

Recovering Christmas

WALT MUELLER, CPYU President



YOUTH CULTURE HOT QUOTE

“Everything is perfect right now. I’m having a lot better relationships... it’s a stress free environment no pressure about social media.”

“I think it’s really refreshing and relaxing... I was able to fall asleep a lot easier.”

Two Adelphi University students, who made it a full week without their cell phones as part of an assignment intended to break the powerful addiction of smartphones, CBSNewYork, Nov. 14, 2019



A few years ago, I came to a sad realization about myself: the amazing story of Christmas had become so familiar to me that it was almost as if it didn’t matter much anymore. No, I hadn’t lost my love for God and the Son He sent to redeem the world. But I had lost the sense of wonder and awe that I knew I should have had. It was disturbing. My guess is that you and your kids might share my experience of Christmas being all-too-familiar.

What brought me to this point of being almost numb to the wonder and joy of the greatest news humanity will ever experience?

I concluded that it was a combination of things. First, I had grown up hearing the Christmas story over and over every year. Familiarity hadn’t bred contempt, but I had allowed it to bring a certain unhealthy measure of disregard. Second, there was the sum total of holiday distractions. This includes all the stuff like decorations, endless commercials, Black Friday sales, and the rush that drains both the meaning and the Christ from Christmas. Finally, there was the busyness of my own life. The older I’ve gotten, the more I’ve allowed myself to get sucked into the tyranny of the urgent. . . all at the cost of losing time to cultivate a proper sense of wonder and awe. And when you allow your life to be governed by urgency, Christmas just shows up, catching us almost unaware. A consumer-centered Christmas can even become a burden!

Since coming to that realization, each and every year I work to become more mindful of Christmas by taking the time to focus first on all the horror and brokenness in the world. This practice breathes amazing new life and excitement into the story of the Incarnation. By focusing on the reality of sin and brokenness that occasioned Christmas, I have become more appreciative of God’s grace and mercy shown in the gift of the Savior. In other words,

pondering the bad news has allowed me to appreciate the Good News! We need. . . desperately need the baby in the manger.

My ongoing efforts to recover Christmas in this way were fueled by a rather severe bicycle accident I had a few years ago. The accident was my fault. I wasn’t paying attention. I overlooked the railroad tracks. And, I paid a steep price. Thirty-two fractures, a punctured lung, and an inability to move myself off the street resulted in a difficult and painful ambulance ride and a lengthy recovery. I was broken by my own actions and had to be fixed. Since that day, the everyday sound of sirens that I once so easily ignored now catch my ear and attention. Since then, I utter this little prayer every time I hear a siren: “Lord, someone is in trouble. Please make things right.”

All you need to do is take five minutes to scan today’s headlines and you will be convinced that our world is horribly broken and needs to be fixed. . . a task that we are unable to accomplish on our own. Things are not right. In fact, all we do is make an even greater mess of the world. It is only when we realize how broken and desperate we really are that we realize just how meaningful Christmas really is. “Lord, we are in trouble. Please make things right” . . . and Jesus *is* the answer to that prayer. Reckoning with the bad news feeds our longing for and appreciating of the Good News!

If you and your kids share my Christmas struggle, why not focus your pre-Christmas thoughts on the words Sally Lloyd-Jones uses to describe Jesus in her best-selling children’s book, *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. She writes, “And there, in the stable, amongst the chickens and the donkeys and the cows, in the quiet of the night, God gave the world his wonderful gift. The baby that would change the world was born. His baby son. . . **the Rescuer.**”★

Places consumers plan to shop this Christmas

Annual October Holiday Consumer Survey
Source:
National Retail Federation



1. **Online**
2. **Department Store**
3. **Discount Store**
4. **Grocery Store/Supermarket**
5. **Clothing or Accessories Store**
6. **Local/Small Business**
7. **Electronics Store**
8. **Crafts or Fabric Store**
9. **Drug Store**
10. **Other Specialty Store**
11. **Thrift Store/Retail Shop**
12. **Outlet Store**
13. **Catalog**



QUICK STATS

This holiday season, consumers plan to spend a total of \$1,048 on average for items such as decorations, candy and gifts as well as other purchases for themselves and their families.

(National Retail Federation)

95% of Gen Zs made a trip to a shopping mall within a 3-month period and 75% say that shopping in physical stores is a better experience than shopping online.

(International Council of Shopping Centers via Retail Dive)

FROM THE NEWS:

PLASTIC SURGERY FOR SELFIES

Dr. Dariah Hamrah is a facial cosmetic surgeon in McLean, Virginia. He recently wrote an op-ed piece for the *Washington Post* entitled, "What do my cosmetic surgery patients want?" But the title of his piece didn't stop there. The title went on to include an answer to that question that reveals just how vain, misguided, and self-obsessed we have become. That answer? "To look better in selfies." Dr. Hamrah writes about how ten years ago, his typical patient was a 47 or 48 year-old woman. Today, the average age has dropped to 38 and 39. They want to look younger. One 20 year-old requested a face lift. A survey of members of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons has found that social media is driving more plastic surgery requests than any other social influence. As parents and youth workers, it's reasonable to assume that this pressure and trend will only intensify as time goes on. We need to teach our kids that while man looks on the outside, God looks on the heart.


TRENDS: BURNER PHONES

Last year, a survey from the Pew Research Center found that fifty-six percent of teens felt anxious, lonely, or upset when they didn't have their cellphones. Typically, teens are without their phones when their parents or school require cell-phone free time, during overnights or during class. The *Wall Street Journal* recently ran an article describing how kids are now circumventing these rules by secretly securing what are called burner phones. A burner phone is an inexpensive mobile phone that is designed for temporary use and which can be discarded. These phones are prepaid and contract-free, and they can be connected to wifi to bypass data plans. One detective told the *Wall Street Journal* that in almost every high school across the country there is a kids who sells burner phones from their locker. Parents, be aware that your kids might choose to evade your tech rules with a burner phone. Talk to your kids about setting and keeping their own tech limits as an act of worship.




LATEST RESEARCH: SUPPLEMENT USE

We live in a world where our kids are encouraged to find and build their identity around physical characteristics, including appearance and performance. It should come as no surprise that more and more kids are turning to dietary supplements to lose weight, shrink their waistlines, or build muscle. New research published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* reports that teens who use these supplements could be putting themselves at risk of harm and even death. Researchers say there are two ways that dietary supplements can cause harm. First, some supplements contain dangerous ingredients that are not listed on the label. And second, users were combining supplements with other supplements or even prescription drugs, creating combinations that cause harm. Previous studies report negative health issues including chronic diarrhea, dehydration, stroke, seizures, heart problems, and kidney and liver damage. Parents, be aware, and help your kids make good choices.



**SEXUAL INTEGRITY
INITIATIVE**
A resource of CPYU and Project Six19

**Pornography
Exposure**
by Walt Mueller



Our friends at ProtectYoungMinds.org are advising parents about five sneaky locations where pornography finds kids. Parents, be aware of these five locations. First, kids are accessing pornography through the wifi at their grandparents homes. The reason? Grandparents are less prone to install controls on their devices. Second, when kids are out from under your roof and at a sleepover, there are risks related to a lack of supervision. Many recommend that sleepovers are never a good idea. Third, when kids are together on the school bus and there are smartphones present, there is unsupervised freedom that often leads to exposure. Fourth, several kids report that their first exposure to porn occurred when they were 13 and babysitting in someone else's home. And finally, 80% of exposure happens right in our own homes when our kids are behind closed doors. Parents, be diligent by warning your kids of the dangers, and then set up safe borders and boundaries.

New Podcast

Youth Culture Matters
is a long-format
podcast from CPYU
co-hosted by Walt Mueller
and Jason Soucinek.



Listen at
www.cpyu.org/podcast.

Be sure to check out
Episode 92 for an interview
with Luke Bob titled
“Recovering a Proper
Understanding of Work.”

FROM THE WORD

James reminds Christ’s followers of this truth: “Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead” (James 2:17). Sadly, our me-centered culture feeds an all-too-often accepted mutation of true Christian faith that is *me-glorifying* and *self-centered*, rather than *God-glorifying* and *other-centered*. Equally sad is how this self-centeredness manifests itself in massive consumerism at the very time when we celebrate the birth of the One who told us that it is “more blessed to give, than to receive.”

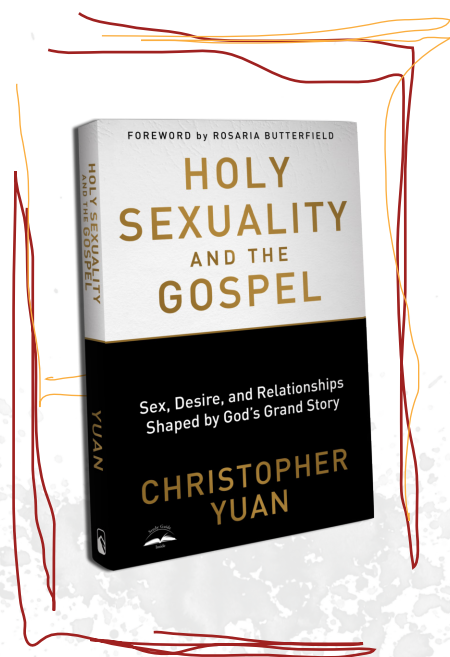
This Christmas, why not battle the materialism of the age by encouraging your children and teenagers to help others by getting involved in a social justice cause or missions endeavor as a family? By modeling selfless involvement in missions and service projects, you will grow a desire in your kids to make a difference through service to others in the name of Christ. As their interest grows, enable them to take opportunities to participate in short-term mission projects on a local, national, and international scale. Experience shows that one of the most effective ways to build and cement the faith of teenagers is to involve them in missions and service. As a family, bring your faith to life by putting it into action.

**“THE WORD BECAME
FLESH AND BLOOD,
AND MOVED INTO THE
NEIGHBORHOOD.”
JOHN 1:14
(THE MESSAGE)**

HELPFUL RESOURCE ←

From the author of *Out of a Far Country*, which details his dramatic conversion from an agnostic gay man who put his identity in his sexuality to a Bible professor at Moody Bible Institute who puts his identity in Christ alone, comes a thoroughly gospel-centered examination of sex, desire, and relationships.

Holy Sexuality and the Gospel: Sex, Desire, and Relationships Shaped by God’s Grand Story is a continuation of Christopher Yuan’s first book which introduced the concept of holy sexuality—chastity in singleness or faithfulness in marriage. God has uniquely qualified Dr. Yuan with personal experience and theological training to winsomely present a robust theology of sexuality in an approachable, practical, and relevant manner. Whether you want to share Christ to a loved one who identifies as gay or you’re wrestling with questions of identity yourself, this book will help you better understand sexuality in light of God’s grand story and realize that holy sexuality is actually good news for all.



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