

Engage360 Episode 167 | Christmas Reflections 2025

Dr. Don Payne

[00:00:16] **Don Payne:** hi friends. Welcome again to Engage 360 from Denver Seminary. My name is Don Payne and I'll be your host, and this is our annual Christmas episode.

The 1990 film home alone may be the subject of perennial debate about whether it's actually a Christmas movie, but there is no doubt that it stirs up all kinds of Christmas sentiments, even in its odd, over the top comedic way. Apart from the slapstick scenes depicting two hapless burglars, grabbing hot doorknobs, and getting hit in the face by paint cans, the script slips in one subplot that actually expresses a serious and painful Christmas question.

The subplot revolves around the McAllister's neighbor, the reclusive old man Marley, about whom terrifying rumors circulate among the local children. But as the central character Kevin McAllister is running from his Wouldbe assailants. He happens upon old man Marley watching his granddaughter perform in a poorly attended Christmas Eve service.

Kevin discovers that Marley is actually a hurting lonely man who is tragically estranged from his son, leaving him with no relationship with his granddaughter, so he can only watch her from a distance. Christmas for Marley is a poignant reminder of his loss and his pain. That type of scenario from home alone is probably familiar to every one of us in some respect.

Whether it's part of our own life narrative or the experience of someone we know. Christmas for many people is not a joyous, warm, festive occasion, but a lonely time or a dreaded reminder of loss and pain. What's worth our reflection at this Christmas season is how that type of experience is so often considered a sad anomaly, a regrettable exception for those who don't get to enter the happiness that the majority of people seem to experience, and that our culture considers the norm for the season.

And I wonder whether the actual Christmas story. Should challenge and overturn that assumption in a really hopeful way. You know, the undramatic entrance of the son of God into human history for the sake of redemption, certainly points in the direction of gratitude and celebration. No doubt about that.

It even creates the occasion for festivity. The commercialization of Christmas festivity creates a sort of deceptive facade, a disproportioned illusion that Christmas is primarily about the festivity and the warmth and the sensation of everything being right and resolved rather than being about the act of God that makes all things right and offers the promise of that in the middle of a world where so many things are as yet far from right.

Maybe just maybe those among us, for whom Christmas is a painful time, a dreaded reminder of loss. Maybe they are at the center of God's act that Christmas is actually all about. Maybe those of us who get to enjoy all the happiness and reunion and connection and festivity of Christmas are actually just enjoying the fringe benefits while those among us who suffer.

Actually sit at the core of the Christmas reality. That's much closer to the true nature of the incarnation God in Christ. Hopping the fence into the very brokenness and alienation, all the effects

of sin in the world. To conquer all that and redeem us. Pointing through that first advent to his second advent when all things will be made new.

That's the space we really occupy at Christmas. That's what we really celebrate. Whether or not we're surrounded by family and friends, whether or not we have a warm home, and ample resources and whatever. Combination of gains and losses, successes and failures, wholeness and pain marks our memories. Each year during the Christmas season when God's people stand up in the middle of the superficial commercialism and sentimentalism with the reminder of what Christmas is really all about, that's a mark of theological health.

That reminder that God in Christ. Took the shockingly humble approach of entering our broken world to redeem us from sin, death, and evil. That's theological health, and I hope we always courageously remind the world of that. And while we do so, add a reminder not only of what Christmas is about, but a reminder of who Christmas is for.

Of course it's for all of us because we all need redemption and are all helpless to provide it for ourselves regardless of how intact or well resourced or happy our lives may seem. But those for whom the sentiment and glow and charm of the Christmas season has become a painful reminder of loss in their lives.

They stand at the center of who Christmas is for. They represent most vividly. The brokenness of the world in which the Son of God took up residence to redeem, to save, to forgive, to rescue, to create a new future. They are not on the margins of what Christmas is about. They represent and remind the rest of the world of what it's about because their experience epitomizes who it's for.

It's easy to be distracted from that fact by the glitz of Santa and sleigh bells, and even by the wonderful fringe benefits of family and firesides. And anyone for whom Christmas is a painful, lonely, or dreaded occasion actually occupies the spotlight of what Christmas is all about. All the seasonal glitz aside.

And by the way, I love all of that. The broken hearted of all sorts have the most reason to celebrate at Christmas. To be honest, we don't really divide into two neat categories as much as it might seem. There aren't simply those who can be happy and celebrate at Christmas on one hand, and those who have deep pain at Christmas.

On the other hand, those lines blur for most of us personally. I can't wait for Christmas. I start playing Christmas music far earlier than it's generally considered fashionable, and I do it because it makes me happy and I can't wait to be with my family and enjoy the best sip of coffee of the year, which is the first sip of the first cup on Christmas morning.

But I'll enjoy all of that while remembering my brother and my dad, whom I still miss horribly. To my surprise, tears crept up on me and I had to even stop and cry for a bit when I wrote that sentence in my script. The incarnation, the redemptive entrance of the son of God into our world, allows us to occupy both spaces with no tension.

Jesus, our Lord sits with us in our tears and regrets just as powerfully as He points us to the resurrection reality of the new creation through whatever joys and delights come our way at Christmas. Friends, whatever your life circumstance this season. The incarnation and the Christmas

season, which we celebrate is for you. On behalf of all of us here at Denver Seminary, may our incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord give you through the Holy Spirit, that type of merry it this Christmas.

Thanks for spending some time with us. We're grateful for you, for your interest, support, and prayers. We hope you have a Merry Christmas and may the Lord bless you in every way. Take care.