

SESSION FOUR:

Read a Story Script

THE LEANING CHRISTMAS TREE

The Christmas tree hunt is on. Families are entering tents and patrolling sidewalks. They lift limbs and examine needles. They measure. They ponder. They consider. They barter.

The tree can't be too tall or too short. It needs to fit the room and the budget. It must be full yet not dense, mature but not dry. A noble fir for some. A Douglas fir or Virginia pine for others. The preferences are different, but the desire is the same. We want the perfect Christmas tree.

And, oh, the special moment when we find it. When we lash it to the car. Drag it into the house and set it in the tree stand.

We revel in this moment. Only a few people have won the Olympics, completed an Ironman triathlon, or been awarded the Nobel Prize. Fewer still have positioned a Christmas tree so that it doesn't lean.

One year I barely escaped. Denalyn and I placed the tree in the stand, stood back...and sighed in disappointment at what we saw. The dreaded tilt. I crawled under the branches and began adjusting the screws until the tree stood as straight as a stalk of wheat. We stepped back and admired my engineering skills. Denalyn placed her arm in mine, and I choked back tears of joy. My children called me blessed. Angels began to sing. The blast of trumpets sounded in the front yard, where neighbors had gathered. The

White House called to congratulate me. We strung the lights and hung the decorations. It was a wonderful night.

Then disaster struck. The tree started to lean again. Decorations shook, lights shifted, Denalyn shouted, and I ran to the rescue.

This time I placed the tree on its side, removed the stand, and saw the root of the problem. Just six inches above the cut line was a right turn. Our tree was crooked! Once upon a time in a forest, this tree had been a leaner! And now here it was, in our house, in broad daylight, in front of my own children—leaning again!

What's a person to do? As I was retrieving a saw from the garage, it occurred to me: I'm not the first father to deal with this issue. God faces this situation on a continual basis. Don't we have our share of unattractive bents?

I wish I stood as straight as a sequoia, but I don't. And since I don't, I find a kindred spirit in the Christmas tree. I think you will find the same. What you do for a tree, God does for you.

He PICKED you.

Do you purchase the first tree you see? Of course not. You search for the right one. You walk the rows. You lift several up and set them down. You examine them from all angles until you decide, *This one is perfect*. You have a place in mind where the tree will sit. Not just any tree will do.

God does the same. **He knows just the place where you'll be PLACED.** He has a barren living room in desperate need of warmth and joy. A corner of the world needs some color. He selected you with that place in mind.

God made you on purpose with a purpose. He interwove calendar and character, circumstance and personality to create the right person for the right corner of the world, and then he paid the price to take you home.

He PURCHASED you.

We don't ask the tree-lot owner to give us the tree for free. The kid who loads the tree in the trunk doesn't shell out the cash; we do. We make the necessary payment.

God did the same. On the original Christmas tree, Calvary's cross, he paid the price to save you by dying for you.

In the manger God loves you; through the cross God saves you. But has he taken you to his home? Not yet. He has work for you to do.

So . . . he PRUNES you.

He takes an ax to your back-talking and clippers to your self-pity, and when there is a tilt in your character that needs to be removed, he's been known to pull out the old Black & Decker.

Once he gets us cleaned up and standing straight, the DECORATING begins. He festoons us with the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. He crowns us. Most people crown their Christmas trees with either an angel or a star. God uses both. He sends his angels to protect us and his Word as a star to guide us.

Our task is to stand tall in his love, secure in our place, sparkling in kindness, surrounded by his goodness, freely giving to all who come our way.

You, me, and the Christmas tree. Picked, placed, purchased, pruned and crowned.¹

1 Adapted from Max Lucado, *Because of Bethlehem* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2016), chapter 11.