

I Something Better

I've always loved Christmas. But when I was growing up, there were rules.

The essential rules in the Chandler home were basically:

- You don't steal.
- You don't kill.
- You don't do drugs.
- And you don't decorate for Christmas until after Thanksgiving.

My wife, Lauren, isn't wired that way. She would start celebrating Christmas in January if I wasn't such a bastion of "not until after Thanksgiving."

But once we get past that last Thursday of November, I've always been all in. Near my house, there's a street

that every year decorates their neighborhood with Disney characters and Christmas lights. Around 500 times in the run-up to Christmas, my youngest daughter will ask us on the way home to turn down that street so she can see them... and about 412 of those requests I'm going to say yes to, and we're just going to go down there and watch it.

If that doesn't prove my commitment to Christmas, I'll let you know that my family watches *Elf* every year. And by watch, I mean we watch it about a thousand times together. It's a tradition in the Chandler household that early in December, there's a conversation in my house that goes something like this:

Kids: "What are we going to do tonight?"

Me: "I don't know."

Kids: "We could watch *Elf*?"

Me: "It's after Thanksgiving. Let's go."

I love Christmas. In fact, I love it more now than when I was a kid. And I've even relaxed the "not until Thanksgiving" rule (I'll tell you why in the last chapter, and that can be your reward for reading between here and there). But please don't misunderstand me. Christmas at the Chandlers isn't always— isn't ever—perfect. Far from it. As much as I love the holiday, there is a vast gap between the Christmas that

the commercials promise and the Christmas that we experience as a family.

After all, there is no holiday in the Western world that suffers more propaganda than this season. Every commercial, every special TV show, everything we see lays before us this great promise that this is the year it's all going to come together.

This year, we'll gather with our families and a Christmas miracle is going to take place. Strife will dissipate, and tension will melt, and annoyance will disappear, and all the sorrow of the last year will give way to cheerful joy.

This year, your kids are going to be great. They're going to open up their presents and be like, "Thank you, Mother. This is perfect," and they're not going to get bored within five hours (or minutes) of opening them. Not this year.

That's what the commercials tell you.

And I want to tell you it's not going to happen. Those commercials are over-promising. And, in fact, they are under-promising.

See, I love Christmas—but it's not because I've been kidded by the commercials that at Christmas everything might be perfect. I love Christmas because it's the start of the story that means one day (not this Christmas, but one day) everything will really be perfect.

So in this little book, I simply want to offer you something better than those commercials do—not just for this season but for every day and month of your life. I want to lay before you something that will stay long after the tree is gone (either dead gone or back-up-in-the-attic gone)—something that will still be there after the carols have faded and the lights have been put away.

I want to show you, whoever you are and whatever is going on in your life as you sit down to read this (and thanks for taking the time to read this), how the first Christmas can meet you where you are and provide you with hope where you are.

This is the season of massive shop-till-you-drop, make-sure-everybody-is-totally-happy, gift-buying, food-gorging panic attack. And in the midst of all that, I want to lead you through some things that the Christmas story tells us are true about God—to help you to stop... and breathe... and refocus your heart... and see who God is, what he's like, what he's up to. I want you to have an even better Christmas than the commercials offer, by celebrating not only that Christ has come but also that his power is at work in the present day, and that he will return on one future day—this time not as a baby but as a ruling, restoring King.

Christmas is about more than saying, “Oh, isn't it great that six-pound baby Jesus was born into the world?”

AN EVEN BETTER CHRISTMAS

That's a piece of what Christians celebrate, but it's only a piece.

I'd like to introduce you to—or remind you of—the God who gets involved... who gives joy... and who is worth your trust.

Whether or not your house obeys the “not until after Thanksgiving” rule, you can enjoy the God we discover in Christmas through December, and out into January, all year round, and on and on.