

DAMIAN CHANDLER

Book
Excerpt!



THE CROOKED
CHRISTMAS
TREE

THE BEAUTIFUL MEANING
OF JESUS' BIRTH

Advance Praise for
THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE

"Damian Chandler masterfully captivates the reader with a simple account, revealing a timeless message of redemption and hope. Make no mistake, the heart of this book brings the reader to a place of encouragement and complete transformation."

—Parnell M. Lovelace, Jr., Lovelace
Leadership Connection

"This story is heartwarming and life changing. Damian writes with such beauty and profundity that the story of Christ and His love should never be the same for anyone who reads this insightful book. THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE should be a new song for all to sing."

—C. Wesley Knight, Professor of Religion
and Preaching, Oakwood University

"From shame to shopping, tinsel to the Trinity, Damian Chandler weaves together the deep truths of theology and the trappings of every family's Christmas, and he does it with prose that shines like a Christmas star. Read this book, and you'll never look at your Christmas tree the same."

—Ryan Sanders, author of *Unbelievable:
Examining the Unlikely Beauty of the Christian Story*

"Don't wait for Easter or Christmas, this is a book for any season in life. Damian in his unique delightful unraveling, draws your whole family into a story with multiple layers, turning the complex into simple and bringing value to your life. In a time when we are fragmented, this is one book that can help build stronger communities, stronger families, stronger people in Jesus."

—Japhet J. De Oliveira, Co-Founder,
One project

"I found myself in love with a crooked tree, less aware of my imperfections, and completely overwhelmed by the goodness of God, all from the pages of a book. THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE brilliantly brings to light an unconditional love we all long for."

—Stephen Chandler, Senior Pastor,
Destiny Harvest Church

"Deeply spiritual, exquisitely written, this book will shine the light of God's love into the hearts of all who read it."

—Wintley Phipps, vocal artist, CEO and
Founder, U.S. Dream Academy

"Damian Chandler gives you artistry and therapy all in the same breath. As so many are languishing in guilt and shame, his narrative helps us cast off self-inflicted anxiety while we grab hold of Jesus' amazing grace."

—Chaplain Michael Polite, Campus Ministries, Andrews University

"THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE is sure to be a timeless classic. The way Damian compares the crooked Christmas tree with the brokenness and crookedness of everyday people is brilliant. This book will speak to the heart and soul of every person who reads it. If you've ever felt you aren't good enough, attractive enough, or smart enough, this book is for you. Not only is THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE perfect for the holidays, the content is relevant year round."

—Jeremy Anderson, author,
Founder, Grace Tour

"More than a book, it offers slices of real life with a real God who loves real people in a real world. Damian Chandler is a fresh and fascinating voice."

—Jesse Wilson, Director, Bradford-Cleveland-Brooks Leadership Center,
Oakwood University

"From the first page, Damian Chandler pulls the reader into this charming, witty, and colorful tale about a crooked tree, our imperfect lives, and the extravagant grace of God. Read this book—you'll find yourself immersed in the story and in love with the Gospel."

—Tyler Stewart, Young Adult Pastor,
Loma Linda University Church

"I loved reading THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE. Most of all, I loved the clarity of the Gospel presented in this heartfelt story. In my mind, the book was similar to some New Testament parables in that I can see myself in multiple roles: I am the Crooked Tree. I am the adult, thinking I have to decorate the 'crookedness' of my life. I am the innocent child who recognizes the beauty of the crooked tree and loves it as it is. This will be one of the books I pull out and read year after year."

—Keith Jeffries, Owner, Huntsville Havoc
professional hockey team

"THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE is a powerful and passionate reminder of God's unconditional love for us. It will leave you both challenged and overwhelmed by a God who so recklessly pursues, embraces, and cherishes us. Damian Chandler reminds us of God's unashamed love for humanity in spite of all our various quirks and foibles."

—Pastor Seth Yelorda, Lead Pastor,
Westminster Good Samaritan Church

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The Crooked Christmas Tree

The Beautiful Meaning of Jesus' Birth

Damian Chandler



New York Nashville

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To my tribe, Tanzy, Zoe, Salem and Levi.

Your love is life to me.

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THE CROOKED
TREE

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This live Christmas tree thing started because every good television family had this tradition, and long before I was married, I had decided that I wanted Christmas traditions. Once I found me a wife and we had some children, the next thing on the list was traditions.

So my wife and I decided that a live Christmas tree would be the first of our many family traditions. My wife, the timely one, wanted to have the tree up the day after Thanksgiving, and I wanted the smell of fresh pine in the house. So the tradition became that we took the kids to a lot the day after Thanksgiving, they chose a real tree, and I put it up.

My wife chooses the price point, and my

THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE

job is to guide the kids to a few good trees, because crooked trees really bother me. Not as easy as it would seem, because for what we are willing to spend, there often seems to be more duds than studs. But this year there were crowds of seven-foot green beauties. They wore their branches like models in Paris, boasting their willingness to belittle themselves, to be tied on to the roof of my car and to take residence in our modest home.

My daughter walked past these boasting beauties, unimpressed. At the end of the line, behind the prima donnas, stood a reject. To say it stood was to be kind. I almost had to tilt my head sideways to look at it. It seemed to know its shortcomings because it hid, cowered behind all the "worthy" choices, almost hoping not to be seen. For if it was never seen, it could never be rejected.

Before I could speak, my daughter had already walked past lines of lovely trees and was standing in front of the castaway. Think

she might have even looked at it sideways as it shamefully looked back.

"This one. I want this one. What do you think, Salem?"

"Yep, that is the one."

Oh the horror. I immediately moved to damage control, trying to convince my daughter of the worthiness of the other suitors. How could I spend my entire Christmas looking at a crooked tree? "Are you sure?" I asked her.

"Yes, Daddy."

"What about that one?"

But she shook her head. She was already in love. Already attached.

Before it had proven its worth or shown its creed, my kids were already attached to that crooked Christmas tree. Before they checked its record or its life trajectory, they were already in love. That is who they are. The new toy with the vaulted pedigree and high price will never replace that old and broken relic. That brand-new blanket with their names embroidered and

THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE

initials embossed will sit unwrapped, new smell intact, while the one with stitched-up holes and dark patches, with mold, is the one sought on nights when they are cold. For they are in love. They are attached.

But this must be different. To grow attached while a blanket molds in hand is one thing, but to buy a moldy blanket is clearly another. Why purchase something knowing its defects and shortcomings? Why look for the least beautiful? The least admirable? The least attractive?

I presented my final arguments like a savvy lawyer before the court. This tree was guilty of the high treason of crookedness and deserved a life sentence on the shelf without the possibility of purchase.

But the jury would not be convinced.

Plus my wife was giving me that stare. It was supposed to be the kids' choice.

The Crooked Tree

But wasn't I supposed to guide them around choices detrimental to their health—and mine?

She's still staring.

Fine! We'll pay for this crooked tree and take this crooked tree home. And this crooked tree will ruin Christmas.

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WHY THIS TREE?

I could not force my face to smile, or will my heart to be happy. Yes, I had conceded. Standing in line, card drawn, now swiped—it was final. The tree was theirs . . . mine. But my concession did nothing to squelch my mind's screaming question. I tried to be okay with it. But every time I even glanced in its direction, that question "Why this tree?" boiled over like milk on the stove. Only this realization stopped me from throwing myself on the floor in that store, banging my head on the linoleum while screaming, "Why this tree?"

I remembered lying on my back on a dark, cloudless night and looking out into the vastness of space. Everything that my eyes could

THE CROOKED CHRISTMAS TREE

see was only the universe's first page. Its final chapter—15.5 billion light-years from Earth—was *beyond* far away. Within that known expanse were billions of galaxies, many infinitely more impressive than our Milky Way. Within the Milky Way were billions of stars painted against the black of outer space, many of them infinitely more brilliant than our sun. And even among the planets of our solar system, our planet pales in comparison to massive gas giants like Jupiter. Compared to Earth, Jupiter is massive. Compared to Jupiter, the sun is a monster. Compared to Arcturus, one of the closest stars, our sun is a dot. I lay there lost in the fact that the Earth was essentially invisible.

Why would God choose to expend His greatest collateral on something so insignificant? You would think there were beings more worthy than us. What about the angels? Why not save them? After all, they had spent eternity doing God's bidding—bowing, holying, flying, declaring. Yet when one-third of them fell over the same stick that tripped us earthlings

Why This Tree?

up, there was no emptying of heaven's coffers to redeem them.* But for fools with a willful addiction to eating what was clearly forbidden,† God chose to risk everything, the only beloved one.‡

Instead of struggling, I found it was enough to say to myself that in some ways God is like my kids. Woefully attracted to crooked trees.

* See Revelation 12:3–9.

† See Genesis 3:6.

‡ See John 3:16.