives of those in my family. Perhaps you may see yourself and be moved to give God glory. Or maybe you will perceive opportunities available to you now to have a positive spiritual impact on your own children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.



In my mind, I am at Granddaddy and Mamaw's old farmhouse in Cotton Valley, Louisiana. My Dad was the youngest of a large family. I had many aunts and uncles and many first cousins. Family gatherings at the farm were always big events. My immediate family had moved to Farmer's Branch, Texas when I was young, so traveling back to the Louisiana homestead several times a year was exciting for me.

On my mother's side, she was an only child, but her mother was the oldest of five sisters and it was my Mom's Grandfather—my Great Granddaddy Singleton—who was a circuit-riding preacher.

Both my Dad and Mom were born and raised in Cotton Valley, and both accepted the Lord as children. My mom claimed she fell in love with my dad when they were five years old and he was dressed up for a wedding at their church. Dad and Mom married young and began their family.



I have two older brothers: Randy & Rick; and a younger sister, Carey. I grew up in church. (Kim and I were actually in nursery together at our church in Farmer's Branch.) In my

family, all four of us kids were saved as children—each making a profession of faith at different times and each being baptized a short time later. So far, we've really got that Norman Rockwell thing going.

I know you didn't come here just to learn about my family. Some of you can relate to the scenarios I have described. Others may feel saddened by the thought that you don't have pleasant memories like mine. But I am going somewhere with this that I believe will be beneficial for all of us, so stay with me for a bit.

As much as I value reminiscing about the places and events of earlier years,
Christmas must be more than just nostalgia.

I will admit that I do have a wistful affection for the past. My early memories of Christmas are sweet. (That's me between my two brothers.) Most of us probably do have similar recollections of Christmases



early in life. The Hallmark Channel capitalizes on such nostalgia. For many, the best Christmases were always long ago. But, *fond memories are no substitute for faith*. When Jesus dictated to John what He wanted written to the church in Ephesus, He said:

² I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. ³ I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. ⁴ But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. ⁵ Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. REVELATION 2:2-5

Some, like the people in Ephesus, may have fond memories of the past because that was when you were trying to be right with God. But now you have allowed yourself to drift away from Jesus—you are no longer giving 100% to the Lord. You are left with a sentimental longing for a close relationship with Him, but its just a memory. It is no longer connected to any real effort on your part to change....

For others, there is a notion that because you had a grandmother or grandfather who was a strong Christian—that somehow your love for that godly person translates into you belonging to God by inheritance or something. **You cannot inherit salvation from parents or grandparents....** Besides that, *people are flawed. Only God is perfect.*

My Granddaddy and Mamaw were born in the late 1800's. By the time I was born, my Granddaddy had already been a Christian for many, many years. He was a deacon in the Cotton Valley church and was well-respected in the community.



I remember Christmas mornings with the extended family all gathered in the front room in front of the bay window.... Youngest grandkids on the floor closest to the tree... aunts and uncles in chairs around the room... Granddaddy sitting with his Bible open in his lap.... He would read the Christmas story from Luke's Gospel....

He would read the Christmas story from Luke's Gospel....

¹ In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵ to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. ⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." ¹³ And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" ¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them. LUKE 2:1-20

Granddaddy died when I was eleven. It was many years before I learned more about this man. He wasn't always a god-fearing follower of Christ. He had a somewhat checkered past; he had been a hard man; with a temper.... People are flawed.

Then came the next generation.... Christmas from the perspective of my children when they were small.... My dad reading the Christmas story from Luke 2.... He was bigger than life to my own kids—a successful business executive; a strong Christian; a deacon and Sunday School teacher in his church.... But I grew up with him! I know he was a long way from perfect.... People are flawed.

² *The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God.* ³ *They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.* PSALM 14:2–3

And now *I* am the patriarch of my family.... Now *I* open the Bible at our Christmas gatherings; now *I* read the Christmas story.... And no matter how much my grandchildren may look up to me, the truth is *I am flawed*....

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. ROMANS 3:23

Only God is perfect. Jesus said:

[Our] heavenly Father is perfect. MATTHEW 5:48

If Christmas for you is primarily a nostalgic season based on memories, you're missing the true meaning of Christmas. So embrace the *good old ways* not the *good old days*.

Here's an odd thought: fifty years from now your grandchildren will remember 2020 as *the good old days*. Chew on that for a moment....

The nostalgia factor is the key to *the good old days*. Old pictures have a way of stirring such emotions. Here's one of me and two older cousins building a snowman at the farm....



And here's one of me looking happy with some building blocks.... All of us have old pictures that have the potential of giving us a sense of nostalgia....



But, were those really *the good old days*?... I could give you a list of reasons why those days were better than these days.... But my parents would say the same about their generation. And my grandparents could do the same....

The Bible does tell us to look back. Not to look back with a sense of nostalgia, but to look back and get some clarity about the faith of those who have gone before:

*Thus says the LORD: Stand by the roads, and look, and ask for the **ancient paths**, where the **good way** is; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls.*

JEREMIAH 6:16 (emphasis mine)

If you admire the simple faith of previous generations, ask them to tell you about the Lord!

Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you. DEUTERONOMY 32:7 (emphasis mine)

[This, of course, assumes that these older family members are committed followers of Christ.]

We shouldn't be trying to recreate *the good old days*—we should be embracing the faith that makes all things new! Something is not always better just because it is older. As we see in Hebrews, the *Old Covenant* has been replaced by the *New Covenant*. The new is infinitely better! God even told the people in Isaiah's day that something new and better was coming:



*¹⁸ Remember not the former things, nor consider the things of old. ¹⁹ Behold, I am doing a **new thing**; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ISAIAH 43:18–19 (emphasis mine)*

Jesus was referencing the **new** thing—this *better* thing—when He said:

²¹ No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. ²² And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins. MARK 2:21–22

Of course the new **has** come! We are no longer under the curse of the Old Covenant Law—we are now under grace!... It is that very grace that should be our chief focus—not the good old days of our childhood. We should be highlighting the fact that redemption is God's greatest Christmas gift.

No matter how perfect your memories of the good old days may seem, all of them involve flawed people. But the gift of redemption is the greatest gift of all!

*⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such **were** some of you. But you were **washed**, you were **sanctified**, you were **justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.** 1 CORINTHIANS 6:9–11 (emphasis mine)*

My Granddaddy had some serious issues—but there came a day when he knelt by the side of his bed and confessed his sins and was redeemed, saved by the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ! To quote Paul: my Granddaddy was *washed*, he was *sanctified*, he was *justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*!

The same is true of each of the flawed characters in my nostalgic memories—if they had faith in Jesus they were redeemed!

And the same is true of me! Is it true of you?

God rescues those who turn to Him with faith in Jesus. He redeems us! But there is a danger that we become like those in Ephesus and we lose our first love.

How might that look today? You may still claim a faith in Jesus, but your life is just too busy for the things of God. You don't make faith a priority because you have to work, you have to earn a living, you have to put food on the table, put gas in the car, pay the bills—you just don't have time for church stuff....

*¹¹ Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, ¹² lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, ¹³ and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, ¹⁴ then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God.... ¹⁸ You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth....
DEUTERONOMY 8:11–14, 18*

Christmas should be a time to highlight what God *has done*,
what He *is doing*, and
what He *has promised to do!*

What God has done: He sent His Son to be the Savior of the world!

*We have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.
1 JOHN 4:14*

What He is doing: God is saving the lost and transforming us into the image of Jesus.

*The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. LUKE 19:10
Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son....
ROMANS 8:29*

What He has promised to do: God will bring me to completion and take me to be with Him forever!

I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. PHILIPPIANS 1:6

² ..I go to prepare a place for you... ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. JOHN 14:2–3

Although nostalgia has no power to save, God's redeeming love should be a generational message.

*¹⁷ The steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear him, and his righteousness to **children's children**, ¹⁸ to those who keep his covenant and remember to do his commandments. PSALM 103:17–18 (emphasis mine)*

With this in mind, let me encourage you to begin now to **establish patterns of godliness**.

Recognize your responsibility to pass your faith on to the next generation.

Fathers [parents, grandparents], do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Ephesians 6:4

*⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall **teach them diligently to your children**, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. Deuteronomy 6:4–9 (emphasis mine)*

*⁵ [God] established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers to **teach to their children**, ⁶ that the **next generation** might know them, the **children yet unborn**, and **arise and tell them to their children**, ⁷ so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. PSALM 78:5–7 (emphasis mine)*

Live for today and tomorrow, not for yesterday.

You can be grateful for memories of your past, but you can't change yesterday. Live for today means use today for God's glory!

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. COLOSSIANS 3:17

Live for tomorrow means recognize that your actions today impact your future and your eternity.

²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. COLOSSIANS 3:23–24

Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. MATTHEW 6:20

Live for today (serving Jesus with every breath you take) and live for tomorrow (storing up treasures in heaven). Don't live for yesterday which can never be regained.

¹³ *One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,*
¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*
PHILIPPIANS 3:13–14

Celebrate God's wondrous works with your family. For a Christian, every celebration should be a time to reflect on God's wondrous works.

¹ *Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples!* ² *Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works* ³ *Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!* ⁴ *Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!* ⁵ ***Remember the wondrous works that he has done....***
PSALM 105:1–5 (emphasis mine)



If you have sweet Christmas traditions in your family, that's fine. But make sure they are consistent with Christian truth, not counter to God's ways.

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. JOHN 17:17

I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. PSALM 119:16

Take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children.... DEUTERONOMY 4:9

You will not be perfect until the Lord takes you home.

But you should strive to live as an example of God's redeeming grace and transforming power.

Develop habits that build Christian faith into your children & grandchildren!

²³ *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

²⁴ *He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.* 1 THESSALONIANS 5:23–24

Jesus is the Reason for the Season!