

## **Comfort for Christmas**

While no time ever feels like a good time to grieve, Christmas can be especially painful.

Our longings and losses separate us from the holly, jolly throngs of those with robust health, lucrative jobs, marital bliss, well-adapted children, and photogenic dogs.

On one level, we know that holly, jolly throng is fictional. But it's easy to forget that everyone is fighting a battle when we've stopped interacting at a deep level. We turn to hide our tears and avoid bothering those who ask the kind of questions that could cause our sorrow to slip out.

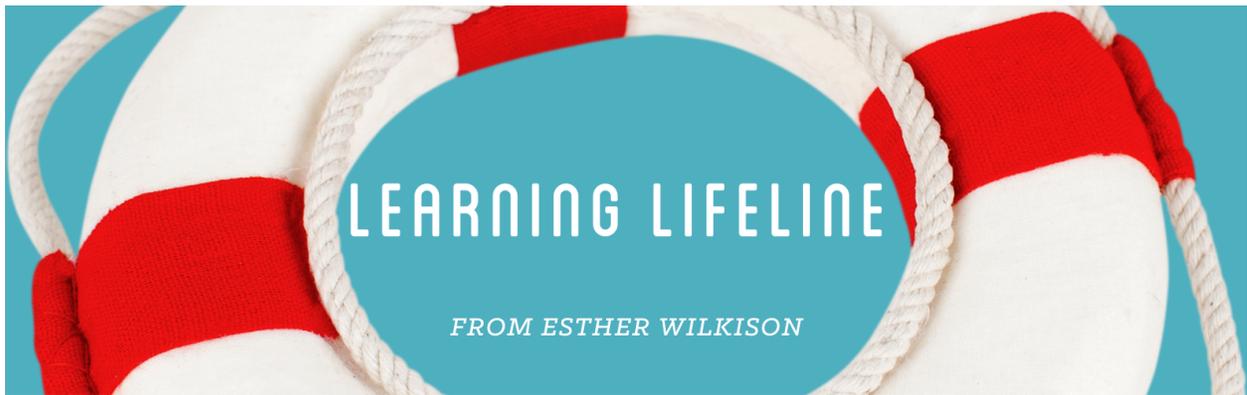
Would those we are protecting from our sorrow actually be bothered if they had opportunity to give us comfort? Probably not. But it sure can be hard to let our needs show when our past has trained us to expect shame or neglect.

Yet, Jesus Christ longs for us to experience His full comfort. The events of His birth show a contrast between someone who refused vulnerability and Someone who embodied it.

Representing the kingdom of force and fear, we have Herod. When toddlers pose a potential threat, fear drives Herod to murder in an attempt to control all the variables. Anything that must be maintained by force is doomed to fail.

Representing the Kingdom of freedom and love, we see Jesus entering our world as a needy, helpless newborn. He needed His parents to soothe Him, feed Him, and change His diaper. He received the nurture and training that allowed His brain and body to develop.

Christmas is a time of giving, and Jesus certainly is the greatest gift. But Jesus didn't just give, He received. And that receiving was not just from His family of origin. He also received gifts from wise men, training, food, friendship, baptism, funding for His ministry, help to carry His cross, care for His body after death, and the gift of a tomb (which He only borrowed for three days).



I've met many who are delighted to give but refuse to receive. There is no true relationship without both giving and receiving. Close relationships are what Jesus designed us for and sacrificed to help us experience.

Isolation is killing far too many of us. We need comfort. If we pull that word apart, *comfort* is made up of *com* (which means *with*) and *fort* (which is *a safe refuge*). Jesus came to be with us as our safe refuge. Jesus gave us His Spirit (another comforter like Himself) to guide us into deeper connection so we could become a safe refuge for one another.

As humans, comfort is not an idol, but something we were designed to give and receive. If we avoid real comfort, we will continue to seek comfort—but in all the wrong places.

Sometimes, as we give comfort, we feel most comforted. Other times, we are comforted when we receive—even though receiving feels awkward until we learn how. May this Christmas be a time of growing comfortable in receiving the kind of deep comfort God has intended for us all along.

*God of All Comfort—Heal us as you help us learn how to be fully human, fully known, and fully loved. Spirit, expand our capacity so we are a safe refuge for those with great needs. Open us up to those longing for the safety and comfort You will empower us to provide.*