

Home for the Holidays

On Sunday morning, December 21, 1856, Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon to prepare his growing church for the coming Christmas season. He titled it “Going Home,” and the aim of the message was to encourage each member of his congregation to humbly, wisely, and appropriately find opportunities to share their personal testimony with family and friends.

Spurgeon had become the pastor of New Park Street Church in April 1854. At that time the church had 232 members. By Christmas of 1856 the membership had risen quickly to around 4,000. A large number of newly converted Christians needed to be prepared for their return home for Christmas.

Spurgeon’s sermon text was taken from the dramatic account of Jesus healing the Gerasene demoniac in Mark 5:1–20. Spurgeon focused his attention on Jesus’s commission to the man after he was healed: “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you” (v. 19).

After explaining the demoniac’s radical life-transformation by Christ and his commission to go home, Spurgeon commissioned his church to return home. In the remainder of the sermon Spurgeon develops several practical points:

- Christmas is suited for sharing the gospel with family and friends.
- Aim to share the story of God’s grace in your life.
- By sharing we edify believers.
- By sharing we reach lost friends and family.
- Be alert for one-on-one opportunities to share your story.
- Don’t expect this sharing to be easy.
- Overcome this fear by sharing to honor your Savior.
- Share your story with gratitude to God.
- Share your story with humility.
- Share your story truthfully—don’t embellish it.
- Tell your story seriously—don’t share it flippantly.
- Don’t neglect your personal devotions during Christmas.
- Rest upon the Holy Spirit’s help to share.
- Remember that this story you share over the holidays is the story that will be on your lips eternally.

What follows are a few excerpts taken from the message that have been slightly modified and rearranged for readability.

May the Savior be glorified this Christmas season as we gather with friends and family.

Going Home: A Christmas Sermon¹

C.H. Spurgeon

December 21, 1856

The demoniac's story

This poor wretch, being possessed with a legion of evil spirits had been driven to something worse than madness. He fixed his home among the tombs, where he dwelt by night and day, and was the terror of all those who passed by. The authorities had attempted to curb him; he had been bound with fetters and chains, but in the paroxysms of his madness he had torn the chains in sunder, and broken the fetters in pieces.

Attempts had been made to reclaim him, but no man could tame him. He was worse than the wild beasts, for they might be tamed; but his fierce nature would not yield. He was a misery to himself, for he would run upon the mountains by night and day, crying and howling fearfully, cutting himself with the sharp flints, and torturing his poor body in the most frightful manner.

Jesus Christ passed by; he said to the devils, "Come out of him." The man was healed in a moment, he fell down at Jesus' feet, he became a rational being—an intelligent man, and what is more, a convert to the Savior.

The demoniac's commission

Out of gratitude to his deliverer, he said, "Lord, I will follow you wherever you go. I will be your constant companion and your servant, permit me so to be" [Mark 5:18].

"No," said Christ, "I esteem your motive, it is one of gratitude to me, but if you would show your gratitude, go home to your friends and tell them of the great things the Lord has done for you, and how he has had compassion on you."

Christmas is suited for sharing the gospel with family and friends.

True religion does not break the bonds of family relationship. True religion seldom encroaches upon that sacred—I had almost said divine—institution called *home*. It does not separate men from their families, and make them aliens to their flesh and blood....

¹ This material originally appeared as a post on C.J. Mahaney's blog in December 2010 (<http://www.sovereigngraceministries.org/blogs/cj-mahaney/>). The full manuscript of Spurgeon's sermon is available online (<http://www.spurgeon.org/sermons/0109.htm>).

Christianity makes a husband a better husband, it makes a wife a better wife than she was before. It does not free me from my duties as a son; it makes me a better son, and my parents better parents. Instead of weakening my love, it gives me fresh reason for my affection; and he whom I loved before as my father, I now love as my brother and co-worker in Christ Jesus; and she whom I revered as my mother, I now love as my sister in the covenant of grace, to be mine for ever in the state that is to come....

For my part, I wish there were twenty Christmas days in the year. It is seldom that young men can meet with their friends; it is rarely they can all be united as happy families....I love it as a family institution, as one of England's brightest days, the great Sabbath of the year, when the plough rests in its furrow, when the din of business is hushed, when the mechanic and the working man go out to refresh themselves upon the green sward of the glad earth.

Aim to share the story of God's grace in your life.

It is to be a story of *personal* experience: "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee."

You are not to repair to your houses to preach. You are not to begin to take up doctrinal subjects and expatiate on them, and endeavor to bring persons to your peculiar views and sentiments. You are not to go home with sundry doctrines you have lately learned, and try to teach these. You are to go home and tell not what you have believed, but what you have *felt*—what you really know to be your own; not what great things you have read, but what great things the Lord hath *done for you*; not alone what you have seen done in the great congregation, and how great sinners have turned to God, but what the Lord has done for *you*. And mark this: there is never a more interesting story than that which a man tells about himself....

Go home, young man, and tell the poor sinner's story; go home, young woman, and open your diary, and give your friends stories of grace. Tell them of the mighty works of God's hand which he hath wrought in you from his own free, sovereign, undeserved love. Make it a free grace story around your family fire.

By sharing we edify believers.

If you want to make your mother's heart leap within her, and to make your father glad—if you would make that sister happy who sent you so many letters, which sometimes you read against a lamp-post, with your pipe in your mouth—go home and tell your mother that her wishes are all accomplished, that her prayers are heard, that you will no longer chaff her

about her Sunday-school class, and no longer laugh at her because she loves the Lord, but that you will go with her to the house of God, for you love God....

Cannot you imagine the scene, when the poor demoniac mentioned in my text went home? He had been a raving madman; and when he came and knocked at the door, don't you think you see his friends calling to one another in affright, "Oh! there he is again," and the mother running up stairs and locking all the doors, because her son had come back that was raving mad; and the little ones crying because they knew what he had been before—how he cut himself with stones, because he was possessed with devils. And can you picture their joy, when the man said, "Mother! Jesus Christ has healed me, let me in; I am no lunatic now!"

By sharing we reach lost friends and family.

I hear one of you say, "Ah! Sir, would to God I could go home to pious friends! But when I go home I go into the worst of places; for my home is amongst those who never knew God themselves, and consequently never prayed for me, and never taught me anything concerning heaven."

Go home to them, and tell them, not to make them glad, for they will very likely be angry with you, but tell them for their soul's salvation. I hope, when you are telling the story of what God did for you, that they will be led by the Spirit to desire the same mercy themselves.

Be alert for one-on-one opportunities to share your story.

Do not tell this story to your ungodly friends when they are all together, for they will laugh at you. Take them one by one, when you can get them alone, and begin to tell it to them, and they will hear you seriously....You may be the means of bringing a man to Christ who has often heard the Word and only laughed at it, but who cannot resist a gentle admonition.

Don't expect this sharing to be easy.

For I hear many of my congregation say, "Sir, I could relate that story to anyone sooner than I could to my own friends; I could come to your vestry, and tell you something of what I have tasted and handled of the Word of God; but I could not tell my father, nor my mother, nor my brethren, nor my sisters."

Overcome this fear by sharing to honor your Savior.

I know you love him; I am sure you do, if you have proof that he loved you. You can never think of Gethsemane and of its bloody sweat, of Gabbatha and of the mangled back of Christ, flayed by the whip: you can never think of

Calvary and his pierced hands and feet, without loving him, and it is a strong argument when I say to you, for his dear sake who loved you so much, go home and tell it. If Christ has done much for you, you cannot help it—you must tell it.

Share your story with gratitude to God.

No story is more worth hearing than a tale of gratitude. This poor man's tale was a *grateful* story. I know it was grateful, because the man said, "I will tell thee how great things the Lord hath done for me." A man who is grateful is always full of the greatness of the mercy which God has shown him; he always thinks that what God has done for him is immensely good and supremely great.

Share your story with humility.

It must be a tale told by a poor sinner who feels himself not to have deserved what he has received. Oh! when we tell the story of our own conversion, I would have it done with deep sorrow, remembering what we used to be, and with great joy and gratitude, remembering how little we deserve these things. Why, then, my eyes began to be fountains of tears, those hearers who had nodded their heads began to brighten up, and they listened, because they were hearing something which the man felt himself and which they recognized as being true to him, if it was not true to them.

Tell your story, my hearers, as lost sinners. Do not go to your home, and walk into your house with a supercilious air, as much as to say, "Here's a saint come home to the poor sinners, to tell them a story."...

Do not intrude yourselves upon those who are older, and know more, but tell your story humbly; not as a preacher, but as a friend and as a son.

Share your story truthfully—don't embellish it.

Do not tell more than you know; do not tell John Bunyan's experience, when you ought to tell your own. Do not tell your mother you have felt what only Rutherford felt. Tell her no more than the truth. Tell your experience truthfully, for one single fly in the pot of ointment will spoil it, and one statement you may make which is not true may ruin it all.

Tell your story seriously—don't share it flippantly.

Let them see you mean it. Do not talk about religion flippantly; you will do no good if you do. Do not make puns on texts. Do not quote Scripture by way of joke. If you do, you may talk till you are dumb, you will do no good, if you in

the least degree give them occasion to laugh by laughing at holy things yourself. Tell it very earnestly....

Perhaps when you are telling the story one of your friends will say, "And what of that?" And your answer will be, "It may not be a great thing to you, but it is to me. You say it is little to repent, but I have not found it so; it is a great and precious thing to be brought to know myself to be a sinner, and to confess it, do you say it is a little thing to have found a Savior. If you had found him too, you would not think it little. You think it little I have lost the burden from my back; but if you had suffered with it, and felt its weight as I have for many a long year, you would think it no little thing to be emancipated and free, through a sight of the cross."

Don't neglect your personal devotions during Christmas.

When you are at home for Christmas, let no one see your face till God has seen it. Be up in the morning, wrestle with God; and if your friends are not converted, wrestle with God for them, and then you will find it easy work to wrestle with them for God.

Rest upon the Holy Spirit's help to share.

Do not be afraid, only think of the good you may possibly do. Remember, he that saves a soul from death has covered a multitude of sins, and he shall have stars in his crown forever and ever....Let your reliance in the Holy Spirit be entire and honest. Trust not yourself, but fear not to trust him. He can give you words. He can apply those words to their heart, and so enable you to "minister grace to the hearers" [Ephesians 4:29].

Remember that this story you share over the holidays is the story that will be on your lips eternally.

When we go home to our friends in Paradise, what shall we do?

First we will repair to that blest seat where Jesus sits, take off our crown and cast it at his feet, and crown him Lord of all. And when we have done that, what shall be our next employ? We will tell the blessed ones in heaven what the Lord hath done for us, and how he hath had compassion on us.

And shall such tale be told in heaven? Shall that be the Christmas Carol of the angels? Yes it shall be; it has been published there before—blush not to tell it yet again—for Jesus has told it before, "When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost."

Poor sheep, when you shall be gathered in, will you not tell how your

Shepherd sought you and found you? Will you not sit in the grassy meads of heaven, and tell the story of your own redemption? Will you not talk with your brothers and sisters, and tell them how God loved you and has brought you there?

Perhaps you say, "It will be a very short story." Ah! It would be if you could write now. A little book might be the whole of your biography; but up there when your memory shall be enlarged, when your passion shall be purified, and your understanding clear, you will find that what was but a tract on earth will be a huge tome in heaven. You will tell a long story there of God's sustaining, restraining, constraining grace. And I think that when you pause to let another tell his tale, and then another, and then another, you will at last, when you have been in heaven a thousand years, break out and exclaim, "O saints, I have something else to say." Again they will tell their tales, and again you will interrupt them with "Oh, beloved, I have thought of another case of God's delivering mercy." And so you will go on, giving them themes for songs, finding them the material for the warp and woof of heavenly sonnets.