



LAY IT *in the* MANGER

CHRISTMAS TIME IS HERE, BUT MAYBE YOU'RE NOT FEELING QUITE UP FOR IT.

There have been weighty things--hard things, to deal with in our lives and you may not feel much like celebrating with decorations, lights, and parties. Stop and gaze at the Manger of the Nativity. Unadorned, in its simplicity, this rough feed box, holds the tiny newborn baby who would change everything. Come to the Manger, with all that you're carrying, and receive from Him, the Savior that is not just for all people, but for you.

In this 5-day Bible study, you will discover the invitation to lay your burdens-- fear, loss, brokenness, isolation, and failure in the Manger in exchange for gifts that will not only change your Christmas but will change every day of your life.

DAY 1

LAY YOUR FEAR IN THE MANGER

REFLECT

What have you been most afraid of this year?

What are you most afraid of right now?

PONDER

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

Luke 2:10

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don’t be troubled or afraid.”

John 14:27

The first words out of the mouths of the angels who announced Jesus’ birth were “Don’t be afraid,” or “Fear not!” That tells you a lot about how well God understands us. Here is the acknowledgement that life can be full of daily fear. Literally hundreds of times in the Bible, God tells us that we don’t have to live in fear and anxiety.

But, knowing that we will struggle, Jesus’ invitation to you today is this: “Leave your fear here in the Manger. Leave it to me.” He invites you to tell him about everything that is striking fear in your heart, that keeps you awake at night and cripples you by day. He is more than able to shoulder your burden of fear because the baby of the Manger came for the purpose of freeing you forever.

Lay down your fears in the Manger and pick up the gift that is there for you in exchange: it’s the gift of illogical, out of the ordinary peace. The peace that Jesus offers is peace that makes no sense in the situation you’re facing. Peace during a pandemic. Peace when there’s a job loss. Peace when a loved one goes astray.

The key to accessing that peace, says Becky Harling, is praise! “A shift takes place in us when we praise. Psalm 63 says, ‘Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.’ That word, glorify, is “shabach” in the Hebrew which has a 2-fold meaning: to adore and lift one up and to sooth, quiet and calm. The Holy Spirit actually calms our anxiety when we praise or Glorify God,” ¹ Harling explains.



DAY 1: CONTINUED

LAY YOUR FEAR IN THE MANGER

When we praise, we are adoring God. We are shifting our focus from the problem to the Problem Solver. Today, will you lay your fears in the Manger? Rest there a while and let your lips glorify God for His Gift this Christmas. Then, receive His peace.

CONVERSE

Jesus, I am fearful about _____ and _____ and _____. You are my merciful advocate, loving, faithful, mighty to save and all-powerful. You are the One who can handle these fearful situations in my life, and I give them to You.

GO DEEPER

Peace in an Uncertain World

Anxiety: A Better Way

¹ Harling, Becky, Personal interview, November 17, 2021.



LAY YOUR LOSS IN THE MANGER

REFLECT

Did you lose a loved one this year?

Did you miss out on significant milestones or celebrations such as graduations, family gatherings or an important life event you were looking forward to?

PONDER

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 Corinthians 1:3

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying."

John 11:25

He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds.

Psalms 147:3

There's no way to pretend otherwise: Christmas and other holidays make the losses we have suffered feel more acute and more agonizing. All around us, the world seems to swirl more garishly and noisily. But in our grief over loss, Jesus of the Manger waits for those who mourn, with powerful comfort.

Scripture tells that when Jesus was born, Mary wrapped her tiny son in "swaddling cloths" and laid Him in a manger. (Luke 2:7) In that day, bodies were swaddled at two times of life: birth and death. Thirty-three years after being swaddled for the Manger, Jesus' body would be swaddled for the grave. But then, three days later, the swaddling cloths would be found, neatly folded inside His tomb, as He greeted his followers, fully alive. Newborn Jesus was born to die. But Jesus' death would bring an end to death's permanence once and for all, and to grief and loss without hope.



LAY YOUR LOSS IN THE MANGER

Follow Him with your grief and your loss to the Manger today; even your anger can be brought to Him without repercussion. Lay it all down, right there in the hay, and accept comfort from “the God of all comfort.” (2 Corinthians 1:3). If you have surrendered control of your life to Jesus, then the Holy Spirit, whose name means, “one who comes alongside to help,” and “comforter” live within you. When you lay your loss in the Manger, the gift of comfort is there for you. Even more, when you lay your life there, the living God, in the person of the Holy Spirit is yours—yes, comforting in loss, and helping, guiding, and empowering you in every season and circumstance of life.

CONVERSE

Father, God, You knew the loss of Your Son. Jesus, you knew the loss of a friend you loved. Holy Spirit, help me and comfort me, I ask. Please hold me up in my grief. Thank you, God that you are in control of every twist and turn of my life.

GO DEEPER[The God of All Comfort](#)[When We Sustain Loss](#)

LAY YOUR BROKENNESS IN THE MANGER

REFLECT

Are there areas of hurt in your life that you prefer to never think or talk about again?

Have you ever been betrayed, mistreated or wronged, without ever having seen the one who wronged you held accountable?

PONDER

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.
Isaiah 61:1

At the set time that I appoint I will judge with equity.
Psalms 75:2

You have all wisdom and do great and mighty miracles. You see the conduct of all people and you give them what they deserve.
Jeremiah 32:18

Christmas, no, make that all of life, comes with a great big platter of expectations. We expect that Christmas will mean gifts, cheer and goodwill. In life, we expect that parents will love and protect children, marriage covenants will be kept and that doing the right thing will bring the right results. But this is not always reality. Sadly, Christmas can make the brokenness in our lives searingly more painful; like the young mother in the troubled marriage who realized one Christmas morning, after all the gifts under the tree had been opened, that there were no gifts for her. Our hurts, our brokenness, feel like an extra heavy load to carry at this time. One option is to simply deny that the brokenness is there. That keeps us going until we know what else to do.



LAY YOUR BROKENNESS IN THE MANGER

The heart of the God of the universe was moved by our human condition of brokenness, and it moved Him to give. That gift was His only Son, whose self-declared purpose was to bring freedom and healing--He came by way of the Manger. Today, if you're carrying around the pain of being wronged by another, you can begin the journey of healing with a trip to the Manger. God is the only Source of the perfect justice and complete healing that you need. He invites you to leave your offender, leave the burdens of the offenses you are carrying, with Him. Having given His Son for your brokenness, He will not stop now in bringing a work of healing to completion in your life.

But we must come. Will you come to the Manger to lay down your brokenness and receive His gift of healing?

CONVERSE

Thank you that none of my broken places have escaped your notice. Oh God, thank you that you are the author of perfect justice and that I can trust You to accomplish that justice in all that concerns me, in your perfect time. Thank you that you are my Healer!

GO DEEPER

There is Healing for Your Broken Heart

God's Whole Love is For You



LAY YOUR LONELINESS IN THE MANGER

REFLECT

| Have you experienced feelings of loneliness or isolation this year?

PONDER

*Draw near to God and He will
draw near to you.
James 4:8*

*And let us not neglect our meeting together, as
some people do, but encourage one another,
especially now that the day of his return is
drawing near.
Hebrews 10:25*

*So then you are no longer strangers and
foreigners, but you are fellow citizens with the
saints, and are of God's household.
Ephesians 2:19*

There's more than one disease plaguing humankind this Christmas. Social scientists have run the numbers and the statistics are in: loneliness is a global epidemic. Locked down and socially isolated by the pandemic, people of all ages have felt the pangs of loneliness. Many of us are still working from home and large numbers of former churchgoers have simply given up going back in person. Even before the onset of Covid, "screen friends" were replacing in-person friends. Now, we greet Christmas in our loneliness.

In the Manger, lies a baby who would know loneliness His entire life. As a kid, he would never be like his childhood peers. He would grow to be a man "despised and rejected... a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." (Isaiah 53:3) His own brothers didn't believe in Him until possibly after His resurrection (John 7:5, Acts 1:14) and then He experienced the ultimate loneliness of rejection by His Father, as He took the sin of the world upon Himself in His death.



LAY YOUR LONELINESS IN THE MANGER

This is Jesus, of the Manger, who waits for you to come in your loneliness. When you choose to bring your loneliness to Him, a shift takes place. “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you,” wrote James the brother of Jesus. (Yes, one of the brothers of Jesus who had thought He was crazy.) “The Lord is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth,” echoes Psalm 145:18. Jesus offers Himself and His “never leave you or forsake you” presence (Hebrews 13:5).

When you approach the Manger, you will find that you are not standing there alone. Jesus-follower, you are part of a global family called the Body of Christ! When you look, you’ll find family members whom you were always meant to do life with. The natural response of the aching heart is to isolate, to focus on self, mull over the miserableness of it all and the wonderful lives we imagine others living around the Christmas tree. But that’s not a Biblical response to loneliness. Yes, it’s hard, especially in these times to reach out. Yes, it’s the last thing you feel like doing. But from your loneliness, you can encourage another, even if by just a text or phone call. Then again, dropping by with a plate of Christmas cookies wouldn’t hurt.

CONVERSE

Jesus, I ask, like the Psalmist, “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted. (Psalm 25:16). Please give me a sense of your presence, as I read Scripture and share my loneliness with you and give me the courage to reach out to another who is also lonely today.

GO DEEPER[How to Handle Loneliness at Christmas](#)[If Your Heart Aches This Christmas](#)

LAY YOUR FAILURE IN THE MANGER

REFLECT

Are you struggling with a feeling of failure this Christmas?

In what area of your life do you need forgiveness?

PONDER

*Lord, if you kept a record of our sins,
who, O Lord, could ever survive?
But you offer forgiveness, that we
might learn to fear you.
Psalm 140:3,4*

*But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful
and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse
us from all wickedness.
1 John 1:9*

Christmas time can make you feel like one big failure. Before social media, it was popular to send a “creatively written” Christmas letter that bragged about everything your family had done and what your kids had accomplished that year. We knew what had really happened in our lives—broken marriages, kids that got into trouble and jobs that were lost. But we didn’t include that in those Christmas letters. No one wanted to risk being authentic.

Pastor Timothy Keller writes, “To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved, is well, a lot like being loved by God.”² God knows us fully and loves us truly. Here then, is the message of the Manger: “You are a totally loved moral failure.” (Keller) The Manger and the coming of the babe that rested in it, were needed, both because of our failure, and because of God’s love.

If you were raised in a home where failure was met with punishment instead of mercy and instruction, you may be more inclined to try to forget about your failures or rationalize them. But unconfessed failure is a heavy burden to bear. Sometimes it even makes us sick; David wrote, “When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.” (Psalm 32:4). Because Jesus came, via the Manger, fully God and fully man, to stand in our places, there is freedom from failure waiting for you. There is refreshing cleansing, unfailing love and forgiveness. Lay your failure in the Manger today and find freedom.



LAY YOUR FAILURE IN THE MANGER**CONVERSE**

God, I confess that I have failed. I'm failing in _____ (this area of my life) right now. Please forgive me and let me understand your unfailing love for me. Thank you that you know me fully and love me totally.

GO DEEPER

5 Things You Can Learn from Failure

There is Freedom After Failure

² Keller, T. (n.d.). A quote from The Meaning of Marriage. Goodreads. Retrieved November 22, 2021, from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/542948-when-over-the-years-someone-has-seen-you-at-your>.



CONGRATULATIONS
WAYS TO GO DEEPER

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