

to him. Those who were proud and in love with themselves—especially those who took pride in their religious achievements—hated him. And, when they could not match his insight or popularity, they conspired to have him executed.

But it is in Jesus' death that God's love is most clearly seen. Because in the death of Jesus, God dealt with the consequences of our selfishness and opened the way back to peace with God.

Love lives again

He didn't stay dead, of course. God raised Jesus from the grave to show that peace with God is truly available. And Jesus Christ pours his Spirit of love, peace and hope into the hearts of all who come to him, confess their need of forgiveness, and depend on what he has done to put them right with our Father.

Jesus still divides people today. Will we accept the forgiveness on offer through the cross of Christ and turn away from our rebellious ways? Or will we ignore God's Christmas gift, and carry on in our self-ruled and ultimately self-destructive lives? There's no middle ground. A choice must be made.

The prayer below might help you take the first steps back into the arms of your loving Creator. Talk to him now... He is listening, and longs to welcome you back...

A Christmas Prayer

Dear Father in Heaven

Thank you that you made me and love me.

Please forgive me for abusing your gifts of life and love.

Thank you for sending Jesus into the world to die so that forgiveness is possible.

Thank you that he rose again to bring us new life.

Please come into my life as my Rescuer, Friend and Lord, and fill me with your love, hope and peace, so that I can live for you.

Amen



Love, they say, makes the world go round, which turns out to be true in more ways than one...

It's true for us, because the love of others is actually what we seek most in our lives. Without the love of others, even our greatest achievements can seem hollow and pointless. The greatest pain we experience is the pain of broken promises and rejected love.

But it is also true in another sense. Because what makes the world go round is *the love of our Creator* who called this amazing universe of ours into being. The love of a Father God who fashioned you and me “in his image”—so that we too are creatures with a basic instinct to love and be loved.

The Christmas message is the story of a Father's heart broken by the selfishness of those he so lovingly made, and of his extraordinary plan to put things right again.

Tainted love

In the first chapters of the Bible, the book of Genesis, we glimpse the heart of the human problem. God made us to be lovers. To

live in a relationship of love with each other; to protect and care for the world he made; and to find our meaning in a relationship with the loving God who made us. But our choice has been to turn that love in on ourselves—to lavish God's great gifts on the pursuit of our own needs—not on the care and welfare of others. We love ourselves, not God.

That rejection of God's way is all too obvious in ourselves. We desire closeness, but find it hard to trust. We offer our love to others, but find ourselves spurned. Those with whom we are generous can turn away and ignore us. And we know that we are capable of selfishly wounding others: harsh words spoken, thoughtless or spiteful things done. Worst of all, we ignore our loving Creator, and search for our meaning in other things.

We see these things in ourselves. But on a global scale, the effects of this selfishness are truly appalling: war, famine, disease and hostility create misery for millions. And all because we find our own comfort more important than the needs of others. Love turned in on itself is the blight that ruins our world, and has separated all of us from the God who made us. We need rescuing.



To save the world our loving God conceived a plan, and is working it out through human history. It was whispered first in those early chapters of Genesis: one born of woman will “crush” the serpent—the first promise that God would send someone who would reverse the damage done by tainted love.

As time went by, God revealed more of his character and this extraordinary plan to us, his wayward children. Born of a virgin. The Prince of Peace. And yet a man who would be rejected and suffer. A man who would bear the pain of our warped lives and open a way back to being at peace with God our Father.

Love child

The child whose birth we celebrate at Christmas lived true to all these predictions and more. Jesus showed us how far we have fallen by living life as it should be lived: full of compassion and care for others. Unafraid to speak the painful truth, and yet caring deeply for those he met.

It is little surprise that such a man divided those who came across him. Those who knew their weakness and need were drawn

