

# Message Reflections

a little something extra to keep you connected to Jesus this week

*Message Reflections accompany the [weekly message](#).*

A lot of people are going to be on the other side of the fence regarding what I'm about to say, but I hate camping. I just don't understand the appeal. I love *being* outdoors. A National Parks vacation in 2019 was one of my favorite vacations ever. It's just the *staying* outdoors that gets me. Why would you want to sleep on the ground, with bugs, snakes, and bears as your potential bedfellows? Your tent could leak, it's not climate-controlled out there, and on this side of 40, whose back prefers a sleeping bag on the ground to a mattress and sheets? I guess the possibility of going from my cozy Noblesville home to a tent somewhere in the wilderness is about as close as I can come to putting myself in the shoes of Jesus at this time of year. He left his home in heaven to spend his first night on earth in a manger. Why would he do this?

*John 1:9-14 says, "The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son."*

Jesus came for us. He didn't come for the joy of experiencing humanity. God didn't send his son just to check in on things and see how his creation was getting along. Jesus didn't come on a whim. He came to provide a way for each of us to be reconciled to God, through his unfailing love and faithfulness. The Christmas season is supposed to be one of peace. We sing about it in countless Christmas songs: "sleep in heavenly peace" (Silent Night), "of peace on earth, good will to men" (I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day), "Hail the heaven-born Prince of Peace" (Hark the Herald Angels Sing), "His law is love and his gospel is peace" (O Holy Night). This peace that we sing of, and that our hearts desire, is possible through the reconciliation of Jesus.

Have you ever done anything to separate yourself from God? I'm going to go ahead and answer that for you: you have. I have too. A quick scan through the 10 commandments, and if I'm honest, I have to recognize that I've broken more of them than I've kept. (And if I'm not honest, well there's a broken one right there.) Even as I write, I keep squeamishly

going over in my mind whether to put in black and white for all to read some of the choices that I've made that I am far from proud of. It's pretty easy to read about Eve and think, "wow, all this for a piece of fruit?" but I know me, and I would have made the same choice. How often do I think I know better than God, and make a choice contrary to his guidance? We are all in need of reconciliation to God.

Ephesians 2:1 says, *"Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins."*

Mostly pretty bleak. But there's a word in there that offers hope. *You were dead. Not you are dead. Verses 13-14 continue, "But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ."*

Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection offer to us the possibility of reconciliation, and a peace that can't be purchased, or manufactured, or holiday cheered into existence. But here's the thing: there's a distinction between given and offered. Either way, it's yours for the taking, but you have to choose to accept a gift. In this season of "peace on earth, good will to men", have you accepted the reconciliation that is yours in Christ Jesus?

Questions for reflection:

1. What emotions does the holiday season tend to stir up in you? Does it feel like a season of peace?
2. Peace and reconciliation with others (horizontal reconciliation) is possible because of Jesus' reconciliation (vertical reconciliation). Is there someone with whom you need to pursue reconciliation, particularly as Christmas approaches?

