

## "Being Christmas People all Year"

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**Colossians 3:12-17 NRSV:**

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. <sup>14</sup> Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. <sup>15</sup> And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. <sup>16</sup> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. <sup>17</sup> And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

If Every Day Was Like Christmas (sung by Elvis Presley)

I hear the bells, saying Christmas is near  
They ring out to tell the world that this is the season of cheer

I hear a choir singing sweetly somewhere  
And a glow fills my heart, I'm at peace with the world  
As the sound of their singing fills the air

Oh why can't every day be like Christmas?  
Why can't that feeling go on endlessly, for if everyday could be  
just like Christmas, what a wonderful world this would be

I hear a child, telling Santa what to bring  
And the smile upon his tiny face, is worth more to me than anything

Oh why can't every day be like Christmas?  
Why can't that feeling go on endlessly, For if everyday could be  
just like Christmas, What a wonderful world this would be.

Red West If Every Day Was Like Christmas lyrics © Universal Music Publishing Group,  
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### INTRODUCTION

I used this song once, in an early sermon to ask: why can't that every day be like Thanksgiving Day, when the hungry are fed and the tables are welcoming. In the synoptic gospels when the people have been listening to Jesus for a long time he tells the disciples: "You give them something to eat" (i.e. Matt 14:16). For Christ-followers, every day should be like that.

Red West, stuntman, bodyguard, actor and songwriter, wrote lyrics for Elvis and others. What do you think of his premise: "Why can't every day be like Christmas?"

## WE CAN BE CHRISTMAS PEOPLE ALL THE TIME

The epistle to the church people at Colosse says that followers of the way of Christ are most like Jesus when they are considerate and generous. Specifically, in the Colossians 3 text we are asked to demonstrate:

compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. We are called to bear with one another, forgive each other, as the Lord has forgiven us, to love, to be in harmony. Our mindset is to be peaceful and thankful, while we explain this way of life to others, with gratitude for the opportunity and a song on our lips. Whatever we do, in word or deed, everything reflects on the name of the Lord Jesus. Our actions and attitudes show thanks to God the Father, through him.

What happened around Christmas? It's only been a few days, you probably remember. Individually and collectively, not just on Christmas Day, but the whole season of Advent:

We were kind to the less fortunate, generous as we could be with our gifts. We were patient with each other. We buried the hatchet and gathered with our friends and family, even the ones we love but don't always like. We forgave or ignored mistakes, careless actions and chronic tardiness. We tried to be peaceful- to sit and watch the lights, to contemplate the significance of "God with us", because "A Baby Changes Everything". We said please and thank you, appreciating the efforts of others. We shared Christmas stories and traditions with younger folk and enjoyed watching little ones.

That certainly sounds like we were living as described to the Colossians, living in the love and joy of the Christ of Christmas.

We worshipped together, we had glorious multigenerational services and we invited people to join us. We were better together. As individuals we couldn't have gathered tables full of food and gifts, like our deacons organized to give to families in Battle Creek. One of us couldn't have provided the beautiful, powerful worship we celebrated on Christmas Eve. Why can't every day be like Christmas? Part of it is because we aren't always all working together, like we do during advent.

Dr. Amy L.B. Peeler, Professor of NT at Wheaton College, explained this about the letter to the Colossians, in the holiday context:

There are no singulars in this passage; everything is directed to the "y'all" of the congregation. To live in a Christmas state of mind, peaceable and wise, is to live counter-culturally, and you cannot maintain that on your own for long. To carry the songs and hymns and odes of the season on into the bleakness of winter and then on into even the dog days of summer takes a critical mass, a body, brought together by the spirit from a variety of backgrounds that can teach and admonish one another to live giving thanks to God always.

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So, maybe, *together* we can be a Christmas-like Christian church, year `round.

DO WE WANT CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY? NO, THANK YOU! NOT EVERY DAY!

Living life if every day were Christmas? If it included freely opening our wallets- no we can't afford to give or shop like that everyday. We can't wrap a pile of presents every day, but we can put on, wrap our lives in "compassion, and kindness" everyday. We can be Christmas people, all we need is for compassion and kindness to be our normal! Only with God's help is that even possible.

We can't cook and eat like it's Christmas, or skip mundane duties to do everything grandly twelve months of the year, like we did pretty much *all* of December. Philippians 4:4 says "rejoice always", but the next verse (4:5) in some translations says "let your moderation be well-known". Celebration in moderation. Celebrate everyday but skip the excesses. Rejoice always. Another "easier said than done".

When I was trying to decide why Christmas would be hard if it were every day, my mind flashed onto a friend's Facebook post. A peer from seminary is glad every day isn't Christmas. She and her husband divorced this year and her teen and her tween spent Christmas Day with their dad. She was lonely on Christmas Day, for the first time ever. Some people are lonely on Christmas, every year. That's sad. It should make us sad every day when people don't feel loved or needed. We don't want it to be like Christmas every day, if it means people are hurting every day. Put on compassion and kindness toward them.

Know why else we don't want every day to be Christmas? There's more gospel to tell than the Christmas Story! There has to be ordinary time after the weeks of Christmas, to have the special seasons of Lent and Easter and Pentecost. The story of Jesus' life, and God's love that we are asked to demonstrate to the world is incomplete without the rest of the story. We need to hear the rest of the story. Dr. Carlson explained it well on Christmas Eve: "The gift of God's Son, this gift for those shepherds, for the people of Bethlehem, for you and me, for all people, is not a gift that we earned or deserved. ... This gift, this Son, is not given because we deserve him. He is given to us out of God's grace, his undeserved favor for those who have turned away from God." (JSC, 12/24/2018)

TO HAVE MORE DAYS LIKE CHRISTMAS, LIVE THE COLOSSIANS 3 WAY.

If you read Colossians 3 in context, the verses before what we heard, you'd catch that there are things to NOT do if you are a Christmas Christian. Basically it says to shed your vices. Especially important is that suggestion that *then*: "clothe yourself with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" Colossians 3:14 NRSV.

What about that? When you put on your clothes you get to choose. You make conscious efforts to make the correct choice for the day. I'm fairly certain no one here has on only one article of clothing. "Clothe yourselves with compassion,

kindness, humility, meekness, and patience". Layer your fabrics and your spiritual clothes.

Above all, "clothe yourselves with love". Consider love as your outer garments. You're never fully dressed without love. "If I do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal" using the Corinthian metaphor (I Cor. 13:1) or "without love, you're standing around in your underwear", if you're a Colossian. Doing things out of love, not duty is the way of Jesus. Easy to say and hard to do.

Verse 14 ends by stressing that love "binds everything together in perfect harmony." Different translations say that in differing ways; the NRSV uses the word harmony. Others say love is the basis for unity or completeness, love joins everything together as it should be. Harmony is a sweet concept because within a choir, harmony- differing notes that blend well- explains how we hope to serve together. We know this is not a perfect world- mistakes always happen. We all get things wrong. Loving someone who makes mistakes, including ourselves, leads to peace. Peace is the foundation of our Christmas hopes and dreams.

Howard Thurman (1899-1981), clergyman, educator and mentor to MLK Jr. wrote this in his work, *The Mood of Christmas* (1973):

When the song of the angels is stilled,  
 When the star in the sky is gone,  
 When the kings and princes are home,  
 When the shepherds are back with their flock,  
 The work of Christmas begins:  
 To find the lost  
 To heal the broken  
 To feed the hungry  
 To release the prisoner.  
 To rebuild the nations,  
 To bring peace among people,  
 To make music in the heart.

Would you like every day to be like Christmas? It means doing what Dr. Thurman and the writer to the Colossians, suggest: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Amen.