

# AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

*Born is the*



**KING**

*of Israel*

## Introduction

*Noel. Noel. Noel. Noel. Born is the king of Israel.*

Christmas would be incomplete without singing. This traditional refrain from The First Noel echoes throughout each Christmas season. Like many well known lyrics, we often sing these words without realizing the depth of their meaning. These lyrics arise from the story of the Bible. Born is the king of Israel encapsulates the story of the Bible in a concise, memorable melody. Behind these familiar words is a story thousands of years in the making in the past, a story the present world participates in as well, and a story that anticipates future fulfillment. The story of the Bible reveals Jesus fulfilled “the hopes and fears of all the years” of the Old Testament. The story of the Bible also continues today “until the son of God appears.” The story of the Bible reveals that Jesus Christ came once, and it also reveals that Jesus Christ will come again.

Advent means “coming.” Each year in preparation for Christmas, the church observes Advent to anticipate celebrating the first coming of Jesus at Christmas and waiting for the second coming of Christ when he returns.

While gift buying, gift wrapping, and gift-giving fill the preparations for Christmas, Advent reminds followers of Jesus that our consumer-focused Christmas culture falls short of what God ultimately did when he sent Jesus into the world. Jesus is God’s greatest gift of love to the world. Like children eagerly waiting to unwrap presents on Christmas, followers of Jesus eagerly wait for the unveiling of Christ to return. We long for Christ to return for our salvation, but more than that, we long for Christ to return to make all things right and all things new.

Advent embodies the experience of the current reality of our dark world. During this year of 2020, defined by a global pandemic, racial tensions, and political division, the season of Advent is essential to provide a biblical framework for us to lament that our world in all its brokenness desperately needs the redemption and reign of Jesus. We long for the day when Christ will return to be king. But in this “present evil age” (Gal 1:4), under the control of Satan, the ruler of this world (John 12:31), followers of Jesus live now with Christ dwelling in their hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17). Jesus has inaugurated his kingdom, but we wait and watch for his return when God puts all things under the feet of Jesus (1 Cor 15:25-27).

This devotional will explore the depths of the story of God seeking to understand the lyric, “Born is the King of Israel.” The story of Jesus cannot be rightly understood apart from the story of Israel recorded in the Old Testament. Each day will include a passage

of scripture to read, along with some brief thoughts to ponder, followed by a prompt from prayer and reflection.

Our prayer for your spiritual growth through this four week Advent devotional is threefold:

- 1) We pray that this Advent season prepares your heart to celebrate Christmas, especially during this unprecedented year that groans for God to make all things new and all things right.
- 2) We pray that during this Advent season the eyes of your heart may be opened to see how Jesus fulfills the Old Testament waiting and longing for the Messiah, the anointed king of Israel and of all creation.
- 3) We pray that Jesus would reign in your heart as you wait for his future return and his forever reign.

In four short weeks we celebrate the first coming of Jesus at Christmas as the newborn King. As we wait for Christmas, we also watch and wait for Christ to return as the eternal King. Behold, Jesus is coming soon (Revelation 22:12)!



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WEEK 1

## Advent Week 1: Hope

*In **hope** [Abraham] believed against **hope**, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

*Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in **hope** of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces **hope**, and **hope** does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.*

Romans 4:18 - 5:5

*For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this **hope** we were saved. Now **hope** that is seen is not **hope**. For who **hopes** for what he sees? But if we **hope** for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

Romans 8:18-25

The season of Advent begins with hope. Hope longs for a promise to be fulfilled. Hope endures despite the delay in the promise coming to fruition. Hope shines brightly like the star that pierced the darkness to mark the birth of Jesus. Hope does not allow barrenness, evil, and even death to have the last word. Hope believes against all hope. Hope trusts that God who *began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Christ Jesus* (Phil 1:6). *Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful* (Heb 10:23). Hope believes in the promises of God. Hope trusts God will fulfill what he promised to do thousands of years ago.

## ***Come Thou Long Expected Jesus***<sup>1</sup>

Sunday, November 29

*Reflect today by reading the lyrics to the hymn and praying the prayer below.*

Come, thou long expected Jesus,  
born to set thy people free;  
from our fears and sins release us,  
let us find our rest in thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,  
hope of all the earth thou art;  
dear desire of every nation,  
joy of every longing heart.

Born thy people to deliver,  
born a child and yet a King,  
born to reign in us forever,  
now thy gracious kingdom bring.

By thine own eternal spirit  
rule in all our hearts alone;  
by thine all sufficient merit,  
raise us to thy glorious throne.

### **First Sunday of Advent Prayer**<sup>2</sup>

Almighty God, give us grace to cast away the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light, now in the time of this mortal life in which your Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious majesty to judge both the living and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

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<sup>1</sup> Written in 1744 by Charles Wesley.

<sup>2</sup> From *The Book of Common Prayer, According to the Use of the Episcopal Church*, 2007.

## Who is this Child in Mary's Womb?

Monday, November 30

By Michael Stambaugh

### ***Scripture Reading: Luke 1:26-38***

Perhaps no other human experience embodies watchful waiting like pregnancy. Waiting seems so long. Being pregnant is exhausting, but each growing day anticipates the unknown day when the waiting culminates in a new baby's birth. During the pregnancy, the parent(s) naturally wonder, "Who will this baby be?" Gender, personality, eye color, and the type of nose are all concealed in the womb, only revealed upon the baby's birth.

Like pregnancy, Advent anticipates a birth, the birth of Jesus. Advent also anticipates the imminent and future return of Jesus. Advent teaches us to wait and to expect. In our waiting, we hope for how things will be while at the same time acknowledging how things presently are. It's in the waiting that growth occurs. Anticipation grows during the waiting.

Unlike most pregnancies, Mary, the mother of Jesus, knew who was growing in her womb. Gabriel revealed to Mary exactly who this embryo conceived by the Holy Spirit would be. What Gabriel revealed about this son growing in Mary's womb connects this child to all the hope of the nation of Israel. Notice what Gabriel says about this child in Mary's womb:

**His name will be Jesus.** God gives the child's name because the child has its origin in God. The name Jesus connects this child to the God of Israel. Jesus means "Yahweh saves." Salvation is growing in Mary's womb.

**He will be called great.** Greatness is an attribute of God. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable (Psalm 145:3). Greatness is developing within Mary's womb.

**He will be called Son of the Most High.** Throughout the Old Testament, the title "Most High God" is the exclusive name of the Lord, emphasizing the majesty and supremacy of the Lord over everything. The Most High God is the father of this child. The son of God is being formed in Mary's womb.

**And the Lord God will give him the throne of David.** This child will fulfill the prophecies about an anointed one, a Messiah, who will come from King David's lineage. The messianic king is reigning even in Mary's womb.

**He will reign over the house of Jacob forever.** The reign of the messiah king extends over all those who are children of the promise to Abraham. Over the

tribes of Israel, the king will rule forever. The promised king is being fulfilled in Mary's womb.

**And of his kingdom, there will be no end.** Eternity is an attribute of God. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations (Psalm 143:13). Eternity is breaking into time within Mary's womb.

For nine months, Mary carries within her the developing Messiah waiting to give birth to God's salvation. Waiting nine months is nothing compared to the waiting of thousands of years as the Israelites waited for the Messiah, the anointed one of God, to sit on David's throne. The King of Israel is coming, but like a pregnant woman, we wait in anticipation. We know who this child will be, but we do not know when he will come.

### **Reflection & Prayer**

Think for a moment about the titles or character traits you typically associate with Jesus and then list out those titles or characteristics. Do you address Jesus as Lord, savior, teacher, or something else? Why do you think you address Jesus like that, and how does your understanding of Jesus line up with what Gabriel declared about Jesus? Take some time to meditate and thank God for who Jesus is. Perhaps thank God for each of the declarations by Gabriel about Jesus. Finally, pray that Jesus would be formed in you (Galatians 4:19) just as Jesus was being formed in Mary's womb.



## **The Return of the King**

Tuesday, December 1

By Michael Stambaugh

### ***Scripture Reading: Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2:5-18***

Kings wear crowns made of gold and adorned with precious jewels. In our present world, kingship is a foreign concept to many of us. Kings and kingdoms wrote history throughout time. However brief or however long, a king reigns over his kingdom, over certain people, over a specific territory. The king establishes his reign through laws and decrees as he enacts justice.

Perhaps as you read Psalm 8, you made a connection to Genesis 1, when God created all things. Psalm 8 poetically explains the creation of humanity. God created humankind in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), and God made them a little lower than the spiritual, heavenly beings (Psalm 8:5). God was mindful of humanity above all the rest of the creation. God placed a crown on men and women, and God destined humanity to rule. God decreed to Adam and Eve, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." God created humanity to be God's representatives, co-regents, to rule and reign over all creation. God crowned us with his attributes of glory and honor (Psalm 8:5).

Unfortunately, the story extends beyond Eden, and Genesis 3 reveals humanity attempts to rule themselves rather than accept God's rule, the creator. Consequently, God banishes them from the garden of Eden. Humanity exits paradise and God's presence and enters a world separated from God full of toil and trouble. Sin increased with each subsequent generation. Yet God still desired to use humanity to enact his reign on the earth. People like Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, even in their greatness, fall short of fulfilling God's perfect representative on earth.

All creation, including humanity, longs to return to Eden. J.R.R. Tolkien, the author of *The Lord of the Rings*, captures this longing in a letter written to his son in 1945, during the end of World War II. Tolkien writes, "...Genesis is separated by we do not know how many sad exiled generations from the Fall, but certainly, there was an Eden on this unhappy earth. We all long for it, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most human, is still soaked with the sense of exile."

Our present world is in exile. The ruler of this world (John 14:30), the prince of the power of the air who is now working in the sons of disobedience (Eph. 2:2), still sows deception just as he did in Eden. In all its toil and trouble, all creation longs for the return of the king, who is crowned with glory and honor.

The writer of the book of Hebrews reveals that Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 8. Unlike the first humans, Jesus, who is entirely God and fully human, embodied humanity's original destiny in his life. Jesus received a crown of glory and honor through a crown of thorns, and Jesus triumphed over the rulers of this world on the cross (Col. 2:15). But, all things are not subject to Jesus yet (Heb. 2:8). The king has yet to return, but his death offers hope now that we too might overcome the evil one. We long for Eden, but more than that, we hope in the return of the king crowned with glory and honor.

### **Reflection & Prayer**

Take some time to think about how you, like Adam and Eve, attempt to rule yourself? God created us to rule and reign, not to rule ourselves but to remain under God, the only true king. In your life, what are the consequences or hardships you've experienced when you lead your life? What areas of your life do you need to surrender to the rule of Jesus? Pray that Jesus, the one crowned with thorns, glory, and honor, might rule your life. To King Jesus alone be glory and dominion forever and ever (1 Peter 4:11).

## Ongoing Promises for All, from a Forever Faithful God

Wednesday, December 2

By Neil Hancock

### ***Scripture Reading: Genesis 12:1-9 and Matthew 1:1***

Eight years ago, as my beautiful bride and I sat talking in the parking lot of a voting precinct in Georgia, we began to pray and ask God to lead us to what He had next for us as a family. We had prayed these types of prayers before, and they usually sounded like this, "God, we want you to lead us to what you have next for us, BUT... we want this, or we want that..."

However, this time was different. THIS TIME, we decided to remove the "BUT" from our prayers. We were saying, "God, we want your will for us NO MATTER WHAT! We trust you, God."

Well, that conversation in that parking lot between God and us opened up the door to blessings and promises we had no idea existed, and quite frankly, we weren't ready for what was next. But ready or not, God led us to load everything our family owned into a storage unit. My wife Stephanie, and our two kids Elyssa and Elijah, who were 8 and 4, all moved into a tiny two-bedroom apartment with my mom. We knew that it would be temporary as we were getting ready to go to the next place God was calling us to. We just didn't know where that was!

Was it scary? YES! Was it uncomfortable? Absolutely! Were there times of doubt? Of course!

But even though there were ups and downs and it felt like so many things were changing all around us, there was one thing that remained true and DID NOT CHANGE...God's promise.

In Genesis 12:1-3, we see that our story of leaving everything behind and leaving for an unknown place that God had yet to reveal was certainly not new or unique to us. God gave that task to Abram. In this passage of scripture, often referred to as "the Abrahamic covenant," the stage is set for the promises and ceremonies that would follow. They testify to the irrevocable nature of the promises of God.

The passage begins with Abram stepping out in faith as an act of obedience; however, I believe it is evident that the covenant is based on the promises of God. After Abram's act of faithful obedience, God quickly follows with seven promises, including an amazing

promise that all people would be blessed through Abram as well as all the generations that followed him.

Jesus was born in the line of Abraham (first known as Abram before God changed his name). And Jesus was the means by which all God's promises could be fulfilled. Everyone who is in Christ, who accept His free gift of salvation and forgiveness by His grace and choose to follow Him, are children of Abraham and are recipients of the promises of God that were fulfilled in Jesus. Those same promises that God gave Abram are still true for us.

Fast forward to today, and here we are over 2,000 miles away from that little parking lot in Georgia. And the same God that brought us all this way is still with us and leading us every step, every day.

The question is, are we still willing to step out in faith and trust Him NO MATTER WHAT and keep the "BUT" out of our prayers? God's promises are ongoing, and he is forever faithful.

### **Reflection & Prayer**

Think about it, when was the last time that you truly gave God permission to have His will in your life and your family? NO BUTS... Just his will alone and not yours. God's plans are always better than our plans, and he is ALWAYS faithful. The God that has brought you through so many things before is ready and willing to bring you through whatever you may be going through now. Will you trust in his promises? Will you trust in his plan even though it is likely different than your plans? Today, take some time to thank God for his promises and for all the many blessings he has given you. Thank him also for all that he has brought you through. Then, pray and ask God to lead you in whatever he has next for you. Pray that his will would be done and not yours.



## **The Lion of Judah**

December 3

By Michael Stambaugh

### ***Scripture Reading: Genesis 49:1-2, 8-12 and Revelation 5:1-14***

Like a crown of majesty on its head, the mane endows the lion with power and strength. Other animals fear the lion as the apex predator and respect its dominance atop the food chain. Lions conquer their prey. One of the names given to the baby born in Bethlehem was the Lion of Judah.

Many generations of the descendants of Abraham waited for the promise to be fulfilled. Against all hope, they waited for the promise to be born. Abraham's son, Isaac, had two combative sons, Jacob and Esau. Jacob, the younger, ticked his brother out of his birthright and his father's blessing. Jacob, in turn, had twelve sons, who later would become the twelve tribes of Israel.

Judah was the name given to Jacob's fourth son, born to Leah. On his deathbed in Genesis 49, Jacob gathers his twelve sons around him and speaks prophetic blessings over each of his sons. Jacob knew the character of his sons, the good, the bad, and the ugly. Jacob speaks reality over the three oldest sons, Reuben, Levi, and Simeon, who all acted wickedly and forfeited their destiny to lead the family. Judah receives the most extended blessing full of prophetic anticipation of who Judah would become and what role his descendants would fulfill. Jacob describes Judah as a lion. Not only did Jacob describe Judah as a lion, but Jacob also used the language of kingship, "The scepter shall not depart him nor the ruler's staff from between his feet." King David and Jesus are descendants from the line of Judah.

John, the author of Revelation, has a vision regarding the end of time when God is making all things new and right. John glimpses the Lord sitting on the throne in heaven, and in his hand is a scroll. An angel proclaims that no one on earth or in heaven is worthy to unseal the scroll and begin God's redemptive work. John grieves because there is no hope in those words. However, an elder who sits and worships around the throne of God tells John, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." These words in Revelation are no doubt referencing Jesus, who was the fulfillment of Jacob's blessing to his son Judah.

The Lion of the tribe of Judah is a conqueror, but he conquered not through strength. Instead, the metaphor changes from a powerful conquering lion to a meek, quiet lamb.

Jesus did not conquer through the strength that everyone expected. Instead, Jesus received "power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" because he was slain (Revelation 5:12). Jesus conquered through his sacrifice. In Revelation, Jesus is referred to as both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb that was slain. Jesus embodies the conquering nature of a mighty lion, but he also embodies the nature of a gentle, perfect lamb who was slain as a sacrifice to God.

Jesus conquered first in the manger and then through the cross. Jesus displayed his strength through his sacrifice. It's difficult to capture fully who Jesus is through one metaphor, but when John's vision identifies Jesus as the Lion of Judah this connects Jesus to God's promise initiated to Abraham and his descendants. The ruling and conquering Lion of Judah broke into the world as a baby, and he will unexpectedly return to this world. But until he returns, may we be reminded that Jesus, the Lion of Judah, has conquered his enemies, sin and death. Unlike a lion that kills its prey, Jesus laid down his life like a lamb.

### **Reflection & Prayer**

Take some time to meditate on what it means for Jesus to be a conqueror. How does thinking about Jesus as the Lion of Judah change how you view Jesus? Take some time to meditate on Jesus as the Lamb who was slain. How does thinking about Jesus as the Lamb change how you view Jesus. Finally, spend some time in prayer worshiping Jesus, the Lion and the Lamb, who is worthy of our praise.

## **Shoot of Jesse**

December 4

By Cory Engel

### ***Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1-9***

The longing for spring is something that almost everyone starts to feel at some point during a long hard winter. After months of snow and ice, we begin to yearn for the hope of spring, a season that signals the end of darkness and struggle and brings with it the newness of growth and life.

One of the first signs of the changing seasons is new shoots and buds on trees' seemingly dead branches. As the grip of winter loses its grip, what seem to be dead and lifeless branches, suddenly start to reveal a truth that was hidden all winter long. Life is still here. Hope is not lost. A new season is coming.

To the ancient Israelites, the prophet's words in Isaiah 11:1-3, would have stirred the imagery of this very thing.

"A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD— and he will delight in the fear of the LORD."

When Isaiah gave that message, the glory days of Israel were gone, and King David's rule was a distant memory. Their nation was divided by upheaval, and political turmoil was everywhere. Godly and trustworthy leadership was almost impossible to find. The hopelessness of their national and spiritual existence permeated every part of their society.

So in the midst of this hopelessness, into the winter of darkness and despair, God sends the nation a message. He sends His prophet to encourage His people and to impart to them a message of hope. What was his message? It might be winter now, but a new season is coming. A new "shoot" is about to appear on the branch. A King is coming from the same root as the great King David, and through this King, God will change the seasons for the nation and bring forth new signs of life. The promised Messiah, this "Shoot of Jesse," was a promise that the darkness of their present reality was about to give way to a new season of growth, life, and promise.

Now, thousands of years later, our nation isn't far from where the Israelites were back then. In many ways, our nation is in upheaval because of a virus, divided in our politics, and many wonder where the godly, trustworthy leaders are in our world. The darkness and difficulty of this season have caused us to wonder when things will change, and we look for the hope of a new season.

And the good news is this: we also have the hope of the "shoot of Jesse," knowing that our King, Jesus Christ, has not only come, but will also return, and when He does, he will "make all things new (Revelation 21:5)." The darkness of this winter will not last forever. Spring is right around the corner.

### **Reflection & Prayer**

What's the one thing you long for in spring, maybe flowers, green grass, or the sound of singing birds? What are you longing for God to make new in your life? Take some time to seek God in prayer asking him to refresh you. Ask the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will to restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you (1 Peter 5:11).



# God's Promise of an Eternal Kingdom

December 5

By Joe Addy

## ***Scripture Reading: 2 Samuel 7:1-17***

Our lives are full of beautiful mountaintop experiences where we have great perspective and amazing views of rivers, lakes, and the landscape around us. But the opposite is equally true, and we can get stuck in the winding paths of the valley floor with limited vision of what lies ahead. However, on that journey, the path up the mountain becomes clear, and we start the ascent through the thick forest, slowly rising above the valley below.

This journey was no different for David. He found himself on the mountaintop of his life after fighting through the valley of war, betrayal, and despair.

We see in our passage today that God had blessed David in three important ways in the past.

- He took David from shepherding in the pasture to leading in the palace. (v. 8)
- He never left David's side wherever he went (v. 9)
- He eliminated all his enemies (v. 9)

He had gone through a journey in the valley, starting with tending his father's sheep (1 Samuel 17:12-15) and being a lowly shepherd, eventually becoming king of Israel and finding peace and rest from his enemies (2 Samuel 7:1). Because of this rest and blessing from God, David wanted to build a temple for God as a proper place of worship to Him. So, David began to dream and cast a vision for how he could give back to God for the many blessings he found in his life.

As David began to plan out his vision, God had other plans that were far better than David could imagine. He went to God for a building permit to build the temple, yet he leaves with a promise of a Savior (Isaiah 9:6-7). David's vision stopped at building a house, but God's vision was to build an eternal kingdom (Luke 1:31-33), for we know that God's ways are higher than ours and His thoughts than our thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9).

God completely fulfilled his promise to make a house for David in the life of Jesus. And, it will be an eternal house of David, and Jesus will reign on David's throne forever.

God's promise was not just for David but for all of those who believe in the name of Jesus.

As we look forward to this Christmas season when Jesus came as a lowly baby boy in a manger, we must also look to His soon return as a conquering king to set up His reign on the throne of David. It will be a kingdom that will last forever and root out all evil from the world. And we will be heirs of that kingdom (Romans 8:15-17) because of the promise God gave to David nearly 3,000 years ago.

### **Reflection & Prayer:**

God, in his endless grace, blesses us with peace and joy in our journey. And, as David did in 2 Samuel 7, we need to keep dreaming and casting vision in our lives. We need to keep hoping for Christ's soon return to the earth as a conquering king. For we know that it was an eternal promise to David, but ultimately to each one of us as well.

So never give up, never lose hope, and never forget God's promise to not only come as a sweet baby boy wrapped in swaddling clothes but also as a conquering king.

David came to a place of peace and rest in his life because of God's many blessings, and He will do the same for each of us if we continue to believe. So as you pray and reflect upon God's blessings and promises in your life, remember to dream big and let God expand your vision today.