

Life and Death at Christmas

As I was about to begin this devotional, I received word that Marion Newstrum had just died. Marion and her husband, Elmer, had been part of our church longer than most of our members had been alive at the time. She was eighty-seven. They had been married sixty-four years.

When I spoke to Elmer and told him I wanted him to be strong in the Lord and not give up on life, he said, “He has been a true friend.” I pray that all Christians will be able to say at the end of life, “Christ has been a true friend.”

Each Advent I mark the anniversary of my mother’s death. She was cut off in her fifty-sixth year in a bus accident in Israel. It was December 16, 1974. Those events are incredibly real to me even today. If I allow myself, I can easily come to tears—for example, thinking that my sons never knew her. We buried her the day after Christmas. What a precious Christmas it was!

Many of you will feel your loss this Christmas more pointedly than before. Don't block it out. Let it come. Feel it. What is love for, if not to intensify our affections—both in life and in death? But, oh, do not be bitter. It is tragically self-destructive to be bitter.

Jesus came at Christmas that we might have eternal life. "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Elmer and Marion had discussed where they would spend their final years. Elmer said, "Marion and I agreed that our final home would be with the Lord."

Do you feel restless for home? I have family coming home for the holidays. It feels good. I think the bottom-line reason for why it feels good is that they and I are destined in the depths of our being for an ultimate homecoming. All other homecomings are foretastes. And foretastes are good.

Unless they become substitutes. Oh, don't let all the sweet things of this season become substitutes of the final, great, all-satisfying sweetness. Let every loss and every delight send your hearts a-homing after heaven.

Christmas. What is it but this: *I came that they may have life?* Marion Newstrum, Ruth Piper, and you and I—that we might have life, now and forever.

Make your *now* richer and deeper this Christmas by drinking at the fountain of *forever*. It is so near.