
Alright, Merry Christmas. It's good to see you. And I just want to welcome you today. We are one church gathering in multiple locations. So I just want to look right into the camera and say hello and Merry Christmas to our North Campus, to those of you Downtown, anybody at West or online and those of you at Northwest.

In fact, if you are here at any one of our campuses and you came today because somebody invited you—I just want to acknowledge you and just thank you so much for coming. Maybe it was a family member or a friend, maybe it was somebody you didn't even know, they just came up to you at the check out line or maybe at a restaurant and they invited you to come and you came—I'm really glad that you did. My name is Aaron and I get to be one of the pastors around here. And I would absolutely love to get a chance to meet you sometime soon.

Honestly, I don't know what you walked in here thinking or feeling today, but I would imagine that most of us could find ourselves in maybe one of three very general categories. Maybe you came in here today honestly feeling pretty good. It's Christmas Eve, maybe you're already starting to reflect back on 2019 and you would honestly say, "Man, things aren't perfect, but they are good." And keeping in line with the Christmas season you might even go as far as to say that you are:

Full of cheer

I don't know. Maybe that's how you would put it. And you just say, "Man, I'm just really grateful for my health and my relationships and my career is going in the right direction—it hasn't always been that way—and things are good." And I hope that that's the category you might find yourself in.

But reality tells me that not everybody would be there. And, in fact, maybe you're here today and you might find yourself in this category right here, you're just experiencing a little bit of:

Winter chill

You know, things aren't great but they're not bad either. In fact, maybe you look at your life and you say, "Things are in such a condition that I should be happier than what I am. I don't know why I'm not. And I can't quite fully put my finger on the reason why, but something feels off."

Or maybe that's not the word, maybe the word is stuck. You just kind of feel stuck in your life. Maybe stuck in your job or in your marriage or maybe spiritually speaking, you just sort of feel stuck. Like, there was a time in your past where you thought, pretty confidently, that you knew what you believed or you knew what you didn't believe, but now you're not so sure. You have more questions than you have answers.

Yet I know that there are probably a number of us today who might find ourselves in a third category. We might just be going through a really difficult time. And maybe the word would just sort of be:

Bah humbug

You're just kind of like, "Man, I'm just not feeling it. I know I should be. It's Christmas Eve." And you came in here today putting on a brave face because you don't want to ruin the Christmas cheer for the people who you are with, but if you were just to be really honest you would say, "Man, I'm just not feeling it. I'm just going through kind of a difficult time. Things are really hard right now."

I don't know what category you might find yourself in. Chances are it may be even a mixture of all three. That's possible too. Like you could go through the day or maybe the week and just find yourself experiencing all three of those.

I don't know where you are. But what I do know is this:

Christmas has a tendency to **magnify** whatever season you're already in.

So if things are really good, then Christmas will magnify that. And, unfortunately, if things are difficult right now, Christmas will elevate that feeling too, because the holidays are emotional. The holidays are nostalgic.

Have you ever noticed that Christmas is the only special day that we do a count down to? It's 25 days 'til Christmas. We never do that for any other special day, do we? We're never like, 20 days 'til Thanksgiving. Or 10 days to our anniversary. Or 5 days 'til Pastor Aaron's birthday. Nobody says that. It's really hurtful.

I think one of the reasons why we watch the Christmas movies that we do, you know the classics, the ones that we really love is because, regardless of the character in the movie, whether it's Clark Griswold, or Kevin McCallister, or Buddy the Elf—all of them have this idea of a perfect Christmas. If things would just go this way, if these people would do or say this thing then Christmas would be perfect.

But what happens in all of those movies is that things don't go as planned. Things are out of their control, and chaos ensues, and they are experiencing a difficult time. But yet the magic in all of those movies—the plot lines are all the same—is they end up experiencing meaning and purpose and peace even though Christmas is far from perfect.

You know, when I think about the perfect Christmas, I very rarely think about the one that I'm in and I don't usually think about future Christmases. I always go to the past. It's very easy to get really nostalgic about the past and think about the good old days. So when I think about the perfect Christmas, one of the ones that comes to mind is this one here. This is me when I'm six years old. My mom and dad got me this semi-truck. I loved this thing. It had a big gold eagle on the side of it. Nothing says America like a diesel truck with an eagle on the side of it. I'd roll that around the house. Man, I remember that Christmas.

And the next Christmas, when I was seven, I downgraded to Cabbage Patch Kids dolls. I just want to point something out. You've got to be pretty secure in your manhood to show thousands of people this picture. Just want to throw that out there.

A couple of weeks ago, when I was working on this message, I texted my mom and I said, "Can you text me some pictures of when I was a kid at Christmas and those are the two she

sent. And right after this one, she sent me another one and she goes, “Actually, I still have both of these Cabbage Patch Kids dolls. She literally texted me a picture of them in her cabinet. And she said, “They are technically yours if you want them.” I was like, “Mom, I’m a grown man. Yes. Yes, I do. Just put them in a very discreet, unmarked bag, alright? I’ll pick them up later this week.”

I don’t know what your idea of a perfect Christmas is. Maybe your idea of a perfect Christmas would look something like this. You think about some friends and family who are going to come over—maybe later today or tomorrow. And it’s possible that for you the perfect Christmas would just simply be that everybody you love would get together and everybody would just be happy and grateful for their gifts regardless of what they are.

Wouldn’t it just be amazing—for those of you who have young kids in your home—if tomorrow morning you pass out all of the gifts and the kids didn’t tear into them right away, but they actually cherished each one. Let’s just say that they just got one gift and they take it and they hold it and they look at it and maybe they begin to get a little bit misty eyed.

And they don’t rip into it. They just stop for a minute and they go, “Mom, Dad whatever is in here, I’m so grateful for it. And thank you for your sacrifice and for your hard work and your thoughtfulness for this gift.” And maybe a tear would stream down their cheek and they would say, “All I really wanted was you.” You know that ain’t going to happen. That’s not going to happen in my household. Those selfish little me monsters are going to rip open the gifts and they may or may not like them. It’s a gamble, right?

And maybe there is somebody in your house, her idea of a perfect Christmas would be like an iPhone 11. Or maybe it’s not that. Maybe you’ve got somebody in your house and maybe his idea of a perfect Christmas would be a Nintendo Switch. Or maybe you’ve got somebody in your house, and she’s got this taste [a jewelry box], yeah, whoo, and she’d really like to see that under the tree.

I was doing some research a couple of weeks ago, and I googled the top 20 Christmas gift ideas in 2019. And it gave me the top 20 gift ideas on Amazon. These two things were on it. These are gloves that light up in the fingers, alright? Pretty classy gift. And then this, a Snoop Dogg cook book. These are on the top 20—so apparently there are a whole bunch of us out there that if these two items were under the tree, that would be a pretty good Christmas.

So, I just want to make somebody’s Christmas dreams come true right now. Who would like the gloves? You right there. You in the jacket right there. You’re the first person I saw. Come on up here. Man, don’t be ashamed. You come here and you take these gloves. You wear them with pride, alright? You take those. Merry Christmas to you.

Now, the Snoop Dogg cook book. Anybody? Yeah, I feel a little guilty giving this to you. But come on up. Apologize to your mom and dad for me. I cannot acquiesce for everything you’re going to read in that book, alright? Yeah, give her a hand for coming up. That’s awesome. I’m going to get an email for that one.

So, I don’t know. Maybe it doesn’t have anything to do with gifts. Maybe you’re like, “Man, I would just love it if that person I’ve been estranged from this past year, if we could just have a conversation.” There wouldn’t be any drama. There wouldn’t be any passive aggression. There wouldn’t be any arguments or fights. We could just get together.

Can I just ask you to take a few seconds and think about your idea of a perfect Christmas? What would need to come together? Who would need to show up? What would you need to feel in order to actually sit back and go, “Man, that was a perfect Christmas.”?

See, here’s the thing. Whatever came to your mind and whatever you’re picturing, like a perfect Christmas—it just doesn’t exist. And aren’t you really glad that you came to church today? Let’s pray and go home.

I think you already know that. I think you know that realistically, a perfect Christmas isn’t going to happen. But that’s not altogether bad news. I think that the faster that we can come to understand that and to accept it is the way back to experiencing peace at Christmas.

See:

The **perfect Christmas** is the one where you can **experience** (experience goes far beyond what we can actually understand or know or feel) you can **experience peace**, when your circumstances are **less than perfect**.

And that’s what we find in the Christmas story that Luke records for us. I want to look at it again. I know that every year at Christmas we look at this passage, and even if you don’t find yourself in church very often, or maybe you don’t know the Bible super well—you’ve probably read or heard the Christmas story out of Luke a number of times. The challenge to that is that we can become so familiar with it that it turns into white noise and we start to read it and we don’t really let it sink in. Or worse yet, we don’t find ourselves in the middle of the narrative.

You see, the Bible isn’t simply a history book recording facts that took place long ago that have no relevance to you today. The Bible isn’t just good literature that you just read; the Bible is mostly written in narrative. And what brings narrative to life is when you can actually crawl into the story, where you can find yourself there and you can experience what it is that they experience.

So I just want to challenge you to do that as we read this passage, and I want you to notice how imperfect it really is. Luke says, “At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.

“And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he **had to go** to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.”

Now Luke was a physician by trade, but you’ve got to admit that he was pretty good with words. And Luke isn’t being dishonest here, but he’s definitely spinning this in the best possible light to make the story sound really beautiful, and it is. I don’t want to take anything away from that. But when you begin to look at some of these details, and you begin to put yourself in Mary and Joseph’s situation, at the very least you’d have to go, “Man, talk about

being stressed out. Talk about anxiety, because I would imagine that this is not the way that they envisioned their family starting. This isn't the way they wanted to spend Christmas."

Could you just imagine Joseph coming into the kitchen that afternoon and he got that letter in the mail saying you're going to have to make the trek back to Bethlehem to register for this census? This is the equivalent of being summoned for jury duty, like who wants to do that? That notice always comes at just the wrong time.

I would imagine that he broke the news to Mary and I'm sure that her face fell. She's like: I really don't want to do that. And the reason why they had to go back—really this fulfills all of the prophecies that say that the Messiah was going to be born in Bethlehem. They live in Nazareth. How are they going to get to Bethlehem? And all of a sudden, he gets summoned to go back to do a census.

And it's not like they could just hop in the Suburban and make a little day trip out of it. Bethlehem was a four-day, ninety-mile journey by donkey. Now, donkey rides are a lot of fun when you are seven, but not when you are nine months pregnant—ladies, can I get a good Amen? That's awful, right?

I would imagine that it was a very silent donkey ride all the way to Bethlehem. And they get there and a detail in the story that we often take for granted is that there was no lodging for them. And the thing that I've pictured is that they pull up at the Motel 8 you know, late at night, and Joseph is like: Oh, my goodness. I totally forgot to make reservations. By chance is there an extra room? And the manager is like: No, there isn't but I've got this barn out back. But I don't know if it went down that way. This is Joseph's home town. I don't think they went to a hotel first. I think he went to friends and family first.

My wife and I are from a town in southwest Missouri called Joplin. And if we were to make a road trip back there without making a hotel reservation, if I totally forgot all of that, I'm pretty confident that within about 10 or 20 minutes I could probably find a place for us to crash: friends, family, people I went to high school with. They probably would open up their spare bedroom for us.

You'd think it would be the same for Joseph. And I would imagine that they probably found themselves on two or three front porches that evening ringing the doorbell, knocking on the door, and maybe his grandma and grandpa, his aunt and uncle, maybe some old friends saw them there and were like: Oh, we heard about this story, Joseph.

He's standing there with his pregnant girlfriend and they were like: We don't want to have anything to do with this scandal. Could you imagine the judgmental stares and the shame that they would have experienced? This is the way that the Messiah is going to come into the world? Under these circumstances?

The manger, though, is where I think Luke does his best work, because you know that a manger is a feed trough. Manger just sounds so much better though. But a feed trough. Have you ever been on a farm and seen what farm animals eat out of? It's nasty and disgusting. Could you imagine Mary, a mom of a newborn, she's getting ready to lay her baby in a feed trough. What would have been going on in her heart and what thoughts would have been going on in her head?

I'll take a stab at it. This isn't going to win me a mom of the year award anytime soon. I can't believe that I don't have any place sanitary to lay my baby. And all of this is going down and it had to have just seemed like their lives were going off the rails. This is not a perfect Christmas by any stretch of the imagination.

Several years ago there were these doctors who put together this test to try to measure the stress and anxiety that we all feel. And anytime life changes on us and it happens outside of our control... So when something happens in your life and mine that we can't control, or we didn't have any say in it—the result of that is stress and anxiety. They call it life change or life change units or LCU's for short. And these two doctors went through some of the most common life changes that we can all experience and they assigned a number to them that is the amount of stress points. So they go through the list:

Separation and Divorce is worth about 65 points

Adding a new family member is worth 39 points

Significant change in finances is worth 38 points

Job loss is 45 points

Difficulty with In-laws is 29 points (I don't know why they wouldn't just round that up to 30, seems more realistic)

Pregnancy is worth about 40 points

So you add all of these up. Now, these doctors say that anything over 300 on the scale, you're at risk of a significant nervous breakdown. You add up Mary and Joseph's LCUs on that first Christmas and it's something like 400 or 450.

That's why what Luke writes next is something that is so surprising. I want to pick it up in verse 15. He's talking about the shepherds. And the shepherds say this:

“Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.' They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the,” feed trough. “After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished,” Now here's what I want you to see, **“but Mary,”** think about her, **“Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often.”**

And I wonder what she was thinking. I wonder what was going on in Mary's heart. One translation says that Mary pondered all of these things and treasured them in her heart. It's not uncommon for a new mom to do something like that. But I don't think that Mary was having one of these *aha* moments. I don't think she was sitting there going: Oh, this is amazing after all. Or, now I totally get it. I think that she was sitting in the midst of a lot of imperfection. She was sitting in the midst of what maybe to her felt like a bit of a train wreck. She never thought she would be in this kind of a situation.

I think this is a snapshot of her experiencing something that she couldn't fully understand or explain. See, Mary is just as much of a human as you and I are, and I know at this particular moment she doesn't have the advantage of history to look back and see how we would sort of make this moment such an epic thing.

I think that Mary was still really struggling and yet, in the midst of all of that, she was somehow, somehow experiencing peace. And I wonder if she looked into the face of her baby, laying in a filthy feed trough and I wonder if she recalled the words that the prophet Isaiah had said about this Messiah hundreds of years before. That this child is the Prince of Peace. That in the midst of this chaos, in the midst of all of this stress, that he came to bring peace and to be peace so that we might experience peace.

See, the opposite of peace is fear. And I'm just wondering if you're afraid of anything right now. I know that I am. I know that there are so many things in life that we can be fearful of. There are times when I'm just fearful of what could go wrong. It doesn't even have to go wrong, it's just what might go wrong?

I think that's why the number one command in God's word has nothing to do with love more or do more or be more. It's these two words right here:

“Fear not”

That command is given in God's word more than any other—in fact, 365 times. And I do not think that is a coincidence. I think it's intentional. I think that God knew what is was that you and I need to hear every single day when we wake up? It's: Fear not. Why? because there are so many things to be fearful of.

And God says this to us with great compassion. He doesn't say that in a way of like: Hey, you know why don't you figure it out and stop being afraid. God's like: Fear not. Why? Because I love you and I care for you and I want what is best for you and I'm in your corner cheering you on.

And you know what? I don't think we hear that enough. I think that we think that we've got to somehow get God's attention, we've got to somehow be good enough for God to even acknowledge. And God is actually in your corner, he's pulling for you, he wants the best for you, and he says: I don't want you to live your life in fear. I don't want you to be paralyzed that way. I don't want you to fear anymore.

I love how Philippians puts it. It's not necessarily a passage that we read at Christmas, but I wonder if we should. It says, “Don't **worry** about **anything**; instead, **pray** about **everything**. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will **experience** God's **peace**, which exceeds anything we can **understand**. His peace will guard your hearts and **minds**,” which is where most of our anxiety lives, “as you live in Christ Jesus.”

I love that passage. He goes: Hey, “Don't worry about anything.” Okay, do other people tell you that? But then he says: “...pray about everything.” I don't know about you, but I'm a really good worrier. It's one of the things I excel in. Nobody has to teach me how to worry. I don't have to practice worry. I'm just really, naturally good at it. And my guess is that I'm not the only one today.

And I would say that there are probably a whole lot of us... If I would say, “Hey, are you a good prayer?” Most of us would probably not say that we are a good prayer for any number of reasons. We feel uncomfortable, we don't know what to say, we don't think that we know enough, maybe our minds starts to drift and we daydream in the middle of a prayer or we fall asleep or whatever.

Here's the thing. If you're good at worry, you can be really good at prayer, because all worry is prayer inverted. All worry is prayer that is redirected. God says: You don't know what to pray? Well I bet you've got a whole lot that you worry about. So why don't you take all of those things that you worry about and why don't you just direct them toward me?

Let me give you one more from 1 Peter, chapter 5. I love this. It says, "**Cast** all your **anxiety** on him because he **cares** for **you**."

See, the Bible had a lot to say about anxiety long before it would ever become the pandemic that it is in our society today. And I don't know how that passage hits you. I know that for me the word cast kind of throws me off a little bit, because I grew up fishing with my Grandfather. So, when I hear the word cast, I think of a fishing rod cast, and so I'm like, "Okay, I've got all of this anxiety, let me just cast it out." But what's the problem with that analogy? "I'm going to reel it back in."

And most of us do that when it comes to our anxiety and our worry. Oh, we'll cast it out. We'll go to church every now and then. We'll pray to God. But then we just reel it right back in, because maybe he's taking too long to answer, or we didn't necessarily like the way in which he dealt with it.

Actually, in the original languages the word cast is translated transfer. It's transfer all of your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

See, the message of Christmas is that whatever it is that you're walking through right now, God says: I want you to experience peace. He doesn't promise that you'll understand that peace. He doesn't promise that you'll be able to have everything figured out. He doesn't even promise that all the things that are stressing you out will go away. He actually says: No, in the midst of all of those things that are imperfect, you can experience something that transcends it all. You can actually experience peace whenever you look around and say, "This is anything but peaceful."

Have you ever been around somebody and he is going through something horrific in his life? And maybe it's a divorce. Maybe it's a child that is suffering from a disease. Maybe there is a loved one who passed away unexpectedly. And you go and you sit with him and you talk to him and you're sitting there going, "I don't know how in the world he is coping with this. I don't know how he is managing this, because if I was in that situation, I would be losing it." And he looks at you and says, "You know what? I'm just at peace right now." And he isn't necessarily going to be fully explain to you how and why that is.

It's just a feeling that you have that transcends all of your ability to understand. But that's what God wants to give you today. Whatever category you might find yourself in, whatever it is that you are walking through right now, God wants to give you that gift.

See, fear and faith are closely related. If you're fearful, God just simply wants you to turn it into faith. And that's not unicorns and rainbows. That's you putting your trust in the Prince of Peace. That's what God wants for you.

And, honestly, as a church that's what we want you to experience in and through Jesus Christ. That's the reason why we exist. In fact, our mission statement as a church—many of you have been around here for a while, you know this statement because we say it so much. It's that we want:

To remove unnecessary barriers that keep people from Jesus.

That's all we're trying to do. We're trying to clear the path and get you to Jesus so that you can know and follow him in every area of your life. So, we want to remove the unnecessary barriers that are keeping you from him. Every now and then people will go, "Well, what are those unnecessary barriers?" And I would say, "Good question." It's usually all of the words that end in -ism. And so it's like:

Legalism

That's maybe the biggest one. Legalism is this idea that I'm going to actually take my personal convictions and I'm going to impose them on you, usually at a distance, without really getting to know you or your heart. And it'll make you feel really bad about not having the same convictions that I have.

And our stories are dramatically different. I'm just willing to bet that some of you grew up in that household. That's actually why you rejected God and why you haven't been to church in a long time. And, you know what? I don't blame you. But God is not legalistic.

Maybe another word would just simply be:

Moralism

Which is very closely related—it's this idea that you've got to take a test in order to get a hearing with God, and you've got to do all of these good things and stop doing all of these bad things, and then God might love you, maybe. And God is not about moralism.

Maybe another one is:

Judgmentalism

It's this idea that I'm just going to keep my distance and I'm just going to assess who I think you are, without really getting to know you.

Or maybe this last one:

Traditionalism

Nothing wrong with tradition at all. I think tradition is a great thing, unless it gets in the way of people getting to Jesus. When we get super passionate about tradition, but not nearly as passionate about the mission, then something goes wrong.

And we just simply want to get you to Jesus. So, here at the end of the year I just want to ask you to consider these three questions right here.

Is it possible, at all for you, that you've been rejecting Jesus for the wrong reasons? All of those isms.

Is it possible, that you walked away from something, really, he was never offering? Jesus wasn't offering moralism. Jesus was offering something way better—grace by faith.

What about this question right here?

Have you found the peace you were looking for?

And if you've been away from God for a long time and you still just haven't found that thing that is satisfying your soul, could I just invite you back? Not to religion, not to legalism, not to moralism, but to a heavenly Father who loves you and wants the best for you and who's in your corner and he simply says: Just turn to me as you are. Just come to me right as you are and let's walk together. You're just inviting Jesus into your life.

So here's a prayer that I want to ask you to consider praying into a new year. Maybe you might want to snapshot this on your phone. Print this out. Put it on your master bathroom mirror. Read it on the dashboard of your car on the way to work every day. Let's just start 2020 with this prayer:

“Jesus, if any of this is true or real, would you help me to experience it in 2020?”

See, that experience isn't necessarily found in a book. It's not found in a google search. It's not found in understanding or getting all of your questions answered. Experience transcends all of that. It's like, “I don't know if I can fully explain it, but I'm experiencing God's presence in my life.”

So, how do you do that? How do you put yourself in a position to do that? One of the things that I've found is that, for me, I've just got to make myself available. I've got to lean in and put myself in a position for God to get a hold of me and begin to speak into my life.

Here's what I want to ask you to do. This is one way to do this. I want to ask you to:

Commit to being here in person the first 15 weekends of 2020.

If you're here. If you're local. If you don't have a church home. I want to ask you to just make it a commitment. Make it a New Year's resolution. That's January 5th through Easter weekend. That's 15 weekends.

If you're not from here, maybe find a church in your home town that is pointing people to Jesus and do it there. By the way, I'm not trying to drum up attendance with this. I really don't care about that. Maybe this isn't the church for you. Find a church somewhere else that you like and that is pointing people to Jesus. Do it there.

Here's why I say this. I think, oftentimes, we want God to work and Satan won't get you to do something bad, he'll just get you distracted. He'll just get you in other places where you don't quiet things down enough to really hear from God. And all I really want you to do... It's not about showing up here on the weekends, it's about showing up and actually making yourself available, which means you don't come late and leave early.

You come early and leave late. You make it your goal every single weekend, like, "I'm just going to meet one brand new person. I'm going to engage in a conversation. And you know what? I'm not going to make this about me. I'm actually going to serve someone else. I'm actually going to try to listen."

I'm not going to promise that every message that you will hear in those first 15 weekends will be a home run. What I can promise is that God will say at least one thing to you. So you come with those ears. You say, "God, what's the one thing that you want me to hear? What's the one thing that you want me to apply to my life." I guarantee that if you'll do that, all 15 weekends starting off the year, you'll have an experience. God will work in your life if you'll just give him time and room to do it.

So, next weekend is a totally online worship experience. I want to ask you to join us. It's at traderspoint.live. Then, on January 5th I'm going to have a couple of special guests here. I'm going to sit down on this stage and interview Brian Welch and his daughter, Jennea. Some of you might recognize him. He's one of the guitarists for the band Korn.

And Brian and Jennea have an incredible story of how God intervened in their lives and how even after Brian came to know Jesus, his life got even messier and it affected his relationship with his daughter. And they just talk about it very openly. You do not have to be a fan of Korn to get something out of this. You just have to be a human being, because they are as real as it gets. Invite somebody to come with you on this day, because I think it's going to really speak to your heart. We'd love to have you here.

More than anything, at this Christmas service today, right now, wherever you are seated, I just hope and pray that you'll have an experience. That maybe you'll just feel the presence of God, whether you believe in him right now, or not. Whether you would say that you would be a God person, or not, that right now you would go, "Man, something is happening to me and I can't even fully explain it," but that you would begin to experience the peace that Jesus was born to give to you.

Let me pray for you.

Father, we come to you today and I thank you for this Christmas. I thank you that it's not perfect, because if it was perfect, I would have no need for you. But, it's actually the imperfections that drive me to my knees and drive me back to you over and over again, because I realize how imperfect I am. Honestly, speaking for me, half the reason why Christmas isn't perfect is because of my own mistakes and my mess that I bring to the table.

So, God, I come to you today and I just thank you that you are the Prince of Peace. That we need so desperately to experience that today. We thank you and we love you. And we ask this in Jesus' name: Amen.