



What's the best thing about Christmas? – Family!

What's the worst thing about Christmas? – Family!

Strategies for Partnering Actively with the Lord over Christmas Break

Steve and Erica Lawry share insights from 44 years of full-time ministry at Stanford

re. How to have joy and fellowship with the Lord over Christmas break.

- > Navigating moving from the independence and spontaneity of college life back into the family routine and expectations
- > How to deal with anxiety over impending conversations with parents who are eager to keep imparting their wisdom on how you can improve
- > Living out the "new you" instead of passively dropping into the "old you" while at home with your family and friends
- > Being alert to the God-designed opportunities to give life while resting and having fun with friends and family

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Strategies to Partner Actively with the Lord during Christmas Break: with parents, family and old and new friends.

- Where shifting from your independent and spontaneous life at Stanford back into family routines, plans and expectations (especially at holidays) is a real challenge
- Where parents may have been saving up many criticisms and concerns to try to help you
- Where the old you tends to come out rather than the new you
- Where old and new temptations allure

Strategize how to go much deeper with the Lord and partner actively with Him

- So easy to be praying and trusting the Lord to get through the big papers, presentations and finals – and then go home and just want to sleep, relax (watch TV, play video games, etc.), hang out with friends as much as possible (after all, we haven't seen each other for quite a while) and have fun – and miss the many opportunities the Lord has in store for you – But the Lord has much more for you than that!
- So what are your hopes for and expectations about Christmas break?...sleeping in, good food, fun time with family and friends?
The Lord is for all that—in fact He is the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17). He originated celebrations with good food, family and friends (Passover, the feast of booths, etc.). We will all meet at the wedding feast of the Lamb!
And we serve a God of rest... *“The Lord gives to His beloved sleep.”* [Psa.127:2d]
- But the Lord is inviting us out of the passivity of a life devoted to self (my pleasures, my sports, my friends, my leisure...) into active partnership with Him to bring His presence to others, to bless them with Him. Many today stay stuck in arrested development where everything is devoted to self (my entitlements, my expectations, etc.) leading to much anger, frustration and disappointment. Christmas can be a time of big longings and expectations of what I and we will experience.
But all the same issues in all of us that have made family a challenge are still there at Christmas: my parents are still distracted with their care for any younger siblings, with their jobs and projects, maybe in fighting with each other over various issues; I find myself dropping into old ways, maybe fighting with siblings or parents or just wanting to go out with my friends...
- If you want a Christmas you will be delighted with, present yourself and your break to the Lord for His plans rather than your plans, rather than just passively going with the flow. The Lord tells us through Paul *“We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works the Lord has prepared for us that we should walk in them”* [Eph.2:10]
- How are you going to hear Him?

Strategy #1 - Plan in special daily times for you with the Lord during the break.

And in the early morning, while it was still dark, He arose and went out and departed to a lonely place, and was praying there. [Mar 1:35 NAS, cf. 1:32-39]

"...you will know that I am He, and I do nothing on My own initiative, but I speak these things as the Father taught Me. ²⁹ "And He who sent Me is with Me; He has not left Me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to Him." [John 8:28b-29 NAS]
Jesus... was saying to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner." [John 5:19 NAS]

Even Jesus knew that the secret was to get time alone with God every morning before interacting with others! -- a "summit meeting" with the Father to get His vision

- for the break overall
- for the different parts of the break
- for each day

spend time with Him in His word and prayer, interacting actively with Him in prayer.

We urge you to take advantage of the opportunity to be learning to live out Colossians 3 in relationships with your family and friends during the break! If you do, you will really grow in the Lord and those around you will be really blessed!

Each day cultivate walking interactively with the Lord, Col.3:1-4 style:

If then you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Keep setting your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. ³ For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Your life, your well-being, your reputation are all secure in Christ which sets you free to keep perspective with Him who is above so we can serve effectively in the things here below!

One other very central strategy for staying connected with the Lord and serving redemptively with Him is gratefulness, actively giving thanks for all things. -- Colossians 3:15-17 emphasizes the centrality of this for our own well-being three times! *"let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another, with psalms, hymns, spiritual songs in singing with thankfulness your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do in word or deed, [do] all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*

- Thanksgiving for each thing that is already good and delightful opens my eyes to what God is already doing and blesses Him through gratefulness, rather than taking so much for granted!

- Thankfulness for the challenges, when the “old” has happened again! -- Back off to the Lord rather than despair or react. ‘Thank you Lord that You who are the Redeemer are right here! Please be at work to heal, bring life out of death, cause growth at least in me, and show me what to pray for and any redemptive action I can take to help others!’

Strategy #2 - Serving with the Lord in the lives of parents, family and friends

Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. [Eph 6:2-3 ^{NAS}]

You are on a growth trajectory from the dependent child who receives passively and is expected simply to listen and obey, into the process of

- leaving that stage of relationship to parents,
- while learning to honor them more than ever as an adult child who is now growing independently dependent on the Lord,
- and blessing your parents through seeking to build a healthy adult/adult relationship and friendship,
- preparing the way for the coming season when you will be helping care for them as they deal with the big challenges of illness and old age.

Thank the Lord for your parents and family (including all of their quirks and flaws, many of which you already share or will discover as you get married and have your own children)!

The Lord gave you to them and them to you as people for whom you are privileged to pray and to whom you are given the opportunity to bring the Lord’s presence through His life and love in and through you over a lifetime!

Be patient with their lifelong need to continue to learn and grow just as they walked with you through your process and at times frustratingly slow progress when you were a child.

Jesus’ Model re. His Parents -- see scripture & comments next 3pp (BCC Notes 30, pp.35-37)

Jesus' Example—Leaving and Honoring Spiritually

Luke 2:41–52 ⁴¹ Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover. ⁴² And when He became twelve, they went up *there* according to the custom of the Feast; ^{43a} and as they were returning, after spending the full number of days, ^{43b} the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but His parents were unaware of it, ⁴⁴ but supposed Him to be in the caravan, and went a day's journey; and they *began* looking for Him among their relatives and acquaintances. ⁴⁵ When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for Him. ⁴⁶ Then, after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ And all who heard Him were amazed at His understanding and His answers. ⁴⁸ When they saw Him, they were astonished; and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You." ^{49a} And He said to them "Why is it that you were looking for Me? ^{49b} Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. ^{51a} And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and He continued in subjection to them; ^{51b} and His mother treasured all *these* things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

- Luke 2:41–43,46–47 As adolescent (12 years old): As family worships, Jesus' attention is on responding to calling and direction from Heavenly Father
- Luke 2:43b–48 Result: Parents go through great anguish because they don't understand what Jesus is doing (re. this not being sin on Jesus' part, cf. Heb. 4:15; 2 Cor. 5:21)
- Luke 2:49a Jesus not aware of their ignorance of His calling
- Luke 2:49b So: He explains respectfully
- Luke 2:50 Though: Jesus' earthly parents still don't understand
- Luke 2:51a But: Jesus remains subject to them as parents
- Luke 2:51b Witness: His submission to both His heavenly Father and His earthly parents, in order, noticed especially by His mother (eventually believes in Him for salvation)
- Luke 2:52 And growth: His earthly parents' spiritual ignorance is no hindrance to Jesus' growth spiritually, physically, or socially

(continued. . .)

Luke 2:52 – Doesn't take perfect parents to grow strong in Lord myself
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John 2:1–11 ¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; ²and both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. ³When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “They have no wine.” ^{4a}And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does that have to do with us? ^{4b}My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.” ⁶Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. ⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” So they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And He said to them “Draw *some* out now and take it to the headwaiter.” So they took it *to him*. ⁹When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, ¹⁰and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when *the people* have drunk freely, *then he serves* the poorer wine; *but* you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

John 2:1–3	As adult: In public (at wedding with His mother, brothers and disciples) Jesus’ mother appeals to Him to help with embarrassing situation
John 2:4a	Jesus defines relationship with His mother clearly to her: He honors her as adult man to adult woman, but not as in obedience to parental authority
John 2:4b	He reminds her specifically, that His response to situations is governed by heavenly Father’s agenda
John 2:5–10	Nonetheless, He is free to do what His mother wants Him to do, but because it is also in accordance with his heavenly Father’s purpose
John 2:11	Result: God is glorified, His kingdom is furthered

John 2:5–10	– I have not really left if I am driven to react against parents’ wishes
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Jesus’ Example—Leaving and Honoring Materially

John 2:12 ¹²After this He went down to Capernaum, He and His mother and His brothers and His disciples; and they stayed there a few days.

John 19:25–27 ²⁵Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own household.

John 2:12	As adult: Taking his widowed (?) mother with Him (no conflict between rightful responsibility for ministry/work and for mother/family)
John 19:25–27	When facing death: Provided for widowed mother

Jesus' Example—Leaving and Honoring Socially / Personally

Mark 3:20–23; 31–35 ²⁰And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. ²¹When His own people heard *of this*, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, “He has lost His senses.” . . .³¹Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him and called Him. ³²A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, “Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You.” ³³Answering them, He said, “Who are My mother and My brothers?” ³⁴Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, “Behold My mother and My brothers! ³⁵For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother.”

John 19:25–27 ²⁵Therefore the soldiers did these things. But standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the *wife* of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶When Jesus then saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, “Woman, behold, your son!” ²⁷Then He said to the disciple, “Behold, your mother!” From that hour the disciple took her into his own *household*.

Mark 3:20–21; 31–35 As adult: Relations with others based on common relationship with heavenly Father and those who receive and give embodiment to Jesus’ life (parallel: Luke 8:19–21)

John 19:25–27 When facing death: Entrusts His widowed mother to the care of one who trusts in the heavenly Father for direction and life, *i.e.*, one who is of the same spiritual family, rather than one who is of the same earthly family

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| Ruth 2:11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Another strong and beautiful example of leaving and yet honoring is Ruth – Left father and mother and own land and culture for relationship with Lord – Cared tenderly for bitter Naomi – Was the Lord’s training ground – Learned to trust the Lord to serve diligently – Preparation to be wife of Boaz – Developed character qualities of Lord he recognized as of great value – Trusted in Lord – Submit to authority (Naomi, Boaz) – Devoted, tender, diligent care for a difficult person – Her life: Great influence and impact during her lifetime and ever since – Great grandmother to king David – Even more important: Own book in Bible, great encouragement to many through the ages |
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>>> Strategize ahead with the Lord

- It's not all about you—a life devoted to self is full of expectations, frustrations, reactions and disappointments!
- Rather give yourself to the Lord ahead to join Him in blessing your parents, family and friends (and as you do so you will be blessed as well!). No circumstances or people can block me from this, but only provide more opportunity!
And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ And beyond all these things [put on] love, which is the perfect bond of unity. [Col.3:12-14 NAS]
- Everything that the Lord does is to bless others!
- Let their plans for the time with you, their suggestions and criticisms inform you of how they would like to be blessed—don't see them as demands but as things to pray about.
- Bring the Lord to your parents, family and friends; and let your life be a sign post, a beacon of His presence. Join Him in the rich adventure of partnering with Him, bringing Him, His character and presence wherever you go!
- See your parents as real people who are in process just like you are—pray for good questions to ask them to get to know them better and build a good adult-adult relationship with them (e.g., what was their college experience (or growing up) like? challenges/joys? what are their challenges/joys now?). Maybe you can pray for/with them now.
- The Lord loves and is in conversation with every person, seeking to reach them, to bring them to Himself or to encourage them to go deeper with Him. Ask the Lord to show you where they are in this conversation and how you can be the next part! (Do so with family, friends, seatmates on the plane, etc.)
- If your parents are not (yet!) believers, let the Lord show you how they helped point you to Him whether they realized it or not, and how you can thank them for the foundation for a life that is pleasing to the Lord that they laid and you are now building on.
- Don't assume that unbelieving parents don't know about their guilt for failing to be what they should be—rather recognize that shame blocks people from acknowledging the bad news about themselves until they hear the good news of how to lay hold of real life instead.
- Don't tell them how much you have changed—(they will counter with how much you haven't changed)—rather show them and let them ask questions eventually (when they are ready—don't be impatient). *“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” [Mat 5:16 NAS]*
- Prayerfully prepare ahead to “weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice” rather than just waiting until you are in the moment.

>>> re. Temptations new and old

- Pray and plan ahead—you know where your typical vulnerabilities are: e.g., anger, complaint, fighting with parents/siblings; wasting time with excessive TV, video games; pornography; hanging out with friends who are into excessive drinking or drugs, sex, gambling, etc. Build in safeguards! What are you going to do instead?
- e.g. New Year's party, approaching parties in general
- *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.* ¹³ *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.* ¹⁴ *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.* [1Cor.10:12-14] Beware the vulnerability of overconfidence—don't zone in on temptation—rather renounce in prayer its false attractiveness & take the escape route God has provided by splitting the scene and getting out of there! (cf. Eph.4:17-24)

Opportunities to Gain Perspective: Both Looking Back, and for the Future

- Schedule time(s) with the Lord
- Looking back to fall quarter (and earlier?): evaluating, giving thanks, confessing failures—and how was the balance?—then ask the Lord to show you what to learn from these assessments
- Consider the Lord's questions from Genesis 3: where are you? who have you been listening to (other/rather than the Lord)? what have you done (contrary to His word!)?
- Looking forward to next quarter (and beyond): where are things headed if there is no change?
- What specific changes does the Lord commend from His word? What other leading from prayer?

Finally: Give the Lord a rewarding Christmas present as we remember and honor His birthday!

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your logical service of worship. ² *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and well-pleasing and mature.* [Romans 12:1-2]

May you and the Lord celebrate a truly joy-filled Christmas together!

We will be praying for you as you do.