

December 19th

THE CHRISTMAS SONG

"Chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose..."

'The Christmas Song' always reminds me of walking around downtown Chicago as a kid. I grew up in a faraway suburb of the big city, but every year we would head downtown in December to take in the lights and decorations, marvel at the story-telling windows of Marshall Fields, and get popcorn or hot chocolate. On the street corners vendors would be roasting chestnuts on little carts, which would always compel my dad to start singing 'The Christmas Song'.

I don't have the best memory - any of my family can confirm this - so special memories from childhood aren't always crystal clear. They tend to merge together and become general concepts and feelings. I think what makes this song so special to me is that it's identifiable and specific to the general memories and feelings of my childhood.

As I got older, the tradition of going into Chicago in December continued. So, the childhood memory came to include adult memories of coming home from college and being "home" again. And then I got married and going downtown became a favorite Christmas tradition with my wife, and then later, my kids. This song brings back great memories gathered over many decades.

But it's also much more than just fun memories. Since I was a child, the true meaning of Christmas has always been at the center of every Christmas - the great gift of God's son Jesus, born in Bethlehem, destined to live a sinless life, die for our sins, and live again. Because of this, the joy from past Christmas memories is not fleeting. It is joy from memories that are tied directly to eternal truth.



Some Christians draw hard lines between "Christian" things and "non-Christian" things. This is often called the sacred-secular divide. Such hard-liners may be offended by the fact that my favorite Christmas song is not a great hymn of the faith. If that's you, all I can do is ask for your grace. If you believe in a hard sacred-secular dividing line and are convinced that a Christmas tree is a pagan decoration (for example), I think you should honor your conviction and not decorate a tree. But if you don't have strong convictions and are seeking God's direction in your life at this time of year, I would direct your attention to 1 Corinthians 10:31 - "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

Unless your song, or tradition, or decoration causes damage to God's reputation, this verse offers you a lot of freedom... with a healthy dose of responsibility. We are free in Christ to enjoy all of God's gifts, sacred or secular, but we have the responsibility to enjoy it all for the glory of God. While 'The Christmas Song' may not be a religious song, it is one that brings joy to my heart at this time of year - joy that is real and true, and flows directly from celebrating Jesus. Joy that brings glory to God.

Contributed by Matt Cook

