

에드먼튼 소망교회 **Youth Group** Edmonton Hope CRC

Because of Bethlehem

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Because of Bethlehem; My Reflection

Daniel Kim

Through reading this book, it made me reflect back to how I have spent my Christmas: Working on my Biology IB IA, spending time with family, playing games with cousins, or preparing for a Christmas concert. And through all those years, Christmas was always fun, but everytime, the image of Christ hasn't been a big part of how I've spent those days despite the fact that Christmas is about him. Furthermore, it really makes me reflect on the days that are not only Christmas but times when I feel joy and how much Christ was in those moments - which was not a lot- as I have often forgotten to thank God due to how distracted I was from that joy. So from now on, I need to make an effort to give credit where credit is due, celebrate WITH God, and be joyful and thankful for the presence of God.

An important point in this book was the quote "He understands, he's been there, he's been here"(5). Often when I feel down, disappointed, frustrated, I look towards God and ask why,

what the purpose of that event was that brought me nothing but pain and grief. But I always need to remind myself: he knows what it's like, understands, but more importantly, everything is planned. In the book, Lucado alludes to the story of how Jesus was born to demonstrate that everything is planned. He refers to the tough experiences on the journey to give birth to Christ with the hotels being full and thus being forced to go into a manger. However, a positive event has risen from this hassle; Through the hassle, a symbol of hope was created. So essentially, these experiences are meant to be there, and when we face them and overcome these obstacles, we will look back and understand the purpose and how much it has helped me to become who I am. In the end, this gives me motivation to push through my struggles that I am facing or will face in the future. Because ultimately, these struggles will help me to be better, play an important part into the development of my character, but also be a better follower of Christ. So it is important for us to remember that he understands us, he knows what is best for us, and he has "plans to prosper [us], and not to harm [us], plans to give [us] hope and a future"(Jeremiah 29:11).

But perhaps through all this realization, the biggest moment of epiphany for me came specifically in chapter 9 where "perhaps today" will be the day that Christ returns.(91) In some moments, we truly feel the grace of God, and maybe sometimes his wrath. But what is important is that we live everyday of our lives as if he were to come tomorrow and prepare ourselves for that moment. While we do live and believe in Christ, it is often very easy to be distracted and distance ourselves from God, whether we forget about him through times of joy, or more prominently in times of suffering in my experiences. But even through all this, it is important that I remember to always look towards Christ, maintain that relationship and prepare for the day that I can meet him. Because once we do meet him, "our present sufferings will be nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed in us"(Romans 8:18)

Deborah Song

During the time I read Because of Bethlehem, my understanding of Christ became deeper and there were many points where I could relate to. Some points that really stood out to me were in chapters 3, 5, and 11. In chapter 3, Lucado talks about our saviour and how God is the only one who can save us from our sins. But the quote that I gravitated towards was "it's impossible to save those who are trying to save themselves" (31). Lucado also uses the example of when he was in the boy scouts, how he had to rescue others from drowning. I could relate to this experience as I have also had to rescue victims from the water during my Bronze Cross course. Because of this experience, I know the difficulties of trying to save someone when they are trying to save themselves by kicking and paddling with their hands. It is most efficient when the victim lets the rescuer save them, by trusting them. In life, I feel that we often try so hard to save ourselves from our troubles and forget that all we have to do is put our trust and faith in God and he will save us as he is our saviour. Chapter 11 was about being chosen for a specific role that God had planned out for each and every one of us. Lucado compared us to being picked like a Christmas tree; when we go looking for a tree, we examine all of them carefully before we pick the perfect one and place it in our homes. Similar to the tree, God has a place for us and chose

us to play a specific role.

Derrick S. Kim

Because of Bethlehem is a book detailing connections of events in Max Lucado's life and historical events to the spirit of God and Christmas. Throughout the book, Lucado makes use of the common holiday subject of Christmas and ties it into questions and references of the events leading up to the birth of Jesus on Christmas. The book is written in an interesting way, with the easing into biblical topics and random subject changes acting as a "hook" to keep the reader from getting bored easily.

Max Lucado makes heavy use of personal experiences and his mindset at the time and ties them to biblical thinking. This itself is an interesting way to introduce topics to the reader, by presenting a situation many of us may relate with on a day-to-day or holiday season basis. For example, Lucado introduces the topic of sin through a confrontation with a reckless driving teenager during a holiday season. In this confrontation, he confronts a teenager after making a reckless U-turn, almost hitting him. He gives the reader insight into his mindset at the time:

"In that heated moment he wasn't someone's son, he wasn't a creation of God, he wasn't a miracle. He wasn't fearfully and wonderfully made. He was a disrespectful jerk, and I let him bring the disrespectful jerk out of me" (26).

Afterward he connects this mindset with sin, and at the same time introduces us to how God can save us from sin by again connecting this to his personal experience of life saving during Boy Scouts. This method draws in the reader with situations and experiences that we may have experienced ourselves, and then connects them to biblical topics. The way Lucado implements this makes the book particularly interesting.

Max Lucado also makes use of an uncommon method of writing; he has a "disconnect" between all of the subjects in his book. For example, the most prevalent differences are in chapter 1 and 2, with the former being focused on why the author is a fan of Christmas time and why he enjoys it, while the latter starts off asking the question of why we do seemingly "redundant" things in our everyday lives and then goes onto why we, as human beings, lack rational behavior and tend to make such a fuss over events and things in our everyday lives. The disconnect and random subject changing seems confusing on a first read, however more careful insight reveals that he cleverly crafts his sentences and formatting to flow into the ending subject of the chapter, with each chapter ending on a particular biblical insight or subject. These biblical insights and subjects, when combined all together, make a big picture about what truly makes Christmas enjoyable and reaffirms the book's title of "Because of Bethlehem".

All of these factors make the book a particularly interesting read, and personally allowed me to make it through the book without becoming bored. Thought provoking questions such as the ones at the start of chapter 2 get me thinking about why something happens, and the book

itself draws me in as it links seemingly abstract concepts to biblical topics, furthering insight into what it really means to be a follower of Christ and further emphasizes into the meaning of the book's title as well as what it means to celebrate Christmas.

Edith Kim

This book is based on the stories of Pastor Max Lucado. He explains how everyday life is connected to God and his teachings, and shares his inspirational lessons to use in tough situations. While reading, I found it very easy to relate to the questions he often asks. In fact, I have asked some of the same questions to myself before. Lucado also mentions the birth of Christ often, and reinforces his greatness and mercy. This book has given me many moments where I had to stop reading, and deeply reflect on my own actions and thoughts. During this short time, I felt regretful for not reaching God in the moments of sin sooner. I started to accept myself as a sinner, and set goals to be a sinner who sins less. One of the quotes in this book that has brought me comfort and helped me find peace within myself was, "He understands how you feel and has faced what you face". As short and simple this quote may sound, the idea and reassurance that God is with me and looking out for me has brought me great peace throughout the weeks. Especially as life becomes more stressful and hard, I think my reliance and relationship with God has slightly started to fade. Just like finding the positives in a negative event, personally, it was hard to maintain a strong relationship with God recently. However, through this book, and as I started to find some sort of peace within me, to motivate me to simply be honest towards God and open up, has influenced my thoughts, behaviours, and feelings. As Pastor Lucado states, God has gone so far as to face us as a human, putting the efforts to understand us; so now, I recognize that it is my turn to put in the effort to understand and face God with an open and honest heart. I realize that I am in need of God's guidance, even as I grow to be more mature. This recognition has encouraged me to seek God first, be humble, and find peace within myself.

Ellen Kim

The book '*Because of Christmas*' opens with the author, Max Lucado, expressing his love for Christmas--especially, the subsequent questions relating to Christ.

This ostensibly ordinary "holiday book" resulted in being one of that taught me many applicable life lessons, with both Christian (biblical) values and values relating to our society today. Through Max's shared experiences (and other mentioned stories), I found myself relating and reflecting on my own life.

One lesson/chapter I enjoyed in particular, was Chapter 3--God has a face. Chapter 3 essentially reminded us that God, at one point, was a human. Ironically, the opening anecdote of the chapter reminded me that, (in general) authors themselves are people; human (the irrefutable gap between the author and the audience, I suppose). Similarly to the rest of the book, I also found lots of meaningful lessons.

I personally enjoyed how Lucado conveyed his passion for, essentially, proclaiming the vast magnificence of God. Quite far from cursory, Lucado delved into each aspect (again, with relating narratives) so it would be “digestible” for (possibly) younger readers, such as myself.

Personally, Lucado’s use of biblical references (verses, for instance) and contrasting juxtapositions of (seasonal) activities further made me enjoy reading this book. Max’s own experiences and “commentary” resonated with me.

Overall, I enjoyed this book. I believe Lucado successfully tied together aspects of Christmas/Christ, making a remarkably enjoyable compilation of experiences to read.

Hyo Kyung (Jennifer) Lee

Because of Bethlehem was full of real-life stories. When the author compared our excitement for Christmas decorations and holiday feelings to the real scenery of Jesus’ birth, I realized I have been focusing on something completely off. The truth was, I have never celebrated Jesus’ birth on Christmas but only carols, hot chocolate, and gatherings.

Another lesson I learned from this book was from Chapter 11 where the author made it clear that “God made [me] on purpose with a purpose”. I was more than well aware of the fact God made me with a purpose, but I overlooked something more important – God took time and chose the best of the best to create me, just like I spent hours and hours on planning my Christmas vacation so that I can have the best wrap-up of the year. As you probably noticed, I only “knew” what Christmas is supposed to be for, but never spent a good amount of time reflecting on what truly entailed it.

The author touched on many simple facts that all of us already know and heard about. However, he brought his own personal stories in and presented with the Nativity stories which made the Bible more relatable. The messages were clear and easy to follow.

Jeff Kim

The book Because of Bethlehem does really have meaning, as after reading chapters 1-12, gives renewed sense of hope and joy in the world, as from what is given to us in the book, believes that it will happen soon, which is the arrival of Jesus again, as it states on page 101, “Your wait is nearly over, if all of history was a year, the leaves would now be Autumn gold.” This quote shows that the arrival of Christ is soon, and that we have little less to wait. It states earlier in the book, that our mindset should be like the one of Simeon, who had been told by the Holy Spirit that he wouldn’t die until he saw Jesus. This gave him the mindset of “Perhaps Today”, which is when you can assume that this could be the day of Jesus’ return to earth from Heaven above. This chapter specifically shows that Jesus is to arrive soon, and this great piece of news can do many wonders, which include boosted joy/happiness and also gives us hope, hope for a new start in Jesus, or perhaps hope for the world overall. The book overall does give good

comparisons and insight about the story of Bethlehem, and on the way includes usually at least 1 personal anecdote a chapter, which makes the topic that will be discussed in the latter more relatable and understood from the introduction through the shared experience. It also gives us ways to appreciate Christmas, instead of blandly seeing it as a holiday, and also does include many other ways to strengthen your faith. Overall the book is good for religious purposes.

Jimmie Jung

I was especially impressed by chapter 5, It's Never too Late, while reading the book. Chapter 5 basically talks about the opportunities that humans have and people who miss opportunities that come to their life. In chapter 5, there is a story that Mary went to Bethlehem to give birth to Jesus. Mary went to an inn to give birth to Jesus. However, the innkeeper does not let Mary in, saying that the inn is full of guests. So Mary had no choice but to give birth to Jesus in the stable. At this point, the writer asks us a question. Won't the innkeeper let Mary in because there are no vacancies in the inn? Couldn't he have found one more space? Mary was third - trimester pregnant. Wouldn't you find a bed for a mother to be? What if Mary and Joseph were queen and king? What if they arrived with camels and servants instead of a few clothes and tired donkey. Then, perhaps the innkeeper's answer would be different. The innkeeper missed the opportunity to help the birth of Jesus. We are also the same. If the person who asked me for directions yesterday could give me bread saying thank you. As I live my life, consideration and service for others can become a big gift to me someday. Believing in God is the same. Believing in God will not change me right now, but one day, the faith in god will be rewarded.