
*Cedar Springs
Mission Devotionals
& Prayer Guide*

December 2017



<http://reclamationstories.org>

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1

Opening Prayer: Let me hear joy and gladness, O God; let the bones you have broken rejoice. (Psalm 51:8)

Scripture: Psalm 51:17

Journal: What are your places of deepest brokenness these days? What is God trying to do in and through those? How is God meeting and healing your brokenness? How might he use it to offer life and hope to others?

Reflection: Most of us flee brokenness at every opportunity. But the truth is that our unique brokenness is meant to be an invitation into the heart of God. Our brokenness, yours and mine, is meant to help us encounter God in an intimate and transforming way. All of life, and particularly our pain, is an invitation to know God more deeply. Our unique brokenness is an avenue through which God can get his hands on us and do a deep work in us, and then pass us along in a fruitful way to those in our lives and world. Therefore we must embrace our brokenness, rather than run away from it. We must receive it, own it, and know it deeply before it can teach and transform us as the Spirit offers hope and healing. Only then will we be able to fruitfully give it away. And the gift our brokenness offers to those around us is immense. For it is those places where we have been most deeply broken that actually have something of value - by God's grace - to offer our world, even if it is simply our compassionate presence.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Hugo and Jackie are from South Africa and have two children, Marlena and John. Hugo is one of the leaders of a media ministry and has also been providing oversight to the PALM ministry (Preparing Arab World Leaders for Ministry) for the last few years. Pray today for more workers to help with the church planting efforts in Egypt.

The focus of [Global Golf](#) is to serve women at all levels of competitive golf - professional tour players, college athletes, coaches and club pros - and introduce them to Jesus Christ through long-term relationships built around golf. Evangelism, discipleship and pastoral care are Global Golf's primary purposes. Pray today for Cris and all of the tour players that she will have opportunities to connect with them on the pro tour.

Closing Prayer: Going through the motions doesn't please you, a flawless performance is nothing to you. I learned God-worship when my pride was shattered. Heart-shattered lives ready for love don't for a moment escape God's notice. (Psalm 51:16-17, *The Message*)

Notes.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to set aside all of my lists and my plans and my agendas for this next hour, and help me to simply spend time with you. For you want my attention and my affection far more than you want my frenetic activity. Capture my heart with your presence and then guide my steps with your Spirit. Amen.

Scripture: Acts 4:13

Journal: How would you describe your life *with* Jesus these days? How is it marking your everyday life?

Reflection: “*And they took note that these men had been with Jesus.*” What a great line! It is so hopeful. I don’t know about you, but most days I feel about as ordinary and unschooled as they come. I mean, these guys were fishermen for crying out loud! And they were standing toe to toe with some of the most distinguished scholars and theologians of their day - and amazing them at that. That is the hopeful part. It isn’t what I know, or what I can do, that makes me useful to God and to his kingdom; it is simply *being with Jesus*. That is not meant to belittle the value of education, but is meant to underscore the importance of devotion. When I spend quality time with Jesus, he gives me everything I need. That time *with him* is what gives me the inspiration and the strength and the power I need to have an impact on those around me, no matter who they are. So before we run off to our books and our strategy meetings and our “*to do*” lists, let us first make time and space to simply be with Jesus.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Darlene Johnson has been a member of MTW’s church-planting team in Nagoya, Japan, since 2000. She teaches conversational English and evangelistic Bible studies and is involved in choral and instrumental music ministry. Pray today for Mrs. K who has been attending church with her daughter and granddaughter. Her daughter has also asked Darlene to teach her about the Bible.

Global Media Outreach is an Internet ministry that seeks to stay on the cutting edge of emerging technologies with the intent to give everyone on earth multiple opportunities to know and follow Jesus Christ. Pray today for each person that will encounter this ministry via their website that they will choose to follow Christ.

Closing Prayer: I ask you, Lord Jesus, to develop in me, your lover, an immeasurable urge towards you, an affection that is unbounded, longing that is unrestrained, fervor that throws discretion to the winds! The more worthwhile our love for you, all the more pressing does it become. Reason cannot hold it in check, fear does not make it tremble, wise judgment does not temper it. (*The Fire of Love* by Richard Rolle)

Notes.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 3 The First Sunday in Advent

Opening Prayer: O Jesus, let me be full of you. Amen.

Scripture: Romans 15:13

Journal: What words would you use to describe your soul these days? What are you full of? What would it look like to be overflowing with hope? What are you overflowing with?

Reflection: We are all full of something. Somedays it is anxiety and insecurity, somedays it is pride and arrogance, and somedays it is something a little more noble than that. If I am completely honest, however, I must admit that almost always I am full of myself. The problem is that there is a spiritual principle in play here: Whatever you are full of is what will pour forth from your life. If I am full of anxiety, then anxiety is what will overflow from me. If I am filled with arrogance, then arrogance with overflow from me. But if I am filled with Jesus, then Jesus will overflow from me. It is that simple. Saint Bernard wrote about it years ago: *“The man who is wise, therefore, will see his life as more like a reservoir than a canal. The canal simultaneously pours out what it receives, the reservoir retains the water till it is filled, then discharges the overflow without loss to itself. Today there are many in the Church who act like canals, the reservoirs are far too rare. You must learn to await this fullness before pouring out your gifts, do not try to be more generous than God.”*

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Michael and Diana Johnson have been serving with People International. As International Director, Michael provided broad vision and leadership for the mission. As they near retirement from People International, they have begun a new work with CSPC that involves recruiting churches to partner with the work with refugees in Europe. Pray today for a new ministry mentoring new mission CEOs that Michael began in September 2017.

Gospel Wave Media is a satellite and Internet ministry that produces, records and broadcasts Christian television programs to Central Asia. Pray today for safe travels, for God's protection and guidance for the staff of this ministry.

Closing Prayer: O May the life of God within us fill us to overflowing, that we might drench all who come across our paths with his love and his joy and his peace. Amen.

Notes.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4

Opening Prayer: How blessed is God! And what a blessing he is! He's the Father of our Master, Jesus Christ, and takes us to the high places of blessing in him. Long before he laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. (What pleasure he took in planning this!) He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift-giving by the hand of his beloved Son. (Ephesians 1:3-6, *The Message*)

Scripture: Ephesians 1:3-10

Journal: What words of life and blessing have you received from God lately? How does he want you to speak words of life and love and blessing to those in your life and world today? To whom?

Reflection: *"We are chosen, blessed and broken so as to be given. The fourth aspect of the life of the Beloved is to be given. For me, personally, this means that it is only as people who are given that we can fully understand our being chosen, blessed and broken. In the giving it becomes clear that we are chosen, blessed and broken not simply for our own sakes, but so that all we live finds its final significance in its being lived for others."* (*Life of the Beloved* by Henri J. M. Nouwen)

You, yes you, are God's Beloved. You are his masterpiece; his work of art. You bring him deep joy and great delight. You make his heart skip a beat every time he thinks of you - which is all the time. You bring a smile to his face and a song to his lips. Our God, the Father of Jesus, is very, very fond of you.

Now go forth into the world and speak words of life and love and blessing to everyone you come in contact with.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Mike and Stephanie are working with a project called LEARN (Leadership Education and Resource Network) based in Beirut, Lebanon. The project's aim is to provide high quality, interactive Biblical training via Internet to Arabic-speakers wherever they are found. Pray today for Stephanie as she takes an intensive training course for certification in English Language Teaching for Adults. She loves the teaching she does at ABTS and wants to take advantage of this training opportunity.

Habitat for Humanity builds and sells single-family homes to qualified low and very-low income families by developing partnerships with businesses, organizations, churches, foundations and individuals who help build the homes. Pray today for Jeanna and her family who many of you met when you worked on her house in November during this year's CSPPC Habitat Build.

Closing Prayer: You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered! I can't even count them; they outnumber the grains of sand! (Psalm 139:13-18, *NLT*)

Notes.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5

Opening Prayer: Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: he will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun. Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret. . .it leads only to evil. (Psalm 37:3-8, NIV)

Scripture: Psalm 37:3-8

Journal: What are you most full of today, delight or fret? How do you delight yourself in the Lord? How do you allow yourself to be delighted in by him? How are the two related? What do you most often fret over? How can you lessen the hold fret has over your life? Have you prayed and asked God to do that?

Reflection: It is impossible to understate the importance of *delight* in the spiritual life. *Delight* is the very lifeblood of our lives with God. It is the thing that gives life and energy and vibrancy to our souls. It is the end result of the activity of God's Spirit within us. "God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit," says Paul in Romans. (Rom. 5:5) Delight is when God's Spirit so captures our hearts with his great love and affection that it changes everything about us. Thus, we come to delight in him as we recognize his deep delight in us, which fills us to overflowing so that his Divine Love spills out of us into the world around us.

The word *delight* ('anag) is used in a couple of different ways in the Old Testament. The literal translation is to be *soft or delicate*. Thus, when we delight in God, we become soft to him. We are pliable in his hands, open and vulnerable to his touch and his voice and his Spirit. The other way the word *delight* is used in the scriptures is *to be filled with deep gladness*. When we *delight ourselves in the Lord*, we find our deepest joy and gladness in who he is, and in his great affection for us. This, in turn, breeds so many other great things in the life of faith: trust and rest and surrender to his will and his direction. When we delight in our God, we recognize, and are convinced of, the depths of his heart for us, allowing us to truly trust in him.

In contrast (in Psalm 37), is the word *fret*. The word *fret* is used a couple of different ways in the Old Testament as well. To *fret* (charah) literally means to *blaze up or grow hot*. Under this usage of the word, when we fret we get angry with God and become hardened to him, rather than soft. The other way the word *fret* is used is to be *filled with worry or doubt*. When we fret, we become consumed. We allow worry or doubt to so fill us up that there is no room for God to do anything of value within us.

So how do we live in such a way, as to cultivate and nurture delight, while minimizing and weeding out fret? Maybe a starting point would be to begin to immerse our hearts in the words of this ancient prayer. To reflect on it and chew on it and meditate on it and pray it until it begins to take root within us. Maybe by praying these words over and over, we might actually begin to do them; or, better yet, to become them. Maybe by praying these very words we will become more convinced of his love and, thus, more able to delight in him. It seems like a good place to start anyway.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Tim and Barbie K. are working to translate the Bible into the Makori language, currently working in Acts and Galatians. Barbie is also guest house manager and Regional Director, having responsibility for more than 20 missionaries in the area. Their main goal is to see a Makori church effectively using its own Bible translation. Pray today for Tim and Barbie who are in the U.S. on home assignment until late summer 2018. Pray for them as they seek to communicate well what God is doing.

Heart for Lebanon is a faith-based holistic ministry that uses relief in many cases, but not exclusively, as the first step in the process of transforming an individual and their community. They seek to unconditionally serve those who have been marginalized and rejected in Lebanon, including refugees from Syria. Pray today for women who struggle to survive in difficult camp conditions, most have no husband living with them (the majority are at war or have died) and desperately need care. Pray that the hope in their hearts remains open and receptive despite so much suffering.

Closing Prayer: Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper. Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.

Be still in the presence of the Lord, and wait patiently for him to act. Don't worry about evil people who prosper or fret about their wicked schemes. Stop being angry! Turn from your rage!
Do not lose your temper - it only leads to harm. (Psalm 37:3-8, *NLT*)

Notes:

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, your love for us is complete and extravagant and unconditional. It is all about giving rather than getting. May our love for one another be the same. Amen.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:21-33

Journal: How is God drawing out your beauty or strength these days? How are you doing that for others? How are you doing that in your family? Your marriage? How has Christ loved you? How is that a guide for how you love others?

Reflection: Out of respect for Christ, be courteously reverent to one another.

Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.

Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church - a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ's love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They're really doing themselves a favor - since they're already "one" in marriage.

No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That's how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become "one flesh." This is a huge mystery, and I don't pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband. (*Ephesians 5:21-33*)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Bobby and Teresa LaDage are working with Redeemer City to City (the church planting arm of Redeemer Church in NYC) envisioning, equipping, and mentoring church planters and their wives in order to see gospel-centered churches reach the major cities of Eastern and Central Europe. They are also now serving as European Regional Leaders for United World Mission. Pray today for the church planters in these cities: Moscow, Warsaw, Kraków, Helsinki, and Stockholm.

Homes of Love creates families for orphaned, abandoned, and at-risk children in Southeast Asia and Africa by identifying, training and supporting in-country Christian parents who will raise these children as their own. With access to education, healthcare, and a loving family, Homes of Love children escape the dangers of poverty, abuse, neglect, and sexual exploitation and are freed to pursue healthy, vibrant futures. On November 3, a major typhoon hit Nha Trang, Vietnam, and affected 5 of the HOL homes. Pray today for those 5 families as they repair their homes and try to get back to a normal life.

Closing Prayer: May we, O Lord, love those in our very own families with the same love and kindness and compassion with which we have been loved by you. Amen.

Notes:

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7

Opening Prayer: O God, how you long for intimacy with us - as well as for us and from us. And you designed marriage to be a beautiful expression of that. Thank you that the best marriages can give us a little taste of eternity. Amen.

Scripture: Ephesians 5:22-33

Journal: How are your deepest desires for intimacy being met in your life right now? How might God be drawing you to that? How might marriage be a picture of that? If you are married, what does God long for (both from you and for you) in your marriage? What about these verses help give you direction on getting there?

Reflection: *Wives, understand and support your husbands in ways that show your support for Christ. The husband provides leadership to his wife the way Christ does to his church, not by domineering but by cherishing. So just as the church submits to Christ as he exercises such leadership, wives should likewise submit to their husbands.*

Husbands, go all out in your love for your wives, exactly as Christ did for the church—a love marked by giving, not getting. Christ’s love makes the church whole. His words evoke her beauty. Everything he does and says is designed to bring the best out of her, dressing her in dazzling white silk, radiant with holiness. And that is how husbands ought to love their wives. They’re really doing themselves a favor - since they’re already “one” in marriage.

*No one abuses his own body, does he? No, he feeds and pampers it. That’s how Christ treats us, the church, since we are part of his body. And this is why a man leaves father and mother and cherishes his wife. No longer two, they become “one flesh.” This is a huge mystery, and I don’t pretend to understand it all. What is clearest to me is the way Christ treats the church. And this provides a good picture of how each husband is to treat his wife, loving himself in loving her, and how each wife is to honor her husband. (Ephesians 5:22-33, *The Message*)*

A few of days ago my wife and I had the incredible privilege of attending a ten-year anniversary ceremony for a couple of dear friends. They got married when they were really young and at the time were unable to afford the wedding they had always dreamt about, so they decided to have it on their tenth anniversary. And it was delightful! It was delightful because of the setting and the intentionality and the friends and family who had gathered. It was delightful because of the wonderful weather and the beautiful decorations and the great food. But mostly, it was delightful because of this extraordinary couple. Her friends and family describe her as a great daughter, a great sister, and a great friend. Her husband describes her as his rock - an incredible wife and mother. Her life revolves around investing herself in the lives of those she loves, especially her husband and their four beautiful children. He is a professional athlete. His friends and family describe him as an enormous man with an enormous heart - kind-hearted, loving, and generous (both with his time and his resources). He is known in his profession as a great teammate who is willing to do the dirty work; willing to do all of the difficult, unglamorous things that no one else really wants to do. In a word, both of these dear friends could be described as *selfless*.

And because this ceremony took place ten years after they had originally gotten married, I think it led everyone there to reflect upon marriage in general, an upon our own marriages in particular. I know it did me. What makes a great marriage? What makes a marriage that lasts? And, even more, what makes a marriage that flourishes? All of these questions, I believe, are addressed in the words above from the book of Ephesians. The secret to a great marriage can be summed up in two words: strength and beauty. Let me explain what I mean by that.

A wise man once said that the deepest question of every man's heart is, "Do I have what it takes?" while the greatest question of every woman's heart is, "Am I beautiful enough to be pursued?" Now I am not completely sure about what resides in the heart of a woman, but as far as I'm concerned, the deepest question of every man's heart is spot on. Deep in the heart of every man is the desire to be capable, adequate, and strong. Oh, not strong in a brutish, bullying sort of way, but strong in a way that allows those dearest to us to feel safe and protected and cared for. It is a strength filled with lovingkindness and tender care. And deep in the heart of every woman lies the desire to be considered beautiful. Not just beautiful in the physical sense, but beautiful deep down to the core of who she really is. A beauty that draws people to want to know her and be in deep relationship with her.

I think that's why Paul uses the word "honor" when speaking to the wives and "cherish" when speaking to the

husbands. Somehow when wives honor their husbands, they hold them in high regard. They make something come alive in them that God breathed into them when he dreamt them into being. They draw out their godly strength. And somehow when a husband cherishes his wife, he makes something come to life in her that makes her the very best, God-breathed, version of herself. When she is cherished, her true beauty is evoked from her.

The bottom line is that marriage was intended to be a place where husband and wife make each other the very best version of themselves. And somehow the oneness from which, and for which, marriage was designed, means that the two together are more than they could ever be on their own. That is not meant to diminish or demean singleness in any way. In fact, I believe singleness is a unique and beautiful calling (or season) as well. For those who are single it is almost as if God were saying, "I want to be that for you right now. I want to be that intimate one in your life." But the whole idea behind marriage is that two separate people would become one in some wonderfully mysterious way. That the sum of the whole (in Christ) would somehow be greater than the sum of the parts. I know that I have found this to be true in my own marriage. I am a much, much better man with Carol in my life than I could ever hope to be without her. Her presence in my life makes me more and more who God intended for me to be.

The question is, how is this oneness in marriage achieved? How do we live in union as husband and wife, rather than simply settling for living parallel lives? I think the answer goes back to the weekend celebration we just had the pleasure of witnessing. Oneness is achieved through selflessness. Just ask the Trinity. They live in joyful, loving union with one another, each honoring and cherishing and pointing toward and delighting in the other. It is a Great Round Dance of Love that we are invited to take part in. Oneness happens when we follow their lead. Thus, oneness begins to take shape when we become more committed to the cares and needs and wants and desires of our spouse than we are to our own plans, demands, and agendas. When both spouses are committed to giving themselves fully and completely to each other--no holding back--oneness is the byproduct. Just ask Jesus, the part of the Trinity who came to show us what the heart of God is really like, and what it means to really love someone. His love is our guide. Each one of us is to love our spouse the way that Jesus has loved us. When we do that we become, both corporately and individually, all that God designed us to be.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

John and Kathy Lesondak are church planters who work across denominational lines in Slovakia to encourage and enable pastors in their work. The Lesondaks utilize various opportunities to engage with local residents, including classes in pottery and sewing. They are in the U.S. now on home assignment until Spring 2018, but ask that you pray for an opportunity to purchase a house that can be used for the Roma community Church in Vitkovce. Getting this house would allow the community to have a place of their own for the first time.

The Hope Center provides caring support and assistance to all individuals and families living with HIV. Pray today for the "Hope for the Holidays" celebration that will be hosted at Cedar Springs today! If you filled a Hope Bucket, it will be given to someone at the party today. Thank you for caring for these patients and their families.

Closing Prayer: O God, how you long for us with the passion and purity of a bridegroom for his bride. Draw us into deeper and deeper intimacy with you, that we might be drawn to deeper levels of intimacy with each other. Amen.

Notes.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8

Opening Prayer: Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your justice like the great deep. O Lord, you preserve both man and beast. How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life, in your light we see light. Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart. (*Psalm 36:5-10*)

Scripture: Ephesians 3:14-21

Journal: How do the words *rooted and established* in love describe you these days? If they do not, what words do best describe the state of your heart and soul? How do we *know this love that surpasses knowledge*? What is your sense of being loved by God these days? What is your current level of fullness? How are we filled with God?

Reflection: What would my life look like if I were really *rooted and established in love*? If I truly and deeply *knew this love that surpasses knowledge*? If those two things were really true I, indeed, would be *filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*. I would not be so blown around by mood and circumstance. I would not be so easily affected by conflict or criticism. I would not be so needy of admiration and affirmation. In fact, I would be so full of God - so full of love - that I would simply overflow that love and fullness on all who came across my path. Now that's the life I long to live!

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Josh and Jenny M. are working with the RAK Church Plant in the United Arab Emirates. The RAK Evangelical Church has now been formally constituted as a church with about 40 members. The Manleys have recently celebrated living in UAE for 5 years. Pray today for this family as they build relationships and share the gospel.

Hope House Knoxville is a ministry that provides housing and guidance for young adults who have reached an age where they no longer qualify to live in foster care. Pray today for Kathy Smith who lives in Hope House and serves as the resident manager as she provides loving support for residents.

Closing Prayer: Fill us to overflowing, O God, with your life and love, that we might be vessels to pour forth that life and love into the world. Amen.

Notes.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 9

Opening Prayer: I call to you, Lord, from my quiet darkness. Show me your mercy and love. Let me see your face, hear your voice, touch the hem of your cloak. I want to love you, be with you, speak to you and simply stand in your presence. But I cannot make that happen. Pressing my eyes against my hands is not praying, and reading about your presence is not living in it.

But there is that moment in which you will come to me, as you did to your fearful disciples, and say, "Do not be afraid; it is I." Let that moment come soon, O Lord. And if you want to delay it, then make me patient. Amen. (*A Cry for Mercy* by Henri J. M. Nouwen)

Scripture: Psalm 37:7, James 5:7-8

Journal: What is the place of waiting in your own personal life with God? Where are you having to wait for the Lord? Where is he asking you to wait for him?

Reflection: *Be still and wait patiently for the Lord. . . (Psalm 37:7)*

God comes like the sun in the morning - when it is time.

We must assume an attitude of waiting, accepting the fact that we are creatures and not creator.

We must do this because it is not our right to do anything else: the initiative is God's, not ours. We are able to initiate nothing; we are able only to accept.

If God does not call, no calling takes place. If God does not come, there is no history! History is the coming of God to us, and the way in which we reply.

Only God created the heavens and the earth; only God can create history. We carry it out through our response, but the inspiration, the design, and the strength to carry it out come from him.

In short, he is what creates, and we creatures are in an act of becoming. (*The God Who Comes* by Carlo Carretto)

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near. (James 5:7-8)

Apparently *waiting* plays a significant role in our lives with God. Unfortunately, we are not good at it. We like to charge ahead. We like to make things happen. The problem is that the *things* that we can make happen are probably not the things God wants to have happen. So even when it is our desire to help God (as if he needed it), we, all too often, actually get in his way if we are not waiting patiently for him to tell us and to show us what he desires. *Waiting*, it seems, must always precede acting. Otherwise we are merely acting on our own behalf, rather than God's.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Heath and Angela Many have been serving at Tenwek Hospital, a Christian mission hospital in rural Kenya, as medical missionaries in their respective fields (surgery and obstetrics/gynecology). Pray today for Heath who has taken on the role of program director for the PAACS Surgery Residency Program at Tenwek since returning in September. He is excited and honored to be able to play an integral role in the training program.

Hope Resource Center is a multi-faceted Christian ministry addressing such matters as sexual purity and health, unplanned pregnancy, post-abortion stress and abstinence education. Pray today for all the young women who will come to this ministry this month.

Closing Prayer: O Lord our God, be the initiator this day, and give us the grace and the courage to respond. Amen.

Notes:

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 10 The Second Sunday in Advent

Opening Prayer: Lord, help me to be *grateful* for what I *have*, to remember that I don't *need* most of what I *want*, and that *joy* is found in *simplicity* and *generosity*. Amen. - *A Prayer for Contentment*

Scripture: Philippians 4:11-13

Journal: What is your level of contentment in life these days? What increases it? What attacks it? How will you nurture contentment in your life going forward?

Reflection: One step toward it [contentment] is patient submission to unavoidable ills and hardships... There are trials which we cannot change into pleasures, burdens which we cannot lay down, crosses which we must continue to carry, thorns in the flesh which must remain with their rankling pain. When we have such trials, why should we not accept them as part of God's way with us? Discontent never made a rough path smoother, a heavy burden lighter, a bitter cup less bitter, a dark way brighter, a sore sorrow less sore. It [discontent] only makes matters worse. One who accepts with patience that which he cannot change - has learned one secret of victorious living. - *J. R. Miller*

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

We are providing prayer support for two families living in Creative Access countries who are "Tent Makers." Their work gives them access to the local population. Pray today for wisdom and safety for these two growing families.

InterVarsity's vision is to see students transformed, campuses renewed, and world changers developed. They live this out by inviting unreached students into life transforming encounters with Jesus Christ and training and developing them as disciples and leaders. Pray today for the staff and volunteers as they complete this semester and makes plans for reaching students in the new year.

Closing Prayer: I would rather be what you chose to make me, O God, than the most glorious creature that I could imagine; for to have been thought about, born in Your thought, and then made by You, is the dearest, grandest, and most precious thing in all thinking. - *George MacDonald*

Notes:

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11

Opening Prayer: Teach me your ways, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. (Psalm 86:11, NIV)

Scripture: Psalm 86:11

Journal: What does it mean to walk in God's truth? To have an undivided heart? To fear his name?

Reflection: But in the epiphany of the night of darkness and pain and near despair, *the holiness of God became an ecstasy, a captivity of adoration, a heart-smiting and heart-cleansing and heart possessing reality.* I was caught up and then bowed in enthralled worship. I wanted to be wholly so engaged forever. I wanted everything I said or did to be an act of worship. What I had become aware of thrillingly and exclusively, was a *holiness that is wholeness!* It includes everything the human heart at its best craves, everything the human mind in its greatest moments reaches after, everything the authentic self needs for its fulfillment. It was goodness of infinite dimensions, truth transcending all limitations; beauty endlessly satisfying; mercy without limit; forgiveness equal to every desperate sin; wisdom surpassing all human knowledge; everything of value in time and eternity; and always there, without variation, for everybody, in every situation.

In the Presence thus manifested there was nothing that at any time diminishes his perfections, dilutes his redemptive powers, modifies his living eagerness to help his creatures fulfill their destiny. I was ravishingly made aware that *the Presence is always the Presence-in-the-fullness-of-his-being, in his concern for all of us, in the inexhaustibleness of his saving energies, in the responsibility he assumes for every one of his children.* (*The Captivating Presence* by Albert Edward Day)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Tom & Juanita Matthews serve in Tanzania & Kenya. Tom is a translation consultant to Bible translation teams from multiple people groups. Some of the groups are minimally reached for Christ and some are dominated by Islam. Pray today for the Rendille NT translation team's work that has been slowed by their typesetter's computer and software and the outbreak of malaria among the Rendille.

Joni and Friends Knoxville ministers to families and individuals affected by disabilities in Knoxville and Tennessee as well as in Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi and in Guatemala. The vision of Joni and Friends is to accelerate Christian ministry in the disability community by communicating the gospel and equipping Christ-honoring churches worldwide to evangelize and disciple people affected by disability. Pray today for the Knoxville staff of Joni and Friends and the families they will connect with this month.

Closing Prayer: You, O Lord, are holy, and created us to live and to walk in your holiness. That is how we become all that you intended us to be. Help us to become that! Amen.

Notes.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 12

Opening prayer: One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will lift me high upon a rock. (Psalm 27:4-5, *ESV*)

Scripture: Psalm 27:1-14

Journal: What words or images from this psalm make something come alive within you? Why? How are you seeking God's face these days? What effect is it having in your life?

Reflection: O Holy Mystery, You who entered into the depths of my brokenness that I might be filled with Your fullness, enflame my heart Your indwelling love that I might desire You above all else. May my growing love for You lead me to offer myself to You through practices of devotion and service. Through these practices may the light of Your cruciform love break the power of the persistent shadows of my false self. May Your light illuminate my darkness. May Your cruciform love consume all evil in me. May Your wholeness heal my brokenness and make me a child of light. (*The Deeper Journey* by M. Robert Mulholland, Jr.)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

J and C are working in a Creative Access country for World Outreach. J. is developing an entry platform using sustainable technologies that will provide income and economic development for the people there. Pray today that the first harvest over the next few weeks will be successful and pave the way towards the goal of financial independence for the project.

KDEC or Kasr el Dohara Evangelistic Church is the largest evangelical church in the middle east. Started in 1948, it has grown to a membership of 8,000 members. Pray today for the ministry leaders of this church.

Closing Prayer: Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me! You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, Lord, do I seek." Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me, but the Lord will take me in.

Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. Give me not up to the will of my adversaries; for false witnesses have risen against me, and they breathe out violence.

I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living! Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord! (*Psalm 27:7-14, ESV*)

Notes.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13

Opening Prayer: For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken. (Psalm 62:1-2, *ESV*)

Scripture: Psalm 62:1-12

Journal: What do the words God *alone* stir up within you? Why?

Reflection: When religion has said its last word, there is little that we need other than God Himself. The evil habit of seeking God - *and* effectively prevents us from finding God in full revelation. In the *and* lies our great woe. If we omit the *and* we shall soon find God, and in Him we shall find that for which we have all our lives been secretly longing. - *The Pursuit of God* by A.W. Tozer

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

After years of leading Young Life Spain and Young Life Western Europe, [Jim and Barbara McNamee](#) are now developing new areas as part of the regional staff. They are working to start new ministries in the five countries of Western Europe, including Luxembourg, Andorra, and Italy. Their primary focus at this time is starting a new YL area in the Basque Country of Spain. Pray today for 10 high school students to sign up for the USA program in July 2018.

The goals of [Kentucky Mountain Mission](#) (KMM) and Youth Haven Bible Camp are two-fold: to reach the children and adults of southeastern Kentucky with the gospel of Jesus Christ and to train/disciple those that receive Christ for Christian leadership in their churches and communities. Pray today for scheduling of college recruitment visits and God's provision of counselors for next summer.

Closing Prayer: For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence, for my hope is in him. He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I will not be shaken. On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God. (Psalm 62:5-7, *ESV*)

Notes.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 14

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, make me more like you this day. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 63:1

Journal: What does it look like to earnestly seek God in your life?

Reflection: We can become like Christ in character and in power and thus realize our highest ideal of well-being and well-doing. That is the heart of the New Testament message.

Do you believe this is possible?

My central claim is that we can become like Christ by doing one thing - by following him in Christ, we must believe that he knew how to live. We can, through faith and grace, become like Christ by practicing the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.

What activities did Jesus practice? Such things as solitude and silence, prayer, simple and sacrificial living, intense study and meditation upon God's Word and God's ways, and service to others. Some of these will be even more necessary to us than they were to him, because of our greater or different need. But in a balanced life of such activities, we will be constantly enlivened by "The Kingdom Not of This World" - the Kingdom of Truth as seen in John 18:36-37. (*The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Pete and Ruth Mitchell are church planters in France with Mission to the World (MTW) and in collaboration with the Eglise Réformée Évangélique de France (French Reformed Evangelical Church). Pete's role is that of team leader. The Mitchells are living in Toulouse planting a new church in Tournefeuille. The church has been meeting in a new building since early July. Pray today for the Mitchells who are on home assignment for the next year and for the Gildards, their Toulouse teammates, who are having administrative problems during a season of spiritual warfare. Pray that God will give them victory.

Keymedia uses television, radio, the Internet and printed literature as well as local missionaries, in their Arabic and Muslim target countries, for the key purpose of planting churches and discipling local believers to take the gospel to their nation's people. Pray today for the staff of Keymedia that God will protect them and give them the strength they need to accomplish His purpose.

Closing Prayer: O God, my Heavenly Father, transform me into the beautiful work of art you dreamt me to be. Give me the courage and the strength to settle for nothing less. Make me more and more like your Son, Jesus. May I live each day continually seized by the power of your great affection. Amen.

Notes:

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15

Opening Prayer: Late have I loved you, O Beauty, so ancient and so new, late have I loved you! And behold, you were within me and I was outside, and there I sought for you, and in my deformity I rushed headlong into the well-formed things that you have made. You were with me, and I was not with you. - *St. Augustine*

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:7-8

Journal: What specific ways are you training yourself each day for the purpose of godliness?

Reflection: So while I write to teach, to add to our knowledge, my ultimate aim is to change our practice radically. This book is a plea for the Christian community to place the disciplines for the spiritual life at the heart of the gospel. When we call men and women to life in Christ Jesus, we are offering them the greatest opportunity of their lives - the opportunity of a vivid companionship with him, in which they will learn to be like him and live as he lived. This is the “transforming friendship” explained by Leslie Weatherhead. *We meet* and *dwell* with Jesus and his Father in the disciplines for the spiritual life.

Our meeting place, the disciplines are part of the good news of new life. We should practice them and then invite others to join us there.

I want us to take the disciplines that seriously. I want to inspire Christianity today to remove the disciplines from the category of historical curiosities and place them at the center of the new life in Christ.

Only when we do, can Christ’s community take its stand at the present point of history. Our local assemblies must become academies of life as it was meant to be. (*The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Lucky and Sonnet Mnisi are South African and serve in Mozambique. Lucky has pastored the Reformed Church in Mucatine and has helped plant other churches in Gaza Province, including Chake. Pray today for the church in Chake, that the believers will continue to thrive and grow in spite of difficulties.

Knoxville Internationals Network (KIN) began in 2010 when a group of believers involved in ministry among internationals in Knoxville gathered to discuss how they could work together to make a difference in our city. As a result, KIN was born and launched a series of community meetings to raise awareness of the needs among internationals and to give ministries, churches, non-profits and other organizations a forum to connect and share information and resources. Pray today for the various ministries in Knoxville for refugees in the areas of education, health, wellness and employment.

Closing Prayer:

I ask you, Lord Jesus,
to develop in me, your lover
an immeasurable urge towards you,
an affection that is unbounded,
longing that is unrestrained,
fervor that throws discretion to the winds!
The more worthwhile our love for you,
 all the more pressing does it become.
Reason cannot hold it in check,
 fear does not make it tremble,
 wise judgment does not temper it.
- *The Fire of Love* by Richard Rolle

Notes:

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 16

Opening Prayer: O God, help our faith in you to take concrete shape and form in our lives this day. May we always walk in such a way that it speaks of you, and our love for you, and reveals your love and your character to everyone we come in contact with. Amen.

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1-3

Journal: How are you *walking* these days? How is your walk with God ordering and determining your walk in the world?

Reflection: Holiness and devotion must now come forth from the closet and the chapel to possess the street and the factory, the schoolroom and boardroom, the scientific laboratory and the governmental office. Instead of a select few making religion their life, with the power and inspiration realized through the spiritual disciplines, all of us can make our daily lives and vocations be “the house of God and the gate of heaven.” The living Christ will make it happen through us as we dwell with him in life appropriately disciplined in the spiritual Kingdom of God.

The Spirit of the Disciplines is nothing but the love of Jesus, with its resolute will to be like him whom we love. (*The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

F & S are working alongside Arab believers toward the goal of seeing churches planted for those who do not have a church. Their focus is to mobilize, resource and train nationals for this purpose. Pray today for the 90 leaders who will finish their training before the end of the year.

Knoxville Area Rescue Mission (KARM) provides emergency shelter and food to homeless men and women and offers recovery for those seeking a way out of drug and alcohol abuse. Pray today for KARM's work with the homeless and all the volunteers that assist with this mission. Pray today for KARM and those in the Knoxville homeless community that they will feed, assist and care for during the winter months.

Closing Prayer: Teach me your way, O Lord, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name. (*Psalm 86:11*)

Notes.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17

The Third Sunday in Advent

Opening Prayer: Forgive me, O God, for all of the muttering and murmuring and grumbling that goes on regularly in my heart and soul. Give me a deep sense of trust in you and a contentment that enables me to be joyful even when circumstances are challenging, annoying, or painful. Amen.

Scripture: Exodus 16:1-21

Journal: Where are you grumbling in your life these days? What is its source? What is at the core of it?

Reflection: *And Moses said, "When the Lord gives you in the evening meat to eat and in the morning bread to the full, because the Lord has heard your grumbling that you grumble against him - what are we? Your grumbling is not against us but against the Lord."* (Exodus 16:8)

Hello, my name is Jim and I am a *grumbler*. It is sad to admit, but it is true. I grumble a lot. I murmur under my breath (and even out loud at times) and complain in my heart pretty regularly about what is going on with the people and the circumstances around me. It is not a pretty sight and is definitely not something I am proud of. Yet, when I read this passage in Exodus 16 my disgust with the incessant nature of my complaint and criticism was taken to a whole different level. For this scripture reveals the fact that when I grumble, ultimately my grumbling is not against those around me, but against God.

What exactly is grumbling anyway, and where does it come from? The definition of the word grumble is to murmur or mutter in discontent; to complain sullenly. The Hebrew word is *luwn*, which means to *be obstinate*. It conveys the idea of *an attitude of complaint that one dwells and persists (or even abides) in*. Grumbling, therefore, is not just an isolated incident, it is a spirit and an attitude that cause a certain way of being. It is one part pride and one part discontent, with a heavy dose of selfishness sprinkled in. Grumbling occurs at the odd intersection of arrogance and insecurity. It criticizes and tears down in an effort to convince ourselves that if we were in charge things would be much different, much better. At its core, grumbling involves a heart of distrust. Grumbling is a subtle, and not so subtle, way of saying to God, "I don't trust you, I trust me." Therefore, it is toxic to the soul. Grumbling dries up the life of the Spirit within us, producing dark sadness, gloom, grumpiness, and discontent in our souls; the total opposite of the way God created us to live. And unfortunately it is a difficult addiction to break.

That is why we must turn to God regularly in prayer (see Psalm 32), acknowledge the state of our hearts, admit the ways we have fallen short of his ideal, and ask him to forgive us and restore a right spirit within us. Only God can detox our souls from the spirit of grumbling that has taken up residence deep within us. Only God can uproot this spirit of complaint and criticism and discontent, and fill us with the Spirit of joy and gladness and gratitude instead. Then we, like King David, can pray, "Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" (Psalm 32:11) For the Lord our God has been so very good to us.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

H and L serve in Asia by providing strategic leadership for colleagues serving in several major urban centers in Asia. Their role involves encouraging and coaching these co-workers in their ministries, as well as networking with others to make sure they have the resources and training that they need for their respective ministries. Pray today for H and L as they consider their next area of service after handing over their previous leadership positions to another couple.

Knox County CAC is a public agency serving the citizens of Knoxville and Knox County. Cedar Springs is partnering with CAC Homeward Bound Emergency Transitional Housing Project (ETH). The program helps specific groups find housing: (1) Families with children that cannot find shelter space, (2) Seniors that cannot get into shelter or who are too frail for existing shelter, (3) Individuals with an already established housing plan. Pray today for the staff of CAC as they seek to find housing for these individuals.

Closing Prayer: Lord, forgive me for my grumbling spirit. I acknowledge it to you, confess it, and ask for your forgiveness and your cleansing. I grumble a lot and I am sorry for that. Please forgive me. Replace my grumbling with your Spirit of joy and gladness and gratitude. Amen.

Notes.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 18

Opening Prayer: Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long. (*Psalm 25:4-5*)

Scripture: Proverbs 3:5-6

Journal: How, or in what circumstances, are you trying to discern God voice these days? How will you know when he has answered?

Reflection: How are we to know, or find out, what the Will of God is? I do not think that any general answer can be given to this. In clear moral or political issues, we must surely judge and act by the great truths and demands of Christianity; and if we have the pluck to do this, then, as we act, more and more we shall perceive the direction of the Will. That choice, cause, or action, which is least tainted by self-interest, which makes for the increase of happiness - health - beauty - peace - cleanses and harmonizes life, must always be in accordance with the Will of the Spirit which is drawing life towards ultimate perfection. The difficulty comes when there is a conflict of loyalties, or a choice between two apparent goods. At such points many people feel unaware of any guidance, unable to discern or understand the signals of God; not because the signals are not given, but because the mind is too troubled, clouded and hurried to receive them. "He who is in a hurry," said St. Vincent de Paul, "delays the things of God." But when those who are at least attempting to live the life of the Spirit, and have consequently become more or less sensitive to its movements to have no clear light, they will often become aware, if they will wait in quietness, of a subtle yet insistent pressure in favor of the path which they should take. The early Friends were accustomed to trust implicitly in indications of this kind, and were usually justified. When there is no such pressure, then our conduct should be decided by charity and common sense; qualities which are given to us by God in order that they may be used. (*The Spiritual Life* by Evelyn Underhill)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Paul and Dori Pittman currently serve as area directors for United World Mission's Latin America region. Paul is also project coordinator of UWM's Cuba Partnership Project. Pray today for the Pittmans during their current home stay in the U.S. as they travel and visit colleges. Pray also for Yu and Kati, Cubans who are planning to go to West Africa as missionaries soon. Pray for the paperwork that will enable them to obtain visas to enter the West African country and for permission to leave Cuba.

Knoxville Christian Arts Ministries (KnoxCAM) is an outreach ministry directed by Dr. Jill Lagerberg. It uses the talents of singers, instrumentalists, dancers and handbell ringers. They minister primarily to prisons and the inner city. They perform up to 10 concerts each year, telling stories of God's unfailing mercy and providence through fully integrated music dramas. Pray today for KnoxCAM that God will prepare the hearts of the men and women who will watch the gospel story told by these performers during this performing season.

Closing Prayer: You, O Lord, will make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. (*Psalm 16:11*)

Notes.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19

Opening Prayer: Confirm me, Lord, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and give me grace to be strong inwardly in soul and to cast out from it all unprofitable business of the world and of the flesh, that it may not be led by unstable desires of earthly things. . . .

Therefore, O Lord, give me true heavenly wisdom, that I may learn to seek you and to find you, and above all things to love you, and to understand and know all other things as they are, after the direction of your wisdom, and not otherwise. - *Thomas à Kempis*

Scripture: Psalm 16:1-11

Journal: What is the state of your soul these days? What is affecting it most? How will you seek God in that?

Reflection: Oh to have *the grace to be strong inwardly in my soul*, and to be led not by *the unstable desires of my flesh*; what a joy that would be. Instead, it is my constant battle. In fact, the older I get, the more I realize what a mess I really am. In my younger days I had a much higher opinion of myself. Funny how time has a tendency to reveal the truth about things. With age comes wisdom (not that I have much of that, wisdom I mean). Wisdom to see things as they are, not through the world's eyes but through God's. In my thirties, I had a hard time truly believing the words of the ancient prayer: "*Apart from you I have no good thing.*" (Psalm 16:2). I was full of myself. I thought I had a lot to offer this poor old world. But sitting in my place of prayer this morning, at 57, I have no trouble believing the words of Psalm 16:2 at all. Apart from God I am a total and complete mess. But I think that realization is a really good thing. It is that realization that causes me to recognize my great need for God. It is that realization that leads me to seek him. And seeking him is what this life is all about. Thanks be to God!

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Joe and Cindy Platillero proclaim the transforming presence of Jesus Christ through Biblical teaching and practical training to all who come through their doors. Their main ministry is through the Torchbearer Center where they have camps, conferences, and a small Bible School during the winter. Pray today for Spanish youth to truly seek Christ with their lives which feels impossible in this aggressively secular society.

Knoxville Inner City Kids Outreach (KICKO) is a para-church ministry with a mission to "Mobilize the Message of Hope" to the at-risk children in our inner-city neighborhoods. This is done through a unique program called Sidewalk SONday School. Large trucks, outfitted to take the church into these communities, allow them to share the gospel with children at multiple locations each week. Pray today for all the families that have been touched during the month's Christmas events throughout our city.

Closing Prayer: O Lord, you know what a mess I am apart from you; please save me from myself. Amen.

Notes:

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 20

Opening Prayer: Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding place, you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. (Psalm 32:6-7)

Scripture: Psalm 32:6-7

Journal: Where do you go in times of trouble? How has God been your hiding place? How does he want to be your hiding place right now? What does that look like?

Reflection: My Lord Jesus, I beseech you, do not be far from me, but come quickly and help me, for vain thoughts have risen in my heart and worldly fears have troubled me sorely. How shall I break them down? How shall I go unhurt without your help?

Truly, this is my hope and my only comfort - to fly to you in every trouble, to trust steadfastly in you, to call inwardly upon you, and to abide patiently your coming and your heavenly consolations which, I trust, will quickly come to me. - *Thomas à Kempis*

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Carlos and Sandy Rios are planting Rivers of Grace Bible Church in the San Andres area of Guadalajara, Mexico. The church is growing and many new families are attending. Pray today for salvation for Jaime, Raquel and Umberto and new contacts from VBS follow-up.

The *Knoxville Leadership Foundation* or KLF focuses on five important components of community life to ensure overall health within the city: family, youth, housing, racial reconciliation, and economic development. Chris Martin is the founder and president. Pray today for all the KnoxWorx job clubs, including the one that meets at CSPC on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month from 6:30-8:00 p.m.

Closing Prayer: Every one of us needs to pray; when all hell breaks loose and the dam bursts we'll be on high ground, untouched. God's my island hideaway, keeps danger far from the shore, throws garlands of hosannas around my neck. (Psalm 32:6-7, *The Message*)

Notes.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21

Opening Prayer: Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live. (*Isaiah 55:2-3*)

Scripture: Isaiah 55:2-3

Journal: What voices are loudest within you these days? Do they give life to your soul or deplete your soul? How will you *listen* and *hear* that *your soul may live*?

Reflection: I am full of voices. So full in fact that it is often hard to discern one voice from another. The voices of my anxieties, insecurities, and fears are loud and demand constant attention. And to be honest, when I listen to them they completely drain and deplete my soul.

God's voice, on the other hand, is quiet and soft and nonintrusive. It, by design, can only be heard when my soul is still and silent and at rest. Which can make hearing it a bit of a challenge. But when I am finally at a place, and in a space, where I can come to stillness and hear his voice, it has the direct opposite effect on my soul. God's voice produces life within me, and peace. It nourishes and nurtures, it guides and directs, it creates joy and delight.

My challenge, then, is to *listen, listen to him* and not allow the more obvious voices to overwhelm and control me. My job is to *give ear, come to him, and hear*. It is a process that will not just happen on its own. It will not just fall on my head. It means that I must be intentional. I must make time and space to quiet all of the voices that negate life, and to listen the still, soft voice of God that nourishes and creates it. The only question is: "How will I do that today?"

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Chris and Donna Roberts have been living in Müllheim, Germany for almost a year working with Young Life's German-speaking ministries. Chris is an Area Developer for Young Life's new service learning initiative in which he will help develop and implement a curriculum for service learning that uses Young Life methodology to reach German-speaking teenagers. Pray today for a project this month to provide a meal at a day home for the homeless.

Cedar Springs adopted *Lonsdale Elementary* in 2003. Lonsdale, with more than 400 students PreK through 5th grade, only serves the Lonsdale area. Over the years, the racial make-up of the school, whose students are 100% free lunch qualified, has changed to primarily Hispanic and African-American children. Pray today for all the children that attend Lonsdale Elementary, their families, and their teachers as they enter the holiday break.

Closing Prayer: Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them. Give me the spirit of the boy Samuel when he said to Thee, "Speak, for thy servant heareth." Let me hear Thee speaking in my heart. Let me get used to the sound of Thy voice, that its tones may be familiar when the sounds of earth die away and the only sound will be the music of Thy speaking voice. Amen. (*The Pursuit of God* by A. W. Tozer)

Notes.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 22

Opening Prayer:

Dear Potter,
The lump of clay that I am
keeps crying for some form
day by day
I yearn for you to mold me.

This is a trust-song, Lord
I am in your hands like clay
I am ready to be transformed:

I expect
to be molded
I expect
to be beautiful
I expect
to be loved.

And if by chance
someone should drop me
as your apprentices sometimes do,

I expect
to be hurt.

I'm just trying to say
I have surrendered
to your dream for me
I am in your hands
like clay.
- *Seasons of Your Heart* by Macrina Wiederkehr

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:6-7

Journal: How aware are you of the treasure that lies within you? How does that humble you? How does it make you grateful?

Reflection: The older I get, the more appropriate the words “treasure in jars of clay” have become, and I don’t just mean physically. Oh sure, my body is indeed getting older and “wasting away” little by little, but what I am talking about is more on the inside. Seeing the all-surpassing beauty of this priceless treasure sheds light on everything that is around it, and shows it all for what it really is. I am amazed at how much angst and anxiety and fear and insecurity still dwells in my heart. I thought by now I would have been past all of that. But it seems that the older I get the more pronounced it has become, or the more noticeable, it is hard to say which.

Either way, it ends me up in the same place - both humble and grateful. Humble at what a flawed and imperfect container I am, and grateful that God would somehow see fit to place himself within me. As Evelyn Underhill once put it, I am “a created dwelling place or sanctuary of the uncreated and invisible Divine Life.” Simply amazing.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

M is living in Asia working with an unreached people group. She is trusting that God will open doors for the gospel and empower local brothers and sisters to make disciples among them. Pray today for their team as they consider how to better find and equip a team of local people who have the same heart and vision, and are considering platforms that would be helpful in this matter.

The [Love Kitchen](#) serves Knoxville's homeless, helpless, hopeless, hungry, and homebound by providing food and clothing. Many CSPC members volunteer there every week preparing and distributing meals. Pray today for all the people who will receive meals from The Love Kitchen this week that they may know the love of God for them because of this ministry.

Closing Prayer: Thank you, O God, that you have deposited the treasure of yourself in this old, broken jar of clay.

Notes.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for showing us the heart of the Father. Thank you for making a way for us to rejoin the intimacy of the Trinity. Truly, in you we have indeed received grace upon grace. Thank you. Amen.

Scripture: John 1:16-18

Journal: How have you received grace upon grace from Jesus these days? What is the life he is inviting you into? What does he show you about the heart of God?

Reflection: *No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

What extraordinary words! We were born out of the love, joy, and laughter of the Trinity. And through Jesus we get a little peek into the depth of love and intimacy that exists in the heart of the Godhead. And we, of all things, are invited to join in that Dance of endless delight. It is what we were created for. It is the deepest longing of our hearts. It seems too good to be true - grace upon grace upon grace upon grace. What we see of God through the eyes (and the life) of his Son should change everything about us. It should capture our hearts with such love that everything in our hearts and souls should be seized by the power of his great affection. Thanks be to God!

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Mostafa and Mona Sharkawy serve among Arab Muslims in the U.K. Their goals are to see Arabic churches arise from Muslim background believers, to see new generations of leaders from Muslim believers, and to teach and prepare them for future ministry. Pray today for the growing ministry inside the Immigration Removal Centre as they anticipate more refugees arriving to the United Kingdom. Pray also for the follow-up ministry that Mona is doing with the Syrian refugee women in England.

Mekong Ministries' vision is to see churches among every Mekong People group that are spiritually healthy and glorifying God, reaching beyond themselves and planting churches in nearby unreached villages and unreached peoples. They seek to facilitate indigenous and Biblical church planting movements among unreached peoples of the Mekong Region. Pray today for new team members to be filled with new insight and understanding and passion in sharing with TL people.

Closing Prayer: To the one who is three; to the three who are one. I know of only one way to make sense of my senseless life: disappear into the love flowing from your words. Your story tells me all that needs to be said, fills all that needs to be filled, restores all that has fallen apart, and heals all that has been infected with selfishness and greed. The world is confusing and even though my questions pester me, I see that everything will make final, perfect sense, but only when I look into the laughing, illuminating light of your eyes. Mystery. (*A Heart Exposed* by Steven James)

Notes.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Opening Prayer: O God, help me avoid pandering to accolades and applause, and willingly disappear into you instead. (*A Heart Exposed* by Steven James)

Scripture: John 3:29-30

Journal: What does decreasing look like for you these days? How are you trying to increase?

Reflection: *The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must increase and I must decrease. - John 3:29-30*

There is just no way around it. As much as I might like to increase, life with God is about me decreasing. Just ask John the Baptist, he had it all in perspective. Although I'm sure it was hard, even for him, to keep it that way. The rule of the Kingdom is simple: I *must* decrease. It is not an option, it is a *must*. Otherwise I will just be in his way.

My desire for attention *must* decrease, that I might cast all the attention on him. My desire to be great *must* decrease, that I might make him great. My desire for affirmation and acclaim *must* decrease, that he might be affirmed and lifted up above all. My desire to have impact *must* decrease, that he might actually have eternal impact. He is the one who is essential here, not me.

You see, the bride does not belong to me (any more than she belonged to John), she belongs to Jesus. He is her groom. He is her lover. Her desire *must* be for Him, not for me. I am just the one waiting and watching and listening for him to come, so that I might help join their hands in an eternal embrace of love. And then I *must* step aside.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

E is part of a team that has translated the New Testament for a large South Asian language group. Beyond this goal of translating the New Testament is the larger goal of seeing the scriptures systematically read and studied by individuals and groups. Pray today for E and for discernment, strength and boldness for local brothers and sisters in both of the countries where E works who are facing a movement to stop Christian activity.

Since 1996, the [Mission of Hope](#) has ministered to the people of various counties in Kentucky and Tennessee from which 80% of the residents no longer have jobs in the coal mining industry. From their first campaign helping 150 children in 1996, they helped over 18,000 children and their families this past Christmas season with food, hygiene, new clothing and new toys. Pray today for this ministry's work during this holiday season.

Closing Prayer: Forgive me, O God, when I get this backwards. Help me to work to make you great, not myself. Teach me what it means that I must decrease, for it is so against my nature. Amen.

Notes.

CHRISTMAS DAY

Opening Prayer: Father, you sent your Word to bring us truth and your Spirit to make us holy. Through them we come to know the mystery of your life. Help us to worship you, one God in three persons, you reveal yourself in the depths of our being, by proclaiming and living our faith in you. Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God for ever and ever. Amen. (*The Liturgy of the Hours*)

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:7-16

Journal: What are you doing to nurture your life with God these days? How do these verses encourage or speak to that? What is your plan for your spiritual growth going forward?

Reflection: You do not have to do these things; not at all. God does not, I regret to report, give a hoot. You do not have to do these things - unless you want to know God. They work on you, not on him.

You do not have to sit outside in the dark. If, however, you want to look at the stars, you will find that darkness is necessary. But the stars neither require nor demand it. (*Teaching a Stone to Talk* by Annie Dillard)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Manuel and Annabella Valverde are involved in church planting and leadership training in Guatemala. Manuel started the Francisco Lacueva Theological Seminary (STFL) in 2012 and they now have 14 students. Pray today an upcoming event in February where Manuel will be leading the ACTS seminar in Cuba.

The New Anglican Missionary Society or NAMS Network is a global and dispersed community of men and women who have come together to do an apostolic work under an apostolic rule. As missionary servants of the gospel, they carry in their hearts the desire to see the gospel of Jesus Christ reach to the ends of the earth, giving everyone the opportunity to respond to the love of God in Christ Jesus. Pray today for their work in Southeast Asia.

Closing Prayer: Abba, this is Your day. I want to be at Your disposal. I have no idea what these 24 hours will contain. But before I begin, I want You to know, that from this moment on, throughout this day, I am Yours. Help me to be a branch that remains in the Vine, to lean on You, to draw strength from You, and to have You fill my mind and my thoughts. Take control of my senses so that I am literally filled with Your presence and power and dynamic. I want to be Your tool, Your vessel today. I can't make it happen. Without You I can accomplish nothing. And so, I'm saying, Abba, fill me with Your Holy Spirit today. - *Fil Anderson*

Notes:

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 26

Opening Prayer: Lord Jesus, you often used children to teach us truths about life and leadership. Help us to know what it means to *receive the little children*. Help us to fully understand how we must *become like little children* in order to be more fully like you. Help us to stop trying so hard to become, and aspire to become least instead. Make us more like you. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 9:46-48

Journal: How are you trying to be awesome these days? For whom? What would it look like to shift toward making yourself least? How will you do that today?

Reflection: I spend way too much time and energy trying to be awesome, when what Jesus really wants from me is to make myself *least*. That is because he knows that, as odd as it sounds, becoming least is the pathway to life and freedom. Becoming least is a beautiful thing because it sets us free from the need to be awesome. When we finally stop trying so hard to become great, we can finally become all that God desires us to be, all that he created us to be. There is no pressure to be anything other than our beautiful, God-breathed selves. And, thus, there is the freedom to stop taking up all of the space.

Good leaders know this all too well. The best leaders never take up all of the space, they actually make space for God, and then for others, in a way brings about life and love and genuine community. True leadership - which is exactly what Jesus was trying to teach his disciples - is about equipping, empowering, and enabling, not doing it all ourselves. I call those around us to become the very best version of themselves.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Vitaly and Oksana Voinov live in Moscow, Russia. Vitaly is working with the Institute for Bible Translation (IBT) in Russia/CIS as IBT's director. IBT has been serving the non-Slavic peoples of the former Soviet Union for four decades by translating the Holy Scriptures - Bibles, New Testaments, individual Bible books, and illustrated Children's Bibles. Pray today for Vitaly and his family.

Navigators Collegiate ministry at UT Knoxville has this mission: "To advance the gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom into the nations through spiritual generations of laborers living and discipling among the lost." Pray today for the leaders of this ministry and the students as they enjoy the semester break and begin planning for the new year.

Closing Prayer: Give me the courage today, Lord Jesus, to make myself least, that you would be made great. Amen.

Notes:

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 27

Opening Prayer: So many things, Lord Jesus, are vying for my attention and my affection this day. Help me to give all of myself fully to you, today and every day. Amen.

Scripture: Luke 10:38-42

Journal: What are you consumed by these days? What is that producing within you? How can you become consumed with Jesus instead? What does that look like?

Reflection: Martha and Mary were consumed. One was consumed with all that needed to be done, and the other was consumed with the One who had just come into their home. One was filled with anxiety and frustration, and the other was filled with a sense of wonder and awe and delight. One was totally overwhelmed by the demands that were upon her, and the other was overwhelmed with the Person that was before her.

There is a key lesson here: Whatever you are consumed by is what will grow larger and larger within you. It is just a part of being human. Each of us will be full of that which he or she is continually focused on. If I am focused on myself and my circumstances, I will be full of my own anxieties, agendas, and frustrations. But if I am focused on Jesus, I will be full of peace and joy and love. Martha was consumed with worry, and Mary was consumed with Jesus. Which one would you prefer?

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Andy and Bev Warren serve with an MTW team that is involved in HIV/AIDS work and church planting through the Ethiopia Aids Care and Treatment (ACT) Project. The project targets slum communities in Addis Ababa which contain the neediest people in the community - large percentages of women with small children. In recent years, the project has served more than 500 AIDS-affected families, reaching more than 1,200 people. In the last few months, the government of Ethiopia has declared a state of emergency because of increasing protests. Pray today for a new family sponsorship program, Family to Family. It is a way for a family in the U.S. to connect with one of their project families.

The focus of Navigators International at UT Knoxville is the over 1,000 international students at the University of Tennessee who come from 100+ nations. Spouses and family networks back home multiply the potential for the gospel to spread. Navigator's mission is to advance the gospel of Jesus and His Kingdom to the nations through spiritual generations of laborers living and discipling among the lost. Pray today for the leaders of this ministry and for the international students that are reaching that they may enjoy their semester break and prepare for the new year.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to sit at your feet this day and listen to what you have to say. Then let that determine what I will do, and how I will do it. I want to be consumed with you, not consumed with myself. Help me to do just that. Amen.

Notes:

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 28

Opening Prayer: I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. (*Psalm 16:8*)

Scripture: John 15:5-9

Journal: How aware of God are you throughout your day? What does it mean to abide in him? How do you stay in constant contact with him?

Reflection: All true prayer somehow confesses our absolute dependence on the Lord of life and death. It is, therefore, a deep and vital contact with Him Whom we know not only as Lord but as Father. It is when we pray truly that we really are. Our being is brought to a high perfection by this, which is one of its most perfect activities. When we cease to pray, we tend to fall back into nothingness. True, we continue to exist. But since the main reason for our existence is the knowledge and love of God, when our conscious contact with Him is severed we sleep or we die. Of course, we cannot always, or even often, remain clearly conscious of Him. Spiritual wakefulness demands only the habitual awareness of Him which surrounds all our actions in a spiritual atmosphere without formally striking our attention except at certain moments of keener perception. But if God leaves us so completely that we are no longer disposed to think of Him with love, then we are spiritually dead. (*No Man Is an Island* by Thomas Merton)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Kenton and Ariana Wood serve in Guadalajara, Mexico as church planters. Pray today for Kenton who oversees a mother church that has six services on Sunday. Pray also for the Purépecha Indians in the nearby state of Michoacan that they may be reached with the gospel.

CSPC has planted a church in the Bearden area of Knoxville. *New Life Gathering* is led by former CSPC Associate Pastor Scott Jackson. They meet on Sundays at 10:30 a.m. at 6800 Baum Drive. Pray today for Scott and other church leaders as they seek to serve those in Knoxville who might not be drawn to a traditional church setting. Their mission statement is "We exist to build a family of passionate followers of Jesus who make a difference through loving, serving, and creating new opportunities for people from all walks of life to belong in the kingdom of God."

Closing Prayer: Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. (*Psalm 84:4*)

Notes.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 29

Opening Prayer: How lovely is your dwelling place, Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. Even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may have her young - a place near your altar, Lord Almighty, my King and my God. Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you. (*Psalm 84:1-4*)

Scripture: Psalm 84:1-12

Journal: What is occupying most of your inner space these days? What is the effect on your soul? What would it look like to allow God to occupy that space?

Reflection: Exterior retirement is not sufficient to engage and satisfy a heart which would really withdraw itself from creatures to be occupied on itself alone, but interior retirement is likewise necessary, which is a spirit of recollection and prayer. A soul which is separated from all amusements of the senses seeks and finds in God that pure satisfaction which it can never meet within creatures.

A respectful and frequent remembrance of the presence of God occupies the mind, and an ardent desire of pleasing Him and becoming worthy of His love engages the heart. It is absorbed in Him alone. All things else dwindle into nothing. It buries itself in its dear solitude and dies to itself and all things in God. It breathes only His love. It forgets all but to remember only Him. Penetrated with grief for its infidelities it mourns incessantly in His presence. It sighs continually for the pleasure of seeing and possessing Him. It nourishes itself with reading good books and with the exercise of prayer. It is never tired of treating with God on the affairs of salvation. At least it humbly supports the irksomeness it may experience and with a view of honoring His sovereign dominion by the complete destruction of sin itself, it renounces all desire of finding any other satisfaction than that of pleasing Him. (*The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas A. Kempis)

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Eric and Beth Yodis are facilitating church planting in eastern Ukraine. Eric and Beth returned to the Ukraine last year to help with church planting in Kiev. Pray today for winter and holiday outreaches coming up in December and January throughout Ukraine.

Cedar Springs supports *Old North Abbey*, an Anglican church plant in North Knoxville that serves its community through various efforts, including Abbey Fields, a neighborhood farm. Pray today for this congregation as they serve and love their neighbors.

Closing Prayer: Dwell in His house, O my soul, find your strength in Him. Set your heart on pilgrimage and trust in him at all times. For this is life.

Notes:

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 30

Opening Prayer: Lord God, help us to trust you, whatever season we find ourselves in. Amen.

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Journal: What is your season of life these days? What is beautiful in your life right now? What is he making beautiful? What is hard? How is He making the hard into the beautiful?

Reflection: *He has made everything beautiful in its time. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)* I don't know about you, but I have a difficult time just letting things be beautiful. It seems like I am always trying to analyze, or explain, or turn something into a message (or a blog post), rather than simply enjoying the beauty of it. If, indeed, God *has made everything beautiful in its own time*, why not just go with it? Why not take what he has said for what it is, and simply embrace and enjoy the beauty of the thing (or person, or season, or event) that is before (or within) us? Let it be beautiful. Embrace the beauty. Enjoy the beauty. Or wait patiently for the beauty he is making. Let it wash over you and transform you - that's what beauty does. That's who God is.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

J & F live and work in one of the poorest and most heavily populated states in a country in Asia. They are seeking to make a difference in this state in both physical and spiritual realms. They have been operating a micro-finance business that is creating self-sustaining means of support for churches and church plants as well as continuing to provide funds for the installation of hand pumps to provide clean water to needy areas of the state. Pray today for their return back to the mission field from Home Assignment to go smoothly.

PALM (Preparing Arab-World Leaders for Ministry) is Arab World Media's discipleship and theological training ministry. It provides high quality leadership and discipleship training materials in Arabic, Kabyle and French. It is an excellent way to meet the need for training in leadership and ministry among Muslim background believers throughout North Africa, Middle East and Arabian Peninsula. Pray today for the fighting in the Middle East, that it will bring before God the people, who are either fleeing for their lives, or feel trapped and helpless. Ask for the Father's will to be done, and for His angels to hover over the region, protecting the innocent.

Closing Prayer: Lord God, do a beautiful work in and through us this day, for you make everything beautiful in its time. Make us beautiful. Amen.

Notes:

NEW YEAR'S EVE

Opening Prayer: O God, my Father, I have no words, no words by which I dare express the things that stir within me. I lay bare myself, my world, before you in quietness. Brood over my spirit with your great tenderness and understanding and judgment, so that I find, in some strange way, strength for my weakness, health for my illness, guidance for my journey. This is the stirring of my heart, O God, my Father. Amen. - *Howard Thurman*

Scripture: Revelation 3:20-22

Journal: How is God stirring you these days? How is he knocking? What does it look like to open the door and let him in to that part of your life or heart? What is he saying to you today?

Reflection: The presence of God is never intrusive. He will not break the door down and bust into your life; that is not his way. Instead, he will stand, knocking and calling. He will wait for us to hear his voice and to open the door. Thus, there are two parts to this equation, the hearing and the opening. Both are a necessary. Once we hear and open, then, and only then, will he come in, draw up a chair, and invite us to taste and see that he is good.

Prayer for the church, for others, for myself

Isik Abila hosts a satellite TV program called "Light for the Heart" on the Kanal Hayat Turkish-language channel. She also hosts a live call-in program that is simulcast on the Turkish and Farsi channels throughout the Middle East and Europe. These TV programs deliver the message of love, healing, and freedom through Christ Jesus, reflecting on Isik's own life experience. Pray today for her plans to start dubbing TV programs into the Indonesian language due to the great demand and interest from Indonesian seekers. As the largest Muslim-populated country in the world, the opportunity to share the gospel is unprecedented.

The Philadelphians Prison Ministry has been ministering in Tennessee prisons for 27+ years. Its purpose is to change the thinking of a prisoner through the power and the knowledge of Jesus Christ. This is done through strong Bible teaching with praise and worship services, weekly in-prison group meetings, the HELP program, and a transitional housing program, the HELP House, in Knoxville. Christian ministry counseling is given to inmate's loved ones, the "silent victims" of crime. Pray today for the volunteers and the inmates that are being reached by this ministry.

Closing Prayer: Come in, Lord Jesus. I hear your voice and I open the door. Come, be with me, dine with me, and speak to me. Give me the life and the intimacy my soul most deeply longs for. Amen.

Notes.

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