



Life Actually

By Kari Kampakis

Invited to the party: A reflection on Christmas

Sometimes I wonder who I'd be if I were stripped of the earthly layers that define me: my family, my friends, my passions and my achievements. What if I lost my home and possessions, too? What if I no longer had decent clothes and makeup to hide behind, no masks to boost my confidence?

Could I love myself in this raw, completely blemished form? Could I find self worth just being a child of God? Would I still love Him, or would I turn away, growing hard and bitter over all that I'd lost?

These are hard questions but ones to consider if we care about eternal life. Because one day, our earthly layers will be stripped off. We'll be judged not by what we wore over our core but our core itself. Like it or not, our identity will be revealed.

I'll be honest: This frightens me. I know how holy God is and how perfect His standards are. The fact that He'd even consider me for His kingdom is mind-boggling. I'm unworthy and fall so short. Part of me wants to say, "Are you kidding me, God? You know the darkness in my heart, all my guises, sins, and motives. You see me make mistakes, and hate myself for them. Why waste your time on me? Am I fooling myself to believe I even have a shot at heaven?"

The thing is, I'm not fooling myself. As hard as it is to comprehend, God wants me and *you* to spend eternity with Him. He wants to bring us all home, back to where He created us, where brokenness is made whole and everlasting happiness exists.

On earth, there's no such thing as a party where everyone's invited. There are exclusions. Cuts. Guests lists tweaked and whittled down to the most important names. But to God, every name is important. Everyone's on His guest list.

We're all invited to God's party in heaven because of grace. His grace changes everything, and it is a gift we receive for free by accepting

Christ Jesus in our life. God doesn't give us what we deserve, He gives *more*. And as we submit to Him, humbly seeking help and forgiveness, His grace works miracles in our life. It makes straight lines out of crooked sticks. Heroes out of vagrants. Masterpieces out of ashes. As impossible things happen, we raise our eyes upward, and wonder if this joy in our heart - this unspeakable splendor — is a taste of heaven.

If so, we want to live there forever.

Christmas is the celebration of a baby sent to save our world from sin and lead us all to heaven. Christ is God's ultimate gift of grace, a model of human obedience. Through Him we have footsteps to follow. Through Him we learn to walk.

There's so much suffering in this world, and none of us are immune. Out of the blue we can be stripped of our marriage, our children, our honor and good name. We can lose everything, yet one thing no one can ever take away is our faith. God's promise of salvation is untouchable.

I want this message to be one of hope. Because God is hope. Jesus is hope. Christmas is hope. Any gifts we're robbed of in this world will be reclaimed in the next. There's freedom knowing this now, because even in the most painful circumstances, we have a reason to hang on. The future holds rewards.

As we celebrate the remarkable birth of Christ, let's remember God's love for us and His invitation to heaven. By sending His son into our world, God built us a bridge home. He offered atonement for our sins. His grace does, indeed, change everything.

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