

Christmas:

IT'S ALL GOOD

Christmas Celebration

The Christmas story is full of instances of God choosing imperfect people who often misbelieve and misbehave, but nonetheless find themselves playing a part in the redemptive history of God reconciling humanity back to Himself. This is a reminder that God loves each human being despite our imperfections, and is going to fulfill his redemptive purposes regardless of whether any of us deserve it.

Start Talking

1. Has anybody ever let you down despite the fact that you held up your end of an agreement? What happened?
2. Which feels worse to you: letting someone down or being let down by someone else?
3. Have you ever been saddled with a responsibility that was exciting, but felt more like a burden?

Looking Back

1. Last week, Andy outlined four specific ways we can be good news for those around us: To apologize immediately. Forgive quickly. Defer habitually. And give sacrificially. Which of these did you find easiest over the past week? Which was most difficult?
2. How did you re-orient yourself to the radically good news of Jesus when the various factions within American Christianity proved distracting this past week?
3. Were there any instances when you found yourself able to put Paul's relationship advice (that Christians should follow the example of Christ and lay down their own rights and preferences for the good of others) into practice? Any times when you weren't up to the task?



What About You?

1. Have you ever heard people use the term, "God's plan?" How does it make you feel?
2. Do you believe that the fulfillment of "God's plan" requires perfect action on your part? Why or why not?
3. Does the idea that "God's gonna do it anyway" when it comes to his redemptive purposes in the world comfort you? Scare you? Bother you?
4. Does the idea that love can be completely unconditional make that love seem more or less costly? Why?

Look It Up

Read the Following Passages: Luke 1: 18–38, Luke 2: 1–14.

1. What significance is there to be found in the fact that God chose to land his redemptive plan in a small, forgotten village far away from the major power centers of the ancient world?
2. What thoughts and emotions do you imagine racing through Zechariah's head during his encounter with Gabriel?
3. While the good news is not about Mary, what choices do you think Mary was faced with in her encounter with the redemptive plan of God? How does she respond?
4. While some people get hung up on the sexual implications of virgin birth, most commentators agree that the physical facts kind of miss the point. Why would it be significant for a "king" figure in the ancient world (where power was inherited through the paternal family line) not to play by the unfair Earthly rules?
5. Overall, how do you see the key human players in this drama responding to God's news to them? Are they always immediately believing? Behaving?
6. How does God react? Does he pull up stakes and put off his plans?

Putting It All Together

1. Based upon the examples we encounter in the Christmas story, what are the best responses to the invitation to be a part of God's work on Earth? Is there room for human emotion?
2. How can the reality that God is going to love you when you don't believe, until you believe, and even if you never believe change your outlook this week?
3. How should it affect the way you interact with other people?
4. Where can you embody this truly unconditional love this week? What relationships and interactions in your life might need an application of this ethic of constant love?

