

Couples Talk Takeaways

6th December 2021

Doing Christmas Well

With Jerry & Suzanne Varghese and Paul & Lesley Cheesman

Christmas will look different for everyone. Traditions, expectations and activities will carry different significance for people, even within one family. The festive season can bring to the surface those differences and the tensions they might provoke.

Good communication is always important between spouses and so often we don't talk about something that can consume us for a good month of every year.

As Paul & Lesley and Jerry & Suzanne have shared, they all have different approaches to what it means to "do Christmas well". We've drawn on some of their ideas and habits to get you thinking about your own Christmas celebrations and to encourage good communication on this often divisive topic!

Different stages of life

From newly-married to empty-nesters, family looks different and it changes! Paul & Lesley talked about having their first Christmas without their kids at home.

- What changes are you facing this Christmas?
- How do you need to adapt your celebrations and expectations to embrace these changes?
- What are your hopes, fears and disappointments? Take some time to share these with your spouse

Different backgrounds

Every marriage is cross-cultural! Christmas can be a great way to highlight this.

- How have you adapted your traditions to respect your different backgrounds and create your own traditions?
- How has this caused tension in the past? What conflict has there been? Are you trying to relive your childhood or creating a new way as a family unit?
- Jerry & Suzanne talked about building their traditions from scratch. If all expectations were lifted off you, what would you want your Christmas to look like?
- Which areas might you need to compromise in?
- If the way you do Christmas is not as important as the heart behind it, what would you want the heart behind your decision-making to be?

Being Intentional

Suzanne told us about her revelation that "you can't add things in without taking things away".

It's tempting to try and squeeze more than we can manage into our Christmas planning ("Suzanne Time!") and have self-induced stress. We need to be intentional about what we do and what we don't do.

- Are there things you want to introduce into your celebrations?
- What things do you need to stop doing in order to do this?
- What things do you do just because the culture around you does them?
- What things have you chosen to do intentionally?
- How can you put your spouse's needs above your own this Christmas?

- If you wanted to focus more on the faith-origin of Christmas, what could you introduce into your family traditions?

Community

Paul & Lesley talked about the importance of including others in their celebrations.

- Who do you know who is single or widowed, who doesn't have family or has a tricky or painful family situation?
- Could you ask them about their plans for Christmas?
- What options of a welcoming space for them in your plans could you realistically offer?
- Consider ways your family could be more inclusive all year round.
- How can you have a meaningful conversation with them about their experience of Christmas and whether they would like to join in with your plans in a way you both feel comfortable with?
- How will you honour your other family members in this?

Joy in the Messiness

Families are messy in many senses of the word! Christmas can trigger painful memories as well as happier ones. There is often pain associated with Christmas and the familiar, annual activities may remind us of this all the more. Paul & Lesley talked about how the Christmas story tells us of incredible joy and hope right in the midst of a messy situation.

- Is there unspoken pain in your relationship that you need to talk about?
- What is the mess in your life?
- How does the Christmas story bring hope and joy into that mess?

Something Deeper

It's possible to celebrate Christmas without referring to the original story! But if so, what are we actually celebrating? Take some time to reflect on these questions:

- What does Christmas mean to you?
- Why is that important?
- Have you considered the hope that the birth of Jesus offers?
- If you have a Christian faith, how can you keep Christ the focus of Christmas?
- How does your faith shape what you want Christmas to be?
- If you don't have a Christian faith, why not go along to a carol service this year as a family? [You may be surprised by an unexpected gift!](#)

Further Information

FamilyLife's Toucan Together app covers a lot of the topics raised (communication, conflict, loving, money, growing). Why not have a look together over the Christmas period:

<https://toucantogogether.com>

What's your spouse's love language? Discover a better way to communicate your love for them:

<https://www.5lovelanguages.com>

To find out more about the [Christian faith](#).