



HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

This Christmas season you'll hear from a variety of people in our Central family. We hope you'll be encouraged as you read and remember how Jesus came for all people. Christmas is that season when many will stop and reflect on the Christ child. We hope you can use this devotional to share with others the joy of the season. To get the most out of this devotional we encourage you to:

1. Gather with your family and grab some cups of hot chocolate. Create an atmosphere of excitement each day as you read, ponder, and pray.
2. Take the time to read each passage that goes with the devotion, then reflect, share, and use the prayer prompt as you talk to God.
3. Share with at least one person a week a takeaway from the devotional. Offer them a devotional and invite them to join you for our very special Christmas Eve service.

DECEMBER 1

INTRODUCTION

Christmas is about so much more than that wondrous nativity scene. We read a hint of that when the angel announced to the shepherds, “I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.” In that birth announcement, the angel anticipated over two thousand years of the joy that would come to mankind through Jesus.

Following Jesus’ birth, the next scene recorded in Luke’s gospel is when Jesus is presented in the temple. There, Simeon took baby Jesus in his arms and praised God, saying “For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.” This dedicated man recognized the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies. The Messiah had come for all people.

This is good news, and the thing about good news is that it must be shared. Joy is contagious. This Christmas season we continue to experience that good news of great joy. Jesus came for all people. This devotional will remind you how Jesus came for the Jew and the Gentile. He came for the down and out as well as the up and out. He came for the religious and the irreligious. He came for you.

May this devotional, our gift to you, add to your joy this season. And we’d love for you to rejoice with us on Christmas Eve during a very special candlelight service. We love you, and may the joy of Christ be ever-present in your life! Merry Christmas!

The Central Family

FOR THOSE IN DARKNESS

“... the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light ...”

Matthew 4:15-16

Many have often wondered why Jesus left for Galilee after the arrest of John the Baptist. However, we know that Jesus was strategic in his time on Earth. Galilee was a major population center by this time, and it was home to many different peoples. This means that the city was full of many different customs and ideas that led to much unrest. On top of these issues, the area was under the rule of the Romans. Jesus is described as the light of the world, and Galilee was a city stuck in darkness that truly needed illumination. Jesus performed many miracles in Galilee to show the people that God was with them.

The land of Galilee is not too different from our country today. Like Galilee, the United States has a blend of many different people groups with distinct cultures. We also live in times of political and economic unrest much like the times of Jesus in Galilee. The modern Christian is very similar to the Jews of Galilee too, living mostly in the ways of the world and not as we are called to do. Though we live in a world of darkness, the mission of Christ remains the same as it was back then. We may not have miracles in the way we think of them from the Bible, but miraculous things are happening all around us. God speaks to us in different ways, and we just don’t realize it. We have to be the light in our world’s current darkness.

Dear God, this Christmas, help us to reflect on the world around us. Keep us from being consumed by living a worldly life. Through us, bring light to the darkness in a world that only Jesus can change. Help us to ...

By Dylan Parris

DECEMBER 2

FOR CAPTIVES

“He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives.”

Luke 4:17-19

After having spent 40 days in the wilderness, where He was tempted by Satan, Jesus came to the town of Nazareth. Jesus was no stranger here, after all, this was where He grew up. On the sabbath, Jesus could always be found in the synagogue. This particular sabbath was no different except by now word of Jesus had quickly spread throughout the land. Jesus stood up and read from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, claiming to fulfill the prophecy that He had been sent to set the captives free.

As mentioned earlier in Luke chapter 4, Jesus had just returned from the wilderness where He was tempted in three different ways by Satan. These temptations were no different than the temptations we face today. There are countless ways we are tempted by our physical needs, our own ambition, and even in tempting God. Jesus was able to face all of these temptations that seem to hold us captive and yet He walked away blameless. He alone was the only one who could stand in front of the people on that sabbath day and read those prophetic words that He is the one who can set us free from the sin in our lives. He is the only one who can open our spiritually blind eyes and allow us to see our need to be rescued from the chains of sin that hold us captive. He alone was the only worthy and perfect sacrifice that could buy our freedom.

God, this Christmas season, we thank you for sending your Son Jesus and the salvation from the bondage of sin that He has freely given. May we have the courage to share that good news with those you place in our path. Help us to ...

By Randy Field

DECEMBER 3

FOR SINNERS

“I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

Luke 5:31-32

The Pharisees asked Jesus why he was eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners. They were perplexed why Jesus would choose to associate and spend time with tax collectors, who were considered some of the worst of sinners. It only made sense to the Pharisees that Jesus should be among the Jewish leaders and those who were following the law. Regardless of how closely the best of the Pharisees followed and adhered to the letter of the law, they were filled with hypocrisy and sin just as the tax collector Jesus had called to follow him. What the Pharisees failed to recognize or accept is that God's standard is perfection. Even at their best, they were unable to meet the standard of a Holy God. In the comparison game of self-righteousness, it was no contest about whom Jesus should choose. They were the obvious choice. Jesus responded to the Pharisees that those who are well need no physician, only the sick. He did not come to call the righteous, but instead, came to call sinners to repentance. The Pharisees refused to see that Jesus was referring not only to the tax collectors, who they deemed worse than themselves, but also to them. They just could not see their need.

We celebrate Christmas, thankful that Jesus came for the sinner. We tend to rate our sin, and for some it is blatantly obvious to ourselves and others that we are the worst of sinners, while others in comparison seem to be “good.” God's standard is perfection and Jesus was the only one to meet the standard. Jesus came for all sinners.

Lord, I come to you today thankful that you came for sinners, just like me. I pray that you will burden my heart for those you have placed in my life this Christmas season to share this truth. Embolden my heart as I seek to reach ...

By Angel Field

DECEMBER 4

FOR THE HARASSED AND HELPLESS

“...he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”
Matthew 9:35-38

Close your eyes and imagine what it must've been like for Jesus, as he traveled to cities and towns spreading the grand and glorious news of God's Kingdom. So many who heard of His encouraging words gathered to hear His proclamations. Their desire was to be in His presence with the hope of being close enough to touch Him and watch the healing of every disease—conquering sickness and afflictions. It must have been awe-inspiring to see the crowds in mass as He delivered the promises that only God can deliver. Feeling as though the crowds were like lost sheep, Jesus had compassion for them. All of whom were in need of encouragement and guidance. They lived in a time where the kings and their court harassed them and deemed them helpless subjects under their rule. Jesus spoke with the authority of the almighty God, knowing that His words were true and binding. He also knew that the masses whom He referred to as “the harvest” could only be fully reached if they themselves became believers and “workers” for Christ, spreading the glorious word of the one and only God. Today, we are the masses still listening to His words. As believers, we need to spread the Word. Not just be listeners but true disciples for Christ and become “workers” reaping the harvest.

Lord, help us to be forthright and passionate in our beliefs, focusing on discipleship. Guide and provide us with the confidence in our abilities that we, as believers, can follow the paths of your appointed 12 and also become disciple-makers. Help us to...

By Kevin Wyatt

DECEMBER 5

FOR THE WEARY AND BURDENED

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”
Matthew 11:28-30

They were tired and frustrated. The Israelites living in Galilee wanted to obey God but they lived with guilt and frustration from their inability to keep all the Jewish laws, not to mention the 1,500 manmade rules imposed by religious leaders. Some labored and burdened themselves. Some felt the burdens imposed upon them by others. Jesus knew their plight and offered rest that could only be found in Him. His invitation was to all. If they repented, had faith, and followed Him, he would exchange their burdensome yokes for his light and easy one. Jesus applied the familiar illustration of a “yoke,” which was relatable in their agricultural society. Farmers often yoked a stronger ox to a younger or weaker one as a training relationship, where the stronger would bring along the weaker when burdens got heavier, until the weaker learned to lead. Jesus told them how living a life of faith in God is so much easier than striving to be acceptable to Him through their good works. Self-righteous, outward works can never bridge the gap between our sinfulness and God's holiness. His righteousness was traded for our sin by His going to the cross in our place. Jesus came to earth to fulfill the law. Accepting His yoke does not mean burdens disappear, but it allows us to carry the ones we are meant to carry in a disciple relationship with Him. He promises to pull us along if those burdens start to become heavier.

Dear God, this Christmas season let us not exhaust ourselves in trying to create the “perfect” Christmas. Remind us to love people by sharing you more this holy season! We thank you for your yoke of peace and joy. Help us to...

By Amy Griffin

DECEMBER 6

FOR ORDINARY FISHERMEN

“Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matthew 4:18-22

It started off like any other night at sea. Gruff, diligent, hard-working fishermen, covered in the stench of their catch, casting nets, pulling them in, casting them out again, and mending the broken ones while patiently waiting for the next big haul of fish. Their line of work left them ceremonially unclean and unfit to worship in the temple. They were unaware that the Temple had come to visit them instead. Jesus, walking along the Sea of Galilee, called out to these men with a life-changing invitation, “Follow Me.” Without hesitation, they left their livelihood and the only identity they had ever known for a new profession with eternal purpose: fishers of people.

Jesus came for ordinary people and invites them to join Him in His extraordinary mission of reeling people to Him through the truth of the gospel. For these ordinary fishermen, obedience to the One for whom they left their nets was not difficult because they knew the One who was calling them. Wherever we live, work, study, and play, Jesus calls us to the same mission of making disciples. Even in my daily grind as a medical biller and coder, crunching numbers and deciphering procedure codes, this passage reminds me that the most meaningful work lies with sharing the love of God with the ones in my midst. This Christmas, let us draw near to our amazing Savior, the One who meets us ordinary people where we are and extends the invitation to follow Him for a special purpose.

Lord God, thank you for calling ordinary people like us into Your kingdom work. May we recognize Your voice when You call and follow You daily. Help us to ...

By Melissa White

DECEMBER 7

FOR THE ROYAL OFFICIAL

“And he himself believed, and all his household.”

John 4:46-53

His family is counting on him! What can he do? It seems the only option is to make the journey to Cana in Galilee. The last time Jesus was in Cana, He turned water into wine. Will He perform another miracle? At first glimpse, it seems Jesus rebukes the royal official when Jesus says, “Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe.” The “you” in this phrase is plural and includes the crowd listening. It would have challenged the motives and faith of all who were there. The royal official, a father in distress, hears this and is not deterred. He pushes Jesus to go to Capernaum until he receives the response, “Go; your son will live.” The father believed Jesus’ word and went home. Meanwhile, the household awaits the father’s return. A sense of relief came as the boy started to feel better. What just happened? The royal official arrives and connects the sequence of events. Jesus performed a miracle without going to the official's home! In the passage, John emphasizes that not only did the royal official believe the word that Jesus spoke; but also, the household believed the father’s testimony about Jesus. As a result of the Savior, lives were changed.

Jesus came for the royal official and his household. He came to relieve the distress and fulfill the need. Jesus came for all and challenges all to trust His word. He came for all but not all believed. Do you trust His word? Will you share that Jesus came for all?

Dear God, this Christmas season help me to see your sovereign hand at work in my life. May I grow in trusting your word. May I share with others how you came for all. Father, transform my ...

By Jeremy Lynn
Missionary to Ethiopia

DECEMBER 8

FOR THE LEPER

“Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him ...”

Mark 1:40-45

At one time, he was the cuddled baby of his mother. At one time, he was the little man that his daddy hoisted up on his shoulders. Now he was an infected monstrosity shunned by everyone, including his own family, as the Torah had commanded in its Law. The infection had destroyed his flesh. There was no known cure or treatment or restoration. The Law had demanded his separation and isolation from all who had known him or to whom he came into contact. The isolation was smothering to everyone, except Jesus. The Leper had heard of miraculous healings performed by this new Rabbi, so he went looking for Him. When the Leper approached Jesus, he fell to his knees and begged to be cured. All his infected life, he had found no hope in man or the Law to cure him. What neither man nor the Law could do, Jesus did. With godly compassion, Jesus moved TOWARDS the Leper and TOUCHED the man, curing him of this infection and restoring his health.

Like this Leper, we ALL had an incurable disease that separated us from God. Our cure did not come from other men or the Law, but only through faith in this new Rabbi Jesus. We heard from others' testimonies that this Man could cure us, so we sought Him out to be healed, and coming to Him, we also fell to our knees, beseeching Him for our cure.

Dear God, thank You for sending Your Son Jesus. He loved us unclean and made the ultimate sacrifice so that we may be clean. Like the Leper, all we need is faith. During this season, and throughout the year, may we remember to share with others what Christ has done and can do for us through faith in Jesus. Help us to ...

By Jim & Susan Radike

DECEMBER 9

FOR THE PARALYTIC

“And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic,
‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’”

Mark 2:1-12

The man opens his eyes. Rolls them about to take in his surroundings, bathed in the thin gray light of the dawn. Everything seems normal, safe. Another day has begun, another 15 hours of imprisonment on his bed mat. His ears strain to know if anyone is yet out in the street or a rooster crowing. He takes a deep, shuddering breath—as deep as his feeble diaphragm will allow—and exhales slowly. He squeezes his eyes shut and begins to pray. Hours later—he knows it's afternoon because of how the daylight looks through the doorway—he catches the sound of hurrying feet and excited conversation. Is that ... yes, that's Benjamin's voice. And his cousin Uri. They must be coming to visit him! The voices get nearer and then abruptly fall silent. The man's heart beats rapidly. Suddenly, four faces appear in the doorway, blocking the light. They wave and greet him, and then they all rush toward him. They each grab a corner of his mat. He feels weightless for a moment as they lift together, and then they are hurrying toward the doorway, through the doorway, and down the street! Long before the man sees the crowd, he can sense its buzz and hear the distinct voice of Jesus preaching. A tremor of hope shoots through his body. Could this man, this Jesus, provide the answer to his prayers?

No matter who doubts Him, Jesus has all authority. And His gospel doesn't provide only eternal life when we are dead in our sins; it gives power in this life when we are powerless.

Jesus, when we are paralyzed by the weight of our sin and the fear of what we can't do on our own, help us to ...

By Ethan White

DECEMBER 10

FOR THE DEMONIAIC

“Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”

Mark 5:1-20

At one time he was some mother's baby boy. At one time he was some father's little man. Now, he is almost otherworldly, a nightmarish figure. He is possessed by demons. Those demons have driven him toward self-inflicted gashes. They've compelled him to produce blood-curdling screams. They've isolated him naked in caves—in a graveyard. A man whom mothers protect their children from. A demoniac whom everyone whispers about and avoids at all costs. Everyone, except Jesus. After calming the storm, Jesus instructed his disciples to pull their boat up to the Gerasene shoreline. This was not some leisurely beach vacation; they were greeted by the screaming and shouting demoniac charging right toward them. Jesus didn't flinch. Jesus came for him. The man collapsed to the ground. There was no confusion about who Jesus was. Jesus rid the demons from the man. He was back in his right mind. The demons went into the pigs and then jumped off the limestone cliff. The townspeople would have rather had their pigs than have this man restored. Jesus came for the demoniac and He came for all those who are out of sorts. He came for those not in their right mind. He came for those who others overlook, for the devalued. He comes when they are screaming and ranting and raving. He comes when they are naked and alone and ostracized. He comes not to condemn but to restore. He comes to silence the screams and quiet the souls. He comes to clothe with His righteousness. He comes so that we don't have to be alone.

Dear God, this Christmas season help us to see people as You see people. As You preferred the demoniac to pigs, may we prefer people as well. Help us to ...

By Steve Grieme

DECEMBER 11

FOR THE NEWLYWEDS

“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed him.”

John 2:1-11

John. One of the first evangelists. A man who was there to witness the majestic acts in person. No book explains the great deity of God better! And this book gives a firsthand account of Jesus' first recorded miracle. As we read this passage, we see that Jesus worked His first miracle at a wedding, an act of compassion and great love, one that shows God's great generosity and love toward the last vestige of paradise here on earth. The Lord worked His miracles during times of great need, and in this case the bridegroom needed the Lord's blessing, because running out of wine during a wedding feast could have been a legal offense punishable by the law. That need yielded a great blessing to the family and inspired Jesus' disciples to believe that they were in the presence of the true Messiah!! When the wine was failing, Jesus was there to provide hope, and through His love we see how important marriage is to the Lord our God. We will all fall short, our wine will fail, our hope will dwindle. This is part of life, there is no way around it. But the Lord Jesus is there to fill our jars to the brim, to provide that which is required to live full and fruitful lives! Remember this when your marriage or personal relationships run into trouble. Turning to Jesus will fill your cups, mend broken hearts, and transform the sighs and woes of daily life into songs of celebration.

Jesus, you are the greatest champion of the home, and when we put you first, our jars will be filled to the brim and love will overcome the woes of the world!! All praise be to you, O Lord our God, the Great Creator! Help us to ...

By Dale Hoak

DECEMBER 12

FOR THE PHARISEE

“... whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

John 3:1-21

Nicodemus was religious, educated, and an influential leader in Jewish religious circles. I'm sure from the outside, this guy had all the answers. He knew what he believed and knew where he was going when he died. But then a man named Jesus comes along and Nicodemus starts having questions and doubts he's never experienced before. He approaches Jesus in the shadow of darkness to speak to the Light of the world. A gospel conversation comes forth and for this religious man who has been taught his whole life that being born Jewish got him into eternity, being told that he must be born again shattered his world. So much so, he asks almost ignorant questions so that Jesus starts to get annoyed at this teacher of the law! Come on Nicodemus! You should know this, you've studied the law your whole life! How could you miss it?

Unfortunately, there are many people who devote their life to religion or the study of scriptures and still miss it. Why? Because it's not about academics, it's about a relationship. The second half of this passage says, “God so loved the world.” The world has never loved God. God loved us and sent Jesus to die for us even as the world continues to reject him. Yes, Jesus came for the lost and broken, but he also came for those who thought they had it all figured out. We don't have to have all the answers, in fact, we couldn't handle all the answers; we just have to look to Jesus and have that relationship with Him.

Dear Lord, this Christmas season, help us to seek after you. Not trust in ourselves or the things that have been taught by others. But help us to hear your voice and seek after your truth, even if it shatters what we once knew. Help us to ...

By Janna Robertson

DECEMBER 13

FOR THE DIVORCED

“... but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again.”

John 4:5-30

Have you ever thought how you may identify with the Samaritan woman approached by Jesus at the well? She arrived about noon, which was the hottest part of the day. She chose this time to avoid seeing the other women who rejected her. She had developed a bad reputation and was considered an outcast due to her lifestyle. She had been divorced 5 times and was currently living with a man that was not her husband. She may have felt ashamed, filled with guilt, and searching to feel accepted. It seems she may have tried filling her emptiness with a relationship with a man.

Jesus, along with His disciples, was traveling from Judea to Galilee. Jesus chose to go through Samaria to get to Galilee, which wasn't the norm because the Jews looked down on the Samaritans and didn't associate with one another. Upon their arrival in Samaria, the disciples left Jesus alone while they went into town. Jesus, sitting by the well, asked this Samaritan woman for a drink of water. Do you think it was a coincidence that Jesus was there at the exact time as this woman? No, His timing is always right. He crossed barriers to share living water with this woman. This passage is not about His thirst, nor the men in her life, but about Jesus filling a void in her life. He knew her sin but loved her despite her sin. Her life was changed, and she immediately ran to tell other men about this man, Jesus, and all He had done. Just like this woman, He can quench our thirst, fill our emptiness, and change our lives.

Dear Lord, remind us to see the heart of people and love them despite their sin during this Christmas season and always. Help us to ...

By Cyndi Strickland

DECEMBER 14

FOR THE GRIEVING

“Young man, I say to you, arise.”

Luke 7:11-17

Destitute. That would be how one could describe the woman Jesus meets in Luke 7. That was not rare in Jesus' time, as women had lost their honorable standing in society's eyes. The only son of a widow has died; now there's no one to provide for her, which is likely a death sentence for her too. Jesus is passing through and happens upon this funeral procession. Understandably, the widow is weeping and when Jesus sees her, He has compassion for her. She doesn't ask Jesus for anything; there's not even anything to tell us that she even knew who Jesus was, but He shows compassion on her nonetheless. Jesus touches her son's dead body, ignoring the fact that it would cause Him to be unclean, and commands the young man to “arise.” Jesus lifts the widow out of shame and restores her honor, and in the full view of many witnesses Jesus asserted His authority over sin and death.

It is scary sometimes to put ourselves aside and reach down to others to pull them out of the muck they may find themselves in. Jesus showed time after time throughout His ministry on Earth that He is the hope for everyone. The example of this grieving widow doesn't end with grief. How far can we go with Jesus? How much can He take? He can take it all! The praise, yes, but also the grief, the sorrow, the anger, the disappointment. We can go to Him with all of it, and we can reach out to others to help them remember He can handle it all.

Dear God, help us to remember those this Christmas who are grieving. Jesus came for the grieving, so I lift up ...

By Sarah Hoak

DECEMBER 15

FOR THE HEMORRHAGING

“Daughter, your faith has made you well.”

Mark 5:24-34

It was a time of desperation and despair. Ousted by society and suffering for a long time—12 years, to be exact—a woman had no other choice. Life was literally leaving her body each day. No one had been able to help, as physician after physician could not discover a cure. Left to be alone and all her money spent, her situation seemed hopeless. However, despite the anguish and pain, she chose to be relentless and not give up. She chose to have faith, not in another physician, but to believe in the one true Physician, Jesus. She believed Jesus had healing power and could make her well. She had faith that if she could get near Him, things would turn around. She didn't need Him to touch her, but rather if she could only touch Him, just a little piece of Him. With it all on the line, knowing that this was probably her last option, she reached out and touched his garment. Immediately, her constant flow of suffering was stopped. Her hemorrhaging had been healed.

Jesus came for the hemorrhaging. Those who have suffered for so long and whose conditions seem to be without a cure. He has not forgotten those who are troubled with afflictions. Those in the hospitals, rehabilitation facilities, or even at home in a state of desperation and yearning for relief. We should be reminded and believe that Jesus still has healing power. Call upon His great name, and reach out to touch Him.

Dear God, in this season help us to have compassion for people who are hemorrhaging. Just as Your healing power stopped the constant flow of blood for that woman, help us to ...

By Clarence Bailey

DECEMBER 16

FOR THE TAX COLLECTOR

“For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Luke 19:1-20

Benjamin Franklin famously said, “Nothing in life is certain except death and taxes.” Today that still rings true. Taxes don’t exactly invoke happy thoughts for most people. Things were no different in Jesus’ time. Tax collectors would collect the required tax, and often some more for themselves. Tax collectors were seen as corrupt, often lumped in with criminals. The Gospels show Jesus associating with people viewed by society as outcasts and sinners. Thankfully, whether it be the diseased, the unfaithful, the dirty, or even the tax collector, Jesus came to save us all. In Luke 19, we see a story that most Christians are familiar with. Jesus has entered the city of Jericho, where he would interact with Zacchaeus. Anyone who grew up in Sunday school knows that Zacchaeus was a “wee little man,” but Zacchaeus was also a tax collector.

While Zacchaeus climbed his sycamore tree, and would be called down by Jesus, we see in verse 7 the reaction Jesus got for this. “And when they saw it, they all whispered, ‘He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.’” The crowd that witnessed what happened that day saw that Jesus was eating and associating with a corrupt sinner. I thank God every day that Jesus came to this earth, to save sinners like me. How different are we than tax collectors like Zacchaeus? Do we not squander things given to us by God? Can we not be selfish with our possessions or greedy with our time? Just like Zacchaeus, we are sinners in need of a Savior.

Dear God, I pray that this Christmas we see that Your Son was sent for all, not just the pure and highly regarded, but for the unclean sinners as well. Help us to ...

By Cory Rich

DECEMBER 17

FOR THE BLIND

“Recover your sight; your faith has made you well.”

Luke 18:35-43

Being blind is a challenge today but even more so back in ancient times without our modern technology. The blind man in the story could not physically see Jesus, but he knew that Jesus was the Son of David. In this culture, people with defects were cast out from society and were associated with sin and being unclean. Yet the blind man had no choice but to rely on the help of others. He was a beggar and seen as a nobody to people. On the other hand, Jesus passing by saw him as a person fearfully and wonderfully created by God, and He helped the blind man. Jesus also sees and helps you and me today.

Just how Jesus came for the blind man, He came for all of us. Jesus was sent to us to die on the cross for our sins. He came for the broken and beaten people of the world and would suffer our pain so that we could have a restored relationship with God. This redemptive plan was set before the first Christmas and even before creation. The Christmas story shows how God will always prevail.

Dear God, thank you for not overlooking us. Would you make us mindful of the people around us and give us opportunities to be like Jesus to them? Help us to ...

By Christopher Ellis

DECEMBER 18

FOR THE PRODIGAL

“For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”

Luke 15:11-32

A man had two sons, one of which was hard-working and loyal, and the other one enjoyed being the life of the party. This son asked his father for his inheritance, desiring to live independently. However, the son quickly spent all that he had on pointless things and was left with nothing. He took a job feeding pigs and tried to eat their food because he had nothing. Even a person as broken and lonely as the prodigal son is someone whom Jesus loves and died on the cross to save.

This son had wasted all his money on temporary things of no eternal value. No one loved him, no one accepted him—except his father. In the story, the wealthy father is meant to symbolize our Heavenly Father. When the son had spent all of his money, he was surprised when his father received him with open arms. He gave him the best robes and even threw a party for him. No matter what we have done, no matter if people love us, we will always be loved by our Father. Nothing that we do can ever separate us from the love of God. He is waiting for us with His arms open wide. Just let Him catch you. Christ doesn't care about your social status or what job you have, He cares about you, and out of that, we should have a desire to live for God and demonstrate that same love toward others.

Dear God, thank you that you love us so much that you sent your Son to die on the cross for our sins. In the hecticness of the Christmas season, help us to focus our mind's attention and heart's affection on you. Help us to demonstrate that same love toward others...

By Tyler Thompson

DECEMBER 19

FOR THE THIEF

“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Luke 23:32-43

At this time it might have been one of the most excruciating things to go through. They are hanging there on wood, nails in their hands, both hanging next to an innocent man. The only difference between them and him is that they are guilty next to a guiltless man who came for them. They have probably heard about this man, who has done miracles and healed people, and some call him the Son of God. Most people avoid thieves like themselves, often discarded and unwanted, so they steal the things they want or need. It was about time they were caught, and now they were paying for the crimes they had done. Next to a blameless man, Jesus who came for them. Neither of these thieves could deny that Jesus was the Son of God. One of them asked Jesus if he was the Son of God to save them from this suffering while the other knew that Jesus was on the cross for a purpose.

Jesus came for the thieves, so they could stop stealing so He could steal their hearts. Jesus came for those who seem too far gone and can't be saved. He takes away their sins even on their deathbed. Jesus came for the discarded, those who feel displaced. Jesus gives them an eternal home with Him in paradise. Jesus is not for ourselves only but for the people.

Dear Lord, Help us this Christmas season to show you to those who feel too far gone, as you showed them love and kindness while saving them. Help us to...

By Aurora Viveros

DECEMBER 20

FOR THOSE WHO LOST HOPE

“And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”

Luke 24:13-32

How often does your hope waver in God when you are going through a difficult time? During those times of uncertainty, pain, and loss we feel that situation will last forever. This is how the followers of Jesus were feeling days after his crucifixion. The teacher and leader they had been following for the past 3 years was gone and they were alone. They hoped the mission of the Messiah was to deliver them from the harsh rule of Rome. When His physical body was not in the tomb, many began to lose hope they would receive that deliverance. Unknown to them, Jesus came alongside a few followers and reminded them of scripture and prophecies that detail the very events that had just taken place.

Despite the followers feeling hopeless on their journey from Jerusalem, they were restored when they invited Jesus into their home. This passage of scripture reminds us we have the living Word, the living hope, with us because of our belief in Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly, we will encounter loss and pain throughout our lives at some point. These times of suffering should not make us drift further from Christ but much closer. Just as the travelers were reminded through scripture, we are to hold tight to our living hope in Jesus during uncertain times. We are given much more than physical deliverance from our circumstances, but spiritual salvation through Jesus Christ.

Lord, I pray you continue to strengthen our hope in you. Remind us of your endless love and mercy. I pray you are invited into the homes of those who have lost hope and they are restored. Lord, I pray each of us will have an opportunity to share the everlasting hope we have in you with someone during this season. Help us to ...

By Ciara Bailey

DECEMBER 21

FOR GENTILE MAGI

“Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

Matthew 2:1-12

Some say they were magicians. Some say they were astrologers fascinated with stars and nature. Some even say they were soothsayers. However, what we do know is that they were not Jews, but Gentiles. These were wise men traveling from the east, possibly from Persia, having been miraculously led by a star to Jerusalem, looking for the King of the Jews. Their first stop was with King Herod, assuming Christ would be there, where they inquired of him, “Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?” This troubled the king and all of Jerusalem, but none of that deterred the wise men. The chief priests and scribes assured the king that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem. After being summoned from the king they went on their way to Bethlehem. They followed the star until it stopped over the house where Christ was and when they saw Jesus, with great joy they fell down and worshiped Him and gave Him gifts.

Have you ever thought, How could God want me? These men were foreigners, excluded from the covenant of God, alienated, without hope in this world. But God, rich in His mercy, led not the scribes or priests who were near but the outsiders to behold His only Son and worship Him. My friend, you are not alone. Just as God sought out these men, God seeks for you as well. For He is seeking such to worship Him.

Dear Lord, during this Christmas season, give us a heart to seek those who are forgotten, who have no hope that they too can behold Jesus and worship Him also. Help us to ...

By Darrell Taylor

DECEMBER 22
FOR SHEPHERDS

“And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God ...”
Luke 2:8-20

The shepherds in Luke were not men respected or admired by society. They were considered unclean because of the work they did. The sheep were dirty, smelly, and surrounded by insects. Shepherds watched the sheep all day, taking care that none of the sheep strayed, and if one wandered away from the rest, he would seek painstakingly until he found it and brought it back. If the lost sheep wasn't found, he might feel like a failure. At night he was responsible for bringing the flock home, counting each one to ensure they were all accounted for.

Often, he had to guard the flock at night from the attack of wild beasts or thieves. These were the same shepherds living out in the fields the night Jesus was born. An angel of the Lord announced this wonderful event. The shepherds were terrified. But the angel assured them not to be afraid because, “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” The shepherds went to Bethlehem to see this glorious thing that had occurred.

At times today do we often feel like shepherds? That our beliefs go counter to society. At times we fail in our endeavors to be righteous. But we have a Savior who covers us with his righteousness. God, as our loving Shepherd, cares for us with gentleness, leading us towards spiritual food and protecting us from the dangers that lie in wait for us.

Heavenly Father, in this glorious season, as a shepherd watch over Your sheep. Thank you for how Jesus watches over His people, providing guidance, shelter, and protection. Help us to ...

By Margie Vaughan

DECEMBER 23
FOR JOSEPH

“Joseph, son of David, do not fear ...”
Matthew 1:18-25

At one time, his life had been normal. He was simply a carpenter. He was a happy man. He was betrothed to a wonderful young woman, and he knew their life together would be special, and it was. Not in the way he imagined, though. For when Mary became pregnant with a child before the time of their marriage, he was deeply saddened. Because he was honorable, he wanted to quietly divorce her. God, however, had a different plan. He sent an angel to tell him that the child within Mary was sent from the Holy Spirit, and that the child was the Messiah and that he was to take Mary as his wife. He believed the angel, and his wife gave birth to the Holy Son of God, flipping his world upside-down in a most extraordinary way.

God's divine plan was not Joseph's plan. Jesus the Messiah came for Joseph, pursued him. He shook up his whole world and showed him what it looks like to live a life that is radical and pleasing to God. Jesus does the same for us. He shakes up our world and shows us our purpose, to live a life that is different and special. Just as He came to teach Joseph what living for God looks like, He came to teach us, and He asks us to live for Him daily.

Dear Father, thank you for the radical, special life you have for us, help us to know that Jesus came to shake up our world that we may more clearly see and follow you. Help us to ...

By Emma Grieme

DECEMBER 24
FOR MARY

“Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!”

Luke 1:26-38

Mary, a teenager, a virgin, who was betrothed to Joseph. Although some venerate Mary, when you examine her life, there was really nothing special or extraordinary about her. Historically she was probably doing what most young Jewish girls do, working hard inside and outside the home as a helper to her mother. She lived a simple, everyday life. Beforehand, no one knew her. She was most likely poor, living on her father’s means. When the angel Gabriel spoke with her, you do not find her in a palace or in a holy temple. He spoke to her in a distant, unimpressive area of Galilee. So what set this unimpressive, ordinary Jewish girl apart from anyone else? Wouldn’t we choose a different woman to bear God’s only begotten Son? It was solely by God’s grace over her. And Mary responded with faith and with obedience. When she questioned Gabriel, it was from a posture of seeking understanding, not from a posture of unbelief. When her faith was met with obedience, she said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord, let it be to me according to your word.”

Jesus came for Mary, an ordinary, unimpressive teenager, because of God’s grace and her response of faith and obedience. 2000+ years later nothing has changed. Likewise, Jesus comes to us by His grace through faith and obedience. Believe plus receive equals salvation and walking with God in a communal relationship. As we go about our ordinary, unimpressive lives, Jesus comes for us too.

Dear God, this Christmas season help us to remember that by grace Jesus comes to unimpressive everyday people who live ordinary, everyday lives. Help us to...

By Kelly Mason

DECEMBER 25
FOR ALL PEOPLE

“For unto you is born this day ... a Savior...”

Luke 2:1-11

It truly is a special feeling when something is for you. My favorite type of gift is experiences. Things like getting tickets to see my favorite team play, snowboarding trips, or jumping out of a plane. What can be even more special than having someTHING for you is having someONE for you. Someone in your corner who helps, supports, and challenges you. Someone who holds you accountable and encourages you. That just barely scratches the surface when we talk about the birth of Jesus. The magnitude of His coming can sometimes be a hard concept to fully fathom. And this gift would be for all people!

This is Christ the Lord! Salvation is here and this, for sure, is good news of great joy. The grace and love that was shown to us through Jesus is without a doubt the best gift for us. The disheartening fact about this wonderful gift of salvation is that it is available to all people, but not everyone will accept it. Knowing and following Jesus isn’t just a good thing to do. It is a need that we all have and something we should crave. He is the Savior and the only one who can forgive sins. Let us continue to reflect daily beyond Christmas on this good news of great joy that is for all people.

Dear God, we thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who was born in humility to bring salvation to all people. Help us to remember why we celebrate Christmas and to not miss opportunities to share Jesus and impact people this season and beyond.

By Brian Davis