

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



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Daily Devotions

Each day there is a short devotion from YouVersion.com and a Bible passage to reflect upon. We are grateful to YouVersion.com for letting us use these devotions by Northpoint, Drew, and Bryan Houston.

For each day of the week, use the link to the YouVersion.com study. You will need to hover your cursor over the link and left click your mouse to go to the link.

For the daily Bible passage, hover your cursor over the Bible passage link and left click your mouse to go to the passage at Bible Gateway. As you read each day's Bible passage:



READ. Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you. Read slowly through the passage.



REFLECT. What is God saying to you? Is God asking you to:

- Trust His promise?
- Receive His encouragement?
- Obey His command?
- Stop a bad habit?
- Serve another person?

In a few sentences write what you think God is saying to you.



RESPOND

Write a short prayer to God thanking Him for ministering to you through this passage and expressing what you will do in response.

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Monday December 3

Isaiah 9:1-7

9 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint “Standing-On-Your-Tiptoes Anticipation”

Before we were married, Julie and I knew we wanted kids. After three years of marriage, we were ready. But for the next three years, we could not get pregnant. Every month, for 36 months, we were reminded of our struggle with infertility.

Then one day, we found out Julie was pregnant! Since we had waited three years for this, you might assume that only having to wait nine more months would've been easy. Wrong! It seemed like forever. We could not wait to meet this little girl we'd dreamed about!

Have you ever felt this type of anticipation? You were on the edge of your seat. You couldn't sit still. It's all you could talk about. The prophet Isaiah caused people to experience this kind of expectancy. He talked about a Savior who would come one day. He called him “Wonderful Counselor,” “Mighty God,” “Everlasting Father,” “Prince of Peace.” And he said, “Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).

Talk about good news for everyone. Talk about standing-on-your-tiptoes anticipation! This is what the Advent season is supposed to feel like. We're celebrating the birth of the person who can do for us what no one else can: bring us from darkness to light, from death to life.

The days leading up to Christmas are supposed to be filled with standing-on-your-tiptoes anticipation. Maybe you are anticipating something good this Christmas—that gift you really want, the get-together with friends or family, or that special Christmas tradition. Or maybe you are anticipating something less-than-good: a packed calendar, a painful memory of a lost relationship, or that awkward family member.

What if this Christmas were different? What if you could spend this Advent season anticipating something that would leave you feeling happy, satisfied, fulfilled, and loved? You can.

Let's turn our anticipation to Jesus—our rescuer, our hope, our Savior, our physician, our eternal salvation, God with us. Jesus was born! For you! For me! Let's stand on our tiptoes and anticipate Jesus together. Every day, simply think of the name Jesus, and let your thoughts wander from there.

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Tuesday December 4

Ephesians 1: 3-14

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.⁴ For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love⁵ he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.⁷ In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace⁸ that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,⁹ he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ,¹⁰ to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will,¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.

Micah 5:2

² “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

“Plan B”

I love dreaming and I love ideas. Wondering what could be makes my heart beat a little faster. I can sit for hours (or days!) thinking about the best way to accomplish something and what might be “if . . .” When I’m in a season of dreaming big, I often wake up in the middle of the night to put ideas on paper. I get excited for my husband to wake up so I can share my plan with him. (Sometimes I even bug him a little, hoping he will wake up early . . . my poor husband.) But, as much as I love dreaming, I get even more excited watching a vision take shape.

A few years ago, I was in charge of a large renovation project. I put together a budget, drew up the blueprints, hired a team, and began to implement the plan. I couldn’t wait! What happened in the following weeks, though, is what happens with many great plans. I discovered it was not foolproof. There were unknown issues to resolve, obstacles to work around, and costs that exceeded the carefully prepared and very tight budget. The plan had to be altered. I needed a Plan B.

Generally, I don’t like Plan Bs. Moving to an alternate plan somehow speaks failure to me. It’s admitting I didn’t have it all together from the beginning. It’s a reminder of the unforeseen nature of life.

Sometimes, when I’m contemplating the whys of the universe, I wonder about God’s plan. What was his original idea? Did he have a master plan in place that didn’t work out quite right? Did he create a world where humanity could have lived happily ever after in the garden but subsequently messed it up? Was Jesus God’s second choice? Was Jesus Plan B?

This season, as my house begins to sparkle with lights and I decorate a batch of perfectly cut-out cookies, I will also celebrate the birth of my Savior. This little baby, born to a virgin in the city of Bethlehem, was God tenderly revealing his perfect master plan. The redemption of humanity was not an afterthought or a remedy for a plan gone wrong. Jesus was always God’s perfect and loving solution. This baby is the lens through which God views me. The baby was never Plan B.

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Wednesday December 5

1 Chronicles 17:1-15

17 After David was settled in his palace, he said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent.”

2 Nathan replied to David, “Whatever you have in mind, do it, for God is with you.”

3 But that night the word of God came to Nathan, saying:

4 “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD says: You are not the one to build me a house to dwell in. ⁵ I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought Israel up out of Egypt to this day. I have moved from one tent site to another, from one dwelling place to another. ⁶ Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their leaders^[a] whom I commanded to shepherd my people, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?”’

7 “Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁸ I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name like the names of the greatest men on earth. ⁹ And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹⁰ and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also subdue all your enemies.

“I declare to you that the LORD will build a house for you: ¹¹ When your days are over and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹² He is the one who will build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever. ¹³ I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor. ¹⁴ I will set him over my house and my kingdom forever; his throne will be established forever.”

¹⁵ Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

John 1:41

Andrew said to his brother Simon: “We have found the Messiah” (that is, the Christ).”

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"Christ: Not a Last Name"

First name. Last name. In our Western society, we are accustomed to this way of writing someone's name.

As we approach Christmas, it's important to be aware that Jesus' parents were not Joseph and Mary Christ. Much to the chagrin of my kids (who have asked this often), Christ is not Jesus' last name. Christ is an equally important part of his name—a name that is unique to him.

Jesus was fully man—a person with emotions, appetites, and needs, just like you and me. If you've ever been frustrated trying to relate to God, just know that he went to great lengths to relate to you. Jesus of Nazareth

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was and is God's most empathetic offering.

Christ, though, is just as important. The word "Christ" comes from the Greek term "Christos," which means "chosen one" or "anointed one." Over and over again in the Old Testament, there were hints of a coming Messiah or a coming Christ who would not be anointed by an earthly king. Instead, this one who was to come would be anointed by the heavenly King and, therefore, would be the Christ.

As you read in 1 Chronicles 17:11–14, this prophesied Christ would come from God to "establish his kingdom" and would "establish his throne forever."

According to Isaiah 7:14, he would be "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Though he didn't come like we thought he would, he did come. In love, wrapped in swaddling clothes, he showed up.

When he became a man, he began inviting others to follow him. And he invites us as well. In John 1:41, Andrew, one of his earliest followers, said it so well to his brother Simon:

"We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ).

As we wait for Christmas, remember that we are not merely waiting for the celebration of a baby who was born. We celebrate the Christ, the fulfillment of God's promise, the assurance that God's Word is good, and the certainty that he can still be trusted. Thank God today for Jesus, the man, and Christ, the rescuer sent from God. After all, just as Andrew had, we have found the Messiah (that is, the Christ)!

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Thursday December 6

Isaiah 9:1-7

9 Nevertheless, there will be no more gloom for those who were in distress. In the past he humbled the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the future he will honor Galilee of the nations, by the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan—

² The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

³ You have enlarged the nation and increased their joy; they rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest, as warriors rejoice when dividing the plunder.

⁴ For as in the day of Midian's defeat, you have shattered the yoke that burdens them, the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor.

⁵ Every warrior's boot used in battle and every garment rolled in blood will be destined for burning, will be fuel for the fire.

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"The Magic of the Mosaic"

When I was growing up, my siblings and I had a quiet competition to see who could wow Mom and Dad with the most original gift on Christmas morning. One year, the framed picture of our parents as high school sweethearts with their names engraved had practically “won Christmas.” The next year, in an attempt to create a magical moment for my mother on Christmas morning, I gathered all of her favorite T-shirts, including my dad's old high school football jersey, dusted off the sewing machine, and created a quilt full of memories and sentimentality.

The marvelously woven quilt told a story with seemingly unrelated events collectively pieced together into a more magnificent story. The T-shirt fragments came together. Mom's Christmas would be magical. Winning Christmas was in the bag.

King David knew about crafting things together to show his love. He may not have been motivated by sibling rivalry, but the King of Israel desired to build a temple to honor the God he loved. The shepherd boy turned king longed for a place where the Spirit of God could dwell; he longed to bring the presence of the Lord near.

But God had another plan to draw near to his people.

He was weaving together a legacy that could not be contained in a building. The mosaic of God's story was coming together in a way that was beyond David's wildest dreams. And God would use David's family to accomplish his purposes.

He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. – Isaiah 9:7

From the lineage of David, God was sending a Savior and his name would be Jesus. Like David, he would be known as a shepherd and a king, but this king would be unlike any king Israel had ever seen. He would not reside in a temple but would be the fulfillment of a promise. He would be our Immanuel—God with us.

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Friday December 7

Isaiah 7:1-14

⁷ When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it.

² Now the house of David was told, “Aram has allied itself with Ephraim”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

³ Then the LORD said to Isaiah, “Go out, you and your son Shear-Jashub, to meet Ahaz at the end of the aqueduct of the Upper Pool, on the road to the Launderer’s Field. ⁴ Say to him, ‘Be careful, keep calm and don’t be afraid. Do not lose heart because of these two smoldering stubs of firewood—because of the fierce anger of Rezin and Aram and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Aram, Ephraim and Remaliah’s son have plotted your ruin, saying, ⁶ “Let us invade Judah; let us tear it apart and divide it among ourselves, and make the son of Tabeel king over it.” ⁷ Yet this is what the Sovereign LORD says: “It will not take place, it will not happen,

⁸ for the head of Aram is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is only Rezin. Within sixty-five years Ephraim will be too shattered to be a people.

⁹ The head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is only Remaliah’s son. If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.”

¹⁰ Again the LORD spoke to Ahaz, ¹¹ “Ask the LORD your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights.”

¹² But Ahaz said, “I will not ask; I will not put the LORD to the test.”

¹³ Then Isaiah said, “Hear now, you house of David! Is it not enough to try the patience of humans? Will you try the patience of my God also?¹⁴ Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

“The Thrill of Hope”

Is there anyone more expectant than a child at Christmastime? Pinterest is full of DIY calendars to help answer the eternal question, “How many days until Christmas?” Children are expectant, or hopeful, that their desires will be fulfilled and that a new dollhouse or game system will appear under the tree.

They spend hours fiddling with wrapped gifts, desperately trying to decipher what each one contains. Then Christmas Eve comes and the anticipation is more than their little hearts can handle. They lie awake all night, waiting for the sliver of a sunrise to pounce on their parents and declare that it is finally Christmas!

Imagine living in the days leading up to Jesus’ birth. Political darkness reigned in the region; oppression and hopelessness were commonplace. God had promised that he would send a Savior one day. After centuries passing with this promise hanging over them, you can imagine that many people lost hope. Many even stopped believing.

Those that still believed were looking toward an event that would reshape humanity—an event that many assumed would come through the powerful hand of a great conqueror, through the deliverance of a nation by a mighty king who would rescue them from oppression and slavery. Instead, what they received was the birth of a child from a scared young woman in an unbelievable scenario. Their Christmas (Savior) story was not what they expected it to be. “Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.” – Isaiah 7:14 “Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.” – Luke 2:11

The birth of Jesus represents a promise fulfilled. The world around us may seem dark, and it may seem like our prayers are met with silence, but there is always cause for hope. He fulfills his promises. What would our days look like if we lived expectantly about what God is capable of doing? May this Advent season represent a time of anticipation for the wonderful things God has in store for us. His promises never fail!

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Saturday December 8

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

²⁹ *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

³⁴ *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

³⁵ *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."*

³⁸ *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

Luke 2:10

¹⁰ *But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.*

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"Fear Not"

Christmas is supposed to be the most wonderful time of the year; everything and everyone is decked out! There are parties to attend, joyful music on the radio, food and gifts galore. Unfortunately, there is another side to the holidays.

For many of us, Christmas can be a time of deep loneliness and stress and fear. Maybe you've lost someone, are going through a divorce, or are worried about how you're going to keep the lights on, let alone put presents under the tree. The pressure to keep up with society's version of the holidays can be overwhelming, triggering anxiety and depression.

However, these feelings are not unique to our current culture. Worry and fear have been lurking in the shadows since the very first Christmas. The characters in the Christmas story had everything to be afraid of. Joseph, Mary, the shepherds, and the wise men lived in a scary world filled with uncertainty. God knew this and sent his messenger, the angel Gabriel, to deliver the news of a Savior. Each time Gabriel brought the message, he started with, "Do not be afraid."

What can we take away from this? First, I'm certain angels are terrifying! Second, even in the most frightening of circumstances, God has a plan. Herein lies the magic of Christmas. Jesus, born in a manger, in the middle of the desert, under the rule of a tyrant, was the hope of all humankind. This is what we celebrate. No matter what is going on in our lives or in the world around us, Jesus is our hope.

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Sunday December 9

John 1:1-18

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁶ There was a man sent from God whose name was John. ⁷ He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. ⁸ He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

⁹ The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

¹⁵ (John testified concerning him. He cried out, saying, "This is the one I spoke about when I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶ Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given. ¹⁷ For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and ^[b] is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"The Hidden Miracle of Christmas"

What does grace feel like? A warm embrace? A forgiving parent? A loyal friend? Grace is one of those esoteric Christian words that is hard to explain. Well, here goes.

John 1 tells us that Jesus is the fullness of grace and truth. Fullness means that Jesus isn't half-grace, half-truth but really 100 percent grace and 100 percent truth. This paradox is hard to wrap our minds around. I picture a glass with two pitchers of water, one filled with grace and the other with truth. Intuitively, I would think God would pour half grace and half truth into the glass. In reality, however, God stands there, perhaps with a grin, and pours both pitchers, the whole pitchers, into the glass until it's overflowing, making a huge mess. This is the fullness of grace and truth.

What do we do with grace? Grace is that unmerited mercy and favor we find in the world. It has small beginnings, like an 8-year-old girl giving up her seat for a pregnant woman on the bus. It can be subtle, like leaving a big tip for a barista struggling to make ends meet. Or it can be dramatic, like hosting hundreds of homeless friends for Christmas supper. But no matter how it is given, grace is never deserved. We don't deserve grace, and yet we receive it. Should we not also be giving grace to those that don't deserve it?

Being a Jesus follower means that grace is in us. It means we get to lean into that revolutionary love, that undeserved grace. By the time our brains recognize that we have sinned and should seek forgiveness, Jesus has forgiven us dozens of times over. Why? Because Jesus is the fullness of grace. Grace doesn't care if you are conservative or progressive or if you grew up Christian or are just now seeking God. Grace is freely available from now to eternity. Grace has no favorites, knows no limit, and sees no end.

This Christmas, ask yourself, "Where have I experienced God's grace?" Reflect on that. You'll be surprised to realize that you experience grace every single day. Look for it. I promise it's there. You just have to find it. And, once you do, the overwhelming miracle of Christmas, of the born Christ, full of grace and truth, will be that much more magical.

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Monday December 10

Romans 12:9-21

⁹ Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. ^[a] Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"The Best Christmas Carol"

What's your favorite Christmas song? I bet if I asked you to whistle or hum it right now, you'd hit the melody pretty well. As you know, a melody is a sequence of individual notes that are played one after another, creating a song.

Now think of your favorite performance of that same song. I'm willing to bet that you thought of a version that included beautiful harmonies, either by voice or instrument.

A harmony is when two or more different-sounding notes come together to make a stronger and more beautiful sound. Sure, all you need is a melody to make a simple song, but harmony is what makes a song whole.

A melody is what gives a song its body.

A harmony is what gives that body a soul.

The birth of Jesus was a harmonic introduction to a world of individual songs. The human race could never reach its full potential and constantly yearned for its meaning.

We needed Jesus to change that. Because of his birth, his sacrifice, and his resurrection, we are now able to be more than just individual notes. As my favorite Christmas carol, O Holy Night, says . . .

Long lay the world in sin and error pining, 'Til he appeared and the soul felt its worth.

Jesus brought us into harmony with God the Father. He makes our songs beautiful.

But it doesn't end there. Not only are we now able to live in harmony with our Creator, but we are called to be the harmony for the world. Paul said it best in his letter to the Romans . . .

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. – Romans 12:16

God is not calling us to be just a bunch of different melodies, competing with one another, trying to make the best song. He is calling us to live in harmony—bringing everyone together to make a unified song that glorifies him.

Christmas is a time when we all come together, but it is easy to get distracted by our own differences. This month, ask God to make apparent the harmony you have with him, and thank him for it. In turn, reflect that harmony for those whose songs are yearning to be made more beautiful.

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Tuesday December 11

Luke 2:1-20

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

“Interrupted”

The birth of Jesus was a glorious interruption—an interruption in the history of our world. But on a personal, intimate level, it was an interruption in the lives of his earthly parents, Mary and Joseph. They had planned to be married, but they had not planned for a pregnancy conceived by God. They had not planned for Mary to be carrying the Savior of the World.

God even interrupted the shepherds’ daily work—hanging out on a hillside, counting sheep—with his glory! Luke 2:13–14: Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

In turn, the shepherds interrupted what was expected of them and took off to find the baby Jesus. Talk about spontaneity—those shepherds went AWOL because God interrupted their routine!

During this Christmas season when we are so busy working for God, make sure you leave time, space, and energy to be open to the unexpected. Let God interrupt your life! Maybe he desires to change your daily outlook. Have you grown tired or complacent or even a little bored in your journey with God?

Maybe you’ve had enough of a situation or a person—you’re just worn slap out. Maybe you need to drop the mask that everything is fine and good and you can handle it all. Can I get an Amen? God wants to gloriously interrupt your journey in order to raise you up to a higher level of peace and intimacy in knowing him. Take the time to step away from your routine, from what is expected, and let a glorious interruption happen this season!

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Wednesday December 12

Matthew 1:18-25

¹⁸ *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.*

¹⁸ *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit.* ¹⁹ *Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

²⁰ *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”* ²¹ *She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”*

²² *All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: ²³ “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).*

²⁴ *When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. ²⁵ But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint "Joseph Who?"

Luke only mentions his name a couple of times; Mark and John not at all. The little we do know of Joseph comes from a few verses in Matthew—and that’s not a lot. We know he cared enough for Mary that he wanted to protect her from the public scorn and disgrace that a young woman in her circumstances was destined for.

We know he was a righteous man that believed what the angel of the Lord had spoken to him (in a dream; always in a dream) and thus was obedient in all that he was asked to do and to be. We know he led his family to Bethlehem for the census and was resourceful in providing a safe (yet humble) space for his young bride to give birth. And we know he protected his young family from danger when he fled with them in the middle of the night to Egypt to keep them safe from Herod’s wrath. Caring, protective, righteous, believing, obedient, providing . . . a pretty good list of qualities, to say the least.

And yet Joseph was never intended to be a main character in the story. Although his role was important, he realized that he was not the point—Jesus was. It is as if he voluntarily stepped aside, into the background, in order for the main character to take center stage. His role in this drama would be one of background rather than spotlight. He was simply part of the supporting cast, somehow both recognizing and embracing this reality.

In fact, Joseph’s very best work—the nurture, care, and guidance of Jesus in his formative years—was done in virtual anonymity. Not a word, other than the instance at the temple when Jesus was twelve, was ever written about it. He was a hidden and silent partner in the unfolding story of God’s life on earth. For the most part, he was unrecognized, unsung, and unnoticed—and it is simply beautiful.

During this Christmas season, I want to be more like Joseph—to realize that Jesus is the point of the story and therefore to embrace the covert and behind-the-scenes ways we are called to help “bring him into” this dark and broken world.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Thursday December 13

Luke 1:5-25

⁵ In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. ⁶ Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. ⁷ But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

⁸ Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God, ⁹ he was chosen by lot, according to the custom of the priesthood, to go into the temple of the Lord and burn incense. ¹⁰ And when the time for the burning of incense came, all the assembled worshipers were praying outside.

¹¹ Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense. ¹² When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. ¹³ But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. ¹⁴ He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth, ¹⁵ for he will be great in the sight of the Lord. He is never to take wine or other fermented drink, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even before he is born. ¹⁶ He will bring back many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. ¹⁷ And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

¹⁸ Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."

¹⁹ The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. ²⁰ And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words, which will come true at their appointed time."

²¹ Meanwhile, the people were waiting for Zechariah and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. ²² When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.

²³ When his time of service was completed, he returned home. ²⁴ After this his wife Elizabeth became pregnant and for five months remained in seclusion. ²⁵ "The Lord has done this for me," she said. "In these days he has shown his favor and taken away my disgrace among the people."

Isaiah 61:1-2

61 The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint "Looking at the Wrong King"

In the time of Herod, king of Judea . . . – Luke 1:5

King Herod the Great was the most powerful man in all of Judea. He built ostentatious palaces and a city on the Mediterranean that rivaled Rome. He could have anything money could buy or power could capture. His subjects were jealous and made jokes about how much food one of Herod's palaces could buy. They knew Herod was selfish and insecure, but the insidious thing was, in their secret thoughts, everyone wanted to be Herod. The selfish oppressor had all the power and money, and that was what his subjects thought they wanted.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



While everyone was looking at Herod, a new king—the promised Messiah—was born in the most humble and inconspicuous circumstances imaginable. The surroundings of his simple birth set the stage for his life of selflessness and love. A new kingdom had come and almost no one recognized it. It was not what they expected.

Today, strong oppressors abound in this world and people suffer. Seemingly unlimited power and money have a tendency to corrupt, but humankind still desires both. We hate oppressive leaders, but we still desire what they have.

I sometimes think, If I had a kingdom, I would do things differently. Actually, I am part of a kingdom—the greatest kingdom on earth led by an all-powerful King who has very specific things for me to do.

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor. – Isaiah 61:1–2

I am so thankful for my King, but the noise of other kings sometimes blurs my vision. Thankfulness needs to give way to action. Great blessing is a trust, a responsibility. The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me. The magic of Christmas is that my King has chosen me to be an active part of proclaiming good news to the poor by my actions.

So, what am I to do? Who am I to help? I find great comfort in knowing that my King has already determined that. I just need to ask, listen, and be willing to act.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Friday December 14

Matthew 2:1-12

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

“Light”

The flashlight is one of my favorite features on my phone. It allows me to be in complete darkness one moment and then say, “Let there be light!” With the push of a button, suddenly there is light. When there is light from my phone, I can move forward out of darkness with confidence and assurance that I won’t face-plant into a wall. Light is a good thing!

I think God agrees with me. In fact, after God created the heavens and the earth, he said, “Let there be light.” And suddenly there was light. God saw that the light was a good thing, and he separated the light from the darkness. Since that point in time, there has been a great contrast between light and darkness. In fact, there exists a symbolic theme of moral opposition that has been developed throughout the Bible, and we experience it in our daily lives. Light is a word and an idea used in connection with joy, blessing, and life. Darkness is a word and an idea associated with sorrow, adversity, and death. Light represents good and darkness represents evil.

It was very creative of God to use light, or, more specifically, a light in the sky, to bring men to discover the Light of the World. We know from the Christmas narrative that a light (star) suddenly appeared in the sky. The light led some wise men to Jesus. It was God saying once again, “Let there be Light.” And the Light is most absolutely a good thing. The Light God sent into the world brings joy to our sorrows, blessings to our adversities, and life to our death. The Light is the reason that good dominates evil and we can clearly see our paths forward. Light coming into the world is worthy of an ENORMOUS celebration.

So, as we continue to celebrate the magic of Christmas, let’s consider the goodness of the Light and remember to let our lights shine during Christmas and throughout the year.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Saturday December 15

Matthew 2:1-12

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

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The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

“The Moving Magi”

At the start of every Christmas season, I unwrap my most sentimental family heirloom, a small milk-glass vase with an intricate hand-painted votive inside. A tea candle is placed in the votive. Seems pretty boring, right? But, when lit, it is the most magical thing I own.

The magnificent artwork on the votive is of three Magi riding camels with a bright star in the sky. The movement of the flame makes the images look as if they are moving through the milky vase that the votive sits within. As a child, I sat for hours watching the Magi move toward the star, never realizing it was the flicker of the candle’s flame creating this illusion.

Every Christmas Eve, when all are nestled in their beds, I sit in the quiet dark and watch the glow of the moving Magi vase in front of me. I contemplate the real Magi constantly seeking, searching, moving toward the Savior of the World.

Are we moving toward Jesus just like those Magi? Or are we moving in task-driven circles? The Magi had a beautiful, bright star to follow. Our GPS device is way more powerful: We have the Spirit to be our never-failing beacon toward Christ. But, in order to not move in purposeless circles, we have to turn “us” off and allow the flame of the Spirit to keep us moving toward Jesus.

The star did not fail the Magi. It was divine, literally placed by God to support Micah’s prophecy of the birthplace of our Lord. Most certainly, the Spirit of the living God will never fail us. It will get us there and if we fully let go, it will get us there rejoicing!

When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. – Matthew 2:10–11.

This season and every season, keep the Spirit lit within! Be in constant movement toward the Son of God, just like the Magi. Regardless of the terrain, if the Spirit is leading, purpose and joy will be found in every ounce of the journey until the day we bow down and worship the King of Kings in person!

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Sunday December 16

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

²⁹ *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

³⁴ *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

³⁵ *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."*

³⁸ *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"Promise Keeper"

Growing up, my favorite Christmas decoration every year was the nativity scene. High on the mantle, the white porcelain characters crowded the manger surrounded by greenery and lights. I remember asking my mom most nights if it was time to turn on the lights and illuminate the scene. To me, it wasn't Christmas until those bulbs glimmered in their reflection off the glassy figurines. The tree could be up and decorated, littered with presents underneath, but the nativity always drew me.

As I've gotten older, I've loved reading and learning more about the long-awaited Savior. And while Christmas celebrates Jesus' earthly arrival, the story started centuries earlier. It certainly did for Mary. This Jewish teenager had heard her entire life that God was bringing his people a rescuer, a Savior, someone who would make right what was all wrong. Her conversations with family multiple times a year probably centered on this coming King who would bring everlasting peace and justice.

But it had been 400 years since anyone had heard from God. The God that had physically talked with the fathers of Mary's faith had seemingly fallen silent. And after centuries of a promise being handed down with no new stories to tell, one has to wonder, Did belief in God's promise wane?

If it did for some, it doesn't appear it did for Mary. Imagine the surprise of this faithful teenage girl when she was the first one in 400 years to receive a message from God! A message that began with the phrase, "You are highly favored." Translation: "You are special, Mary, because you still believe in God's promise." And the angel unfolded for her a plan that probably took a lifetime to understand. But, in the final moments of that encounter, a girl who had heard for years that a promised Savior was coming was given one of the most reassuring truths about God: "No word from God will ever fail" (Luke 1:37).

When we feel God is long-delayed in delivering on his promises to us—promises of peace or hope or provision—every Christmas can remind us anew that no promise our heavenly Father has ever given will go unfulfilled. And when God delivers on his promises, it may look nothing like you thought, planned, or wanted.

But you can trust it will be better than you expected.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Monday December 17

John 10:1-21

10 “Very truly I tell you Pharisees, anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. ² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. ⁵ But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger’s voice.” ⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech, but the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them.

⁷ Therefore Jesus said again, “Very truly I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who have come before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep have not listened to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved.^[a] They will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

¹¹ “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. ¹³ The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

¹⁴ “I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. ¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

¹⁹ The Jews who heard these words were again divided. ²⁰ Many of them said, “He is demon-possessed and raving mad. Why listen to him?”

²¹ But others said, “These are not the sayings of a man possessed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?”

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint “Opportunity of a Lifetime”

“I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” – John 10:10

I have a confession. I am one of those weird people that can’t get enough of the Christmas season, no matter what time of year it is. We all have coping mechanisms. Some people shop. Some people eat sweets. I listen to Christmas music.

There’s something about Christmas that brings a smile to my face. So, naturally, when Christmas comes around, I want to make the most of it. It’s as if I develop Christmas FOMO (fear of missing out). I want to make sure I experience the season to the fullest, so my December days are jam-packed with Santa visits, Nutcracker tickets, Christmas tree excursions, gingerbread house contests, holiday light exhibits, caroling concerts, every Christmas movie known to man, and too many Christmas parties to count. It’s no wonder that by the time January rolls around, I’m ready for a long nap.

Maybe you can relate to that feeling. While none of these things are bad, it’s easy for me to lose sight of the joy God is trying to show me in the middle of this season. Amid the busyness, I am reminded to be present,

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



to look around, and to realize that God is at work.

It's a time to celebrate what God has done in my life, to reflect on the past year, and to observe God in the little things around me. When I can look at each day through the lens of faith, hope, and opportunity, God shows up and uses me in ways I could never imagine.

As I shuffle from party to party, I realize I have the opportunity to encourage others, to bring laughter to those going through difficult times, and to be generous to those I have never met. This one concept has changed my whole approach to the Christmas season. It's amazing how much I see God when I actually take time to look for him at work in my life. Instead of a list of dates on my calendar, I instead recognize how many opportunities I have to know God more and to experience the joy he intends for me to have throughout the year. Where is God at work in your life? What opportunities is he giving you today?

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Tuesday December 18

John 14:15-27

¹⁵ Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. ¹⁸ I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. ¹⁹ Before long, the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. ²⁰ On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."

²² Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"

²³ Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴ Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me. ²⁵ "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

Psalm 46:10

¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint "Be Still"

Peace. I often wonder how drastically a healthy dose of peace would alter our lives in a world propelled by unforgiving deadlines, constant evaluations, urgent requests, long carpool lines, ceaseless reminders, a relentless inbox, and hours at the grocery store.

In addition, the Christmas season normally intensifies the mess by forcing us to coordinate dates, parties, travel, finances, and family. What would our lives look like if we invited peace in, deep within? I'm not talking about an hour at a yoga class twice a week, thirty minutes at the gym each day, or even a walk around the block after dinner to get your blood flowing (or catch a break from the noise at home).

Don't misunderstand. Those are great, temporary prescriptions for conditional peace and even our sanity. But they are fleeting and are quickly replaced with the chaos and urgency of life.

Christ challenges us to go deeper than the physical. He challenges us to invite peace into our daily state of mind, heart, soul, and spirit. Peace as a state of mind is not dependent upon our physical surroundings or dictated by our present circumstances. Peace as a state of heart is unconditional, enduring even when life around us seems hectic and busy. Peace as a state of soul goes beyond what we learn from devotionals and quiet times; it reminds us throughout the entire day that we are deeply loved and powerfully saved.

Peace as a state of spirit reminds us that even when the kids get under your skin or while nothing seems to be going well at work, Christ desires your heart to remain in peace, in rest, in tranquility, in stillness, in him.

How do we achieve peace as a state of consciousness rather than a fleeting emotion? Be still. "Be still, and know that I am God." – Psalm 46:10. As C.S. Lewis mentions in *Mere Christianity*, "God can't give us peace and happiness apart from Himself because there is no such thing" (p. 50).

When we find God within the course of each day, we find peace. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you" (John 14:27). During this Christmas season, let's begin to live with peace as part of our daily walks, not as distant retreats from the world.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Wednesday December 19

Luke 2:1-20

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"Quiet . . . Due to the Noise"

I love Christmas music. I'm the guy who is ready to start listening to the Christmas albums on repeat as soon as the final bite of Thanksgiving pie is consumed. I'll take whatever Christmas album you have! Is it Elvis? Mariah Carey? The Beach Boys? Justin Bieber? Just hit "Play."

One of my all-time favorite songs is "Silent Night." It's a vivid reminder of the scene of our Savior's birth. It also reminds us of the impact his arrival had on all of creation for all time. It's an anthem of good news for each one of us!

Christ's birth was the dawn of grace that ultimately has the power to redeem every single one of us. "Silent night, holy night, Son of God, love's pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face. With the dawn of redeeming grace. Jesus, Lord, at Thy birth . . ." This is a lullaby. It is a reminder that we can all "sleep in heavenly peace" because our Savior has arrived. But don't be confused, my friends. That night was not a silent one! First of all, there was a crying newborn baby present. We all know that's not quiet. But overwhelmingly louder than the crying baby was the humongous heavenly army that showed up to shout praises to the newborn King.

Can you picture the scene? I bet it was crazy! It was definitely loud. When the Savior of the World showed up on the scene, it was party time for heaven and earth. There has never been better news for humanity than the birth of Jesus. During this month of December, we have the opportunity to reflect on the greatness of that day in Bethlehem. It was a day of loud celebration and praise. At the same time, we are able to rest peacefully and quietly today because our Savior has come. You see, we are only able to have peace and quiet due to the noise.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Thursday December 20

Psalm 105:1-27, 37-45

¹ Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name; make known among the nations what he has done.

² Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.

³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴ Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.

⁵ Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

⁶ you his servants, the descendants of Abraham, his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.

⁷ He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.

⁸ He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations,

⁹ the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac.

¹⁰ He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant:

¹¹ “To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.”

¹² When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it,

¹³ they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another.

¹⁴ He allowed no one to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings:

¹⁵ “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.”

¹⁶ He called down famine on the land and destroyed all their supplies of food;

¹⁷ and he sent a man before them— Joseph, sold as a slave.

¹⁸ They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons,

¹⁹ till what he foretold came to pass, till the word of the LORD proved him true.

²⁰ The king sent and released him, the ruler of peoples set him free.

²¹ He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed,

²² to instruct his princes as he pleased and teach his elders wisdom.

²³ Then Israel entered Egypt; Jacob resided as a foreigner in the land of Ham.

²⁴ The LORD made his people very fruitful; he made them too numerous for their foes,

²⁵ whose hearts he turned to hate his people, to conspire against his servants.

²⁶ He sent Moses his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen.

²⁷ They performed his signs among them, his wonders in the land of Ham.

³⁷ He brought out Israel, laden with silver and gold, and from among their tribes no one faltered.

³⁸ Egypt was glad when they left, because dread of Israel had fallen on them.

³⁹ He spread out a cloud as a covering, and a fire to give light at night.

⁴⁰ They asked, and he brought them quail; he fed them well with the bread of heaven.

⁴¹ He opened the rock, and water gushed out; it flowed like a river in the desert.

⁴² For he remembered his holy promise given to his servant Abraham.

⁴³ He brought out his people with rejoicing, his chosen ones with shouts of joy;

⁴⁴ he gave them the lands of the nations, and they fell heir to what others had toiled for—

⁴⁵ that they might keep his precepts and observe his laws. Praise the LORD.

Psalm 68:3-5

³ But may the righteous be glad and rejoice before God; may they be happy and joyful.

⁴ Sing to God, sing in praise of his name, extol him who rides on the clouds; rejoice before him—his name is the LORD. ⁵ A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

“What Inhibitions?”

This time of year is so much FUN! There is so much excitement and anticipation. Joy abounds all around. As I am out and about, I notice smiles on people’s faces, especially children. There is nothing like the joy of a child.

Have you ever noticed? They don’t hold it back. You can see it throughout their bodies. From their heads to their toes, their bodies are telling you how they feel!

“Rejoice” by definition means to be glad, to take delight in. Then I find words that are synonyms like joy, celebrate, and exult. I think perhaps children understand REJOICE better than I do! I don’t know the last time I let my inhibitions down and just REJOICED. Do you?

I see how David danced before the Lord and sang a new song. I read it as a commandment: “Rejoice in the Lord.”

So, my question is: What does that look like for me? For you? How can we take some time during this season to not let the busy “to-do” list take over and instead REJOICE from our heads to our toes, letting our whole bodies feel the rejoicing before the Lord?

My prayer for us is that we would let our inhibitions down and dance. At the very least, we would smile really big and laugh a lot. Let the rejoicing begin!

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Friday December 21

Luke 2:1-20

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. ² (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) ³ And everyone went to their own town to register.

⁴ So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. ⁵ He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. ⁶ While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.

⁸ And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. ⁹ An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. ¹⁰ But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. ¹¹ Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. ¹² This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

¹³ Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

¹⁵ When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

¹⁶ So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. ¹⁷ When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, ¹⁸ and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. ²⁰ The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"A Magical, Starry Night"

How many long, exhausting days had the shepherds spent feeding, protecting, and caring for their flocks? How many nights had they spent looking into the starry sky? I wonder what they thought about and if they prayed much on the hillside.

On an ordinary night, as the shepherds were just doing their jobs, heaven exploded into the sky and invaded the hillside, their hillside, to give them a special message. Unbelievable! The Savior that was promised had come to them. They were told where to find the baby! They were told where to find their Messiah.

They were going to see God. They had been invited to see God.

If the newborn Savior had been born in a palace, the shepherds would not have been at the top of the guest list. They were, however, perfectly dressed for a stable and would feel totally comfortable going there for a visit.

I wonder if part of the message to the shepherds is a message to us. In the middle of our ordinary lives, our God wants to meet us and reveal who he is. He is an intimate, loving God who chose to come to us as a helpless baby in a smelly barn. Jesus is a gift of love, mercy, and grace. He has the power to save us. What a God!

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Saturday December 22

Psalm 118

¹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

² Let Israel say: "His love endures forever."

³ Let the house of Aaron say: "His love endures forever."

⁴ Let those who fear the LORD say: "His love endures forever."

⁵ When hard pressed, I cried to the LORD; he brought me into a spacious place.

⁶ The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?

⁷ The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I look in triumph on my enemies.

⁸ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in humans.

⁹ It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in princes.

¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.

¹¹ They surrounded me on every side, but in the name of the LORD I cut them down.

¹² They swarmed around me like bees, but they were consumed as quickly as burning thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them down.

¹³ I was pushed back and about to fall, but the LORD helped me.

¹⁴ The LORD is my strength and my defense; he has become my salvation.

¹⁵ Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: "The LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"

¹⁶ The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things!"

¹⁷ I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done.

¹⁸ The LORD has chastened me severely, but he has not given me over to death.

¹⁹ Open for me the gates of the righteous; I will enter and give thanks to the LORD.

²⁰ This is the gate of the LORD through which the righteous may enter.

²¹ I will give you thanks, for you answered me; you have become my salvation.

²² The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone;

²³ the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

²⁴ The LORD has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad.

²⁵ LORD, save us! LORD, grant us success!

²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.

²⁷ The LORD is God, and he has made his light shine on us. With boughs in hand, join in the festal procession up¹ to the horns of the altar.

²⁸ You are my God, and I will praise you; you are my God, and I will exalt you.

²⁹ Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint "A Grateful Heart"

A few years ago, Christmas was approaching and it didn't "feel" much like Christmas. I didn't feel much like celebrating. My life had taken a turn that I didn't expect, and I was having a hard time embracing my "new normal." My husband was in an inpatient treatment facility and my marriage was uncertain, to say the least. However, I had four daughters that very much wanted to celebrate.

They had the magic of Christmas in their hearts and the wonder in their eyes. So, I had a choice. I could choose to focus on the things that were not going well, or I could choose joy. I could choose to be grateful for all of the things that were going well. My friend John Woodall often says that good and hard run on parallel tracks. Boy, is that true! How do you bounce back and forth from good and hard? 1 Thessalonians 5:15–28 says,

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

One practical thing I did was to make a list of the things I was grateful for. At first, my frustrated heart could only think of basic things like my health, my girls’ health, our home, my job, my small group, my friends, my family, etc. However, as I kept writing, I realized that I was thankful for people I had met because of the difficult situation we were in.

Yes, things were difficult, but after I thought about the things I was thankful for, my heart began to change. I started to feel a peace and actually began to get excited about celebrating Christmas with the girls. I realized that God was WITH me and FOR me. HE was the one that had provided all of the things I had written on the list. And he was up to something. I could "be still" with a grateful heart.

What is it that you need to be grateful for this season? Are you able to find joy in hard times? Are you able to rise above your circumstances and focus on all that Jesus has done for you? What would it look like to let Jesus carry those burdens so you could be grateful for all that is going well?

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Sunday December 23

1 Corinthians 12:1-13

12 Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Luke 2:10

¹⁰ But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

“United by Christ”

As Christmas draws near, we are reminded of the magical story of Jesus’ birth and the hope it brings. We recall the wise men and shepherds that came to visit the newborn King. We picture a child lying in a trough with animals and hay everywhere. This nativity scene is a beautiful picture of many different people being united through one person.

Wise men that came from a foreign land, lowly shepherds from fields nearby, Joseph and Mary from another town, angels singing and exclaiming the glory of God, and even the animals all witnessed this Savior born into the world. Each of these creatures arrived at the scene in a different way and was differently in awe of God.

This is a scene of unity, of God being glorified in heaven and on earth. And we know the rest of the story—that Jesus would die and be resurrected and then leave us with the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us and connect us with God.

This is the truly magical part of Christmas . . . that God wants us to be a part of his body and be united with him eternally. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes that there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, service, and work—but the same God.

Each of us receives something different, yet we are part of the same body, and we use those gifts for the same purpose. I encourage you to reflect on the spiritual gifts given to you by the Holy Spirit and how you can use them to serve God.

Think also about the people in your circles and how their spiritual gifts are different, yet they serve the same God. As we encourage one another and combine these gifts, we may find ourselves in a similar scene as that of the nativity—many different people from many different places united together with joy and praise and harmony to the glory of God our Father.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Monday December 24

Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ *In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, ²⁷ to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."*

²⁹ *Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. ³⁰ But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. ³¹ You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³² He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, ³³ and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."*

³⁴ *"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"*

³⁵ *The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called^[a] the Son of God. ³⁶ Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. ³⁷ For no word from God will ever fail."*

³⁸ *"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." Then the angel left her.*

Matthew 1:23

²³ *"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" (which means "God with us").*

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint "Walk Confidently"

"I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May your word to me be fulfilled." – Luke 1:38

Have you ever thought about what it was like to be the Virgin Mary? To completely surrender your plans and walk confidently into the future, fully trusting God's plan?

Mary sacrificed much to serve God. Before her visit from the angel, her dreams and expectations for the future and her plans for her child were probably very different from what God ultimately had planned. In that moment, she had no idea what her future would hold, but she trusted God and humbly submitted to his will, not out of fear, but out of worship. She trusted God even though the future was unclear and a little scary. Instead of crumbling under the pressure and fear of an uncertain future, she walked forward in faith. She was faithful and brave despite her circumstances. She recognized that her life belonged to God and that God was with her.

I wish I could be more like Mary. She trusted God with the areas of her life that were most precious. She didn't try to bargain with God or demand more information. She didn't even weigh the pros and cons. She followed God without hesitation.

I would like to think I could surrender my life in the same manner, but I tend to try to hang onto control. Why is it our tendency to doubt God in the areas that matter most? Is it that we doubt God's goodness? Or is it that we just don't trust him in times of uncertainty?

What is it in us that keeps us clinging to control instead of completely surrendering? I want to get to the point where I can say without hesitation, "YOUR kingdom come. YOUR will be done."

Peace is something we all seek. When life is uncertain, we want to have something that gives us certainty, something to ground us and make us feel safe. Christ gives us that hope in times of uncertainty, and he gives us the courage to walk confidently into the future—just like Mary did. Because God is with us.

"The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son. They will call him Immanuel" meaning "God with us".

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Tuesday December 25

Isaiah 53:1-5

53 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

² He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

⁴ Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 9:6-7

⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"Born a Zero"

It's finally here . . . Christmas Day! There's a special magic about this most special of days, isn't there? Why is that? Is it because of all the presents, decorations, meals, and gatherings of friends and families? Yes, but there is so much more . . .

It's because today, around the world, we celebrate the birth of a Savior!

According to Isaiah 9:6–7, one would assume the prophet was predicting the birth of an earthly king, complete with fanfare, parades, and feasts! But God had different plans. Jesus, the Messiah, would not be born with the celebration of a hero. He would be born a zero. He was not born of wealth, power, or privilege. He was not even born indoors, but in a barn, surrounded by livestock, to an unwed teenager. He was not born like a king.

Isaiah 53:2–3: "He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we held him in low esteem."

Not a hero. A total zero. But that was the brilliance of God's ultimate gift to us: our Savior's true beauty, strength, and purpose would be made evident through his teaching, compassion, love, and, ultimately, his sacrifice.

Christ came to and existed on earth through the lowliest of means in order to experience our own joys, pains, passions, and sorrows firsthand. It put him on a level playing field with each of us.

So, today, we celebrate the birth of a King—but not any king. The King of Kings, who can truly understand our greatest joys and deepest pains. Something tells me that today, you are experiencing one of those emotions.

Today might be filled with joy. Or today might be the toughest day of the year. But in the eyes of your heavenly Father, you are not a zero and never will be. You are a precious, loved, and cherished child of God, and you were created in his image. YOU are a gift in his eyes, and I pray you find comfort in that truth.

May the peace of Christ be with you today, and Merry Christmas!

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Wednesday December 26

Exodus 3:1-21

3 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. ³ So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

⁴ When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.”

⁵ “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶ Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

⁷ The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. ⁹ And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. ¹⁰ So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

¹² And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

¹³ Moses said to God, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?”

¹⁴ God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.’ ‘This is my name forever, the name you shall call me from generation to generation.

¹⁶ “Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt. ¹⁷ And I have promised to bring you up out of your misery in Egypt into the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites—a land flowing with milk and honey.’

¹⁸ “The elders of Israel will listen to you. Then you and the elders are to go to the king of Egypt and say to him, ‘The LORD, the God of the Hebrews, has met with us. Let us take a three-day journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to the LORD our God.’ ¹⁹ But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless a mighty hand compels him. ²⁰ So I will stretch out my hand and strike the Egyptians with all the wonders that I will perform among them. After that, he will let you go.

²¹ “And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed.

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint "I Am Who I Am"

Though we most often read and say, “The Lord” (from our English Bibles), the original Hebrew translation, Yahweh, literally means “I am.” It’s simple and grand at the same time. It establishes existence but also active presence. One of the first times God describes himself in this way is to Moses after he fled to Egypt. Moses is tending someone else’s flock, uncertain of his future and his ability to ever change his situation. This is a man just like you and me who encountered a personal God who is the one, true “I am.”

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



For many, the holiday season is a time for family and friends to come together and celebrate life. On the flip side, it can also be a time when we are reminded of our loved ones that are no longer here to celebrate with us. Several years ago, I lost my father after a long and painful battle with cancer. At times, I still struggle with my family's loss and the thought that my dad never had peace once he found out he was terminally ill. Not having answers to questions of why and how laced him with fear and bitterness. Now, I have my own set of why and how questions, but I've learned to rest in knowing that Yahweh understands, even when I don't.

He is concerned for us, hears our cries, and has a plan that far outshines our best attempts. Through doubts, heartbreak, and fears, God still says, "I am who I am." He is the comfort you need. He is the guide for which you long. He is the truth for which you search. This holiday season, no matter our situations, we can have joy and peace through Yahweh. The answer to our praises, our cries, our hopes, and our fears is simply "I am."

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Thursday December 27

Matthew 2:1-18

2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem² and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”

3 When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. 5 “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied, “for this is what the prophet has written:

6 “‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’”

7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.”

9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

13 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

14 So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15 where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

16 When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17 Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18 “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

The Magic Of Christmas by Northpoint

"Wisdom from the Wise Men"

My young boys have the well-known Fisher-Price Little People Nativity Set that is ceremoniously brought out with our Christmas decorations each year. It’s an honor to do the initial arranging of this well-loved nativity in our home. It has the usual suspects: Mary, Joseph, baby Jesus, shepherds, cattle, sheep, and the light-up angel.

Then there are the wise men. While the wise men are commonplace in nativities like mine, many believe they were not actually at the scene of Jesus’ birth. Many questions surround the account, yet I still find myself encouraged and challenged by their story. The wise men were led to find and worship the newborn King. They were responding to a calling on their lives.

Am I connected to and abiding in Jesus so that I can hear a calling he has placed on my life? Will I respond?

The wise men were determined to worship the new King. They traveled from the East, perhaps as far away as Yemen or China, with an ultimate destination of Bethlehem. Long before planes, trains, and

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automobiles, their expedition of 1,000+ miles probably took two years. Nothing about the trip was convenient or easy, yet they persevered to worship this infant King.

Am I disciplined and determined in my daily walk with Jesus?

The wise men were overjoyed at the fulfilled promise of a Messiah and didn't second-guess the arrival of a newborn (potentially toddler) king.

Does my joy stop when his plans for me look different than I imagined?

The wise men were intentional with their gifts fit for a king.

What gifts am I bringing to Jesus? Does he get my very best or my leftovers?

The wise men were bold. After receiving a warning in a dream about King Herod, they boldly disobeyed royal commands and, therefore, risked their lives. Herod later issued an edict to murder all babies two years old and younger. I'm certain a death order was placed on the heads of the wise men too.

How can I be bolder in my walk with the Lord? My life is not in danger when I am bold in my faith, so why am I timid?

Thank you, Lord, for the example the wise men left behind. Help me remember their faithful obedience when I see a nativity displayed during this magical season.

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Friday December 28

Psalm 90

- ¹ *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.*
² *Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.*
³ *You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."*
⁴ *A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.*
⁵ *Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning:*
⁶ *In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.*
⁷ *We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.*
⁸ *You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.*
⁹ *All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.*
¹⁰ *Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.*
¹¹ *If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.*
¹² *Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*
¹³ *Relent, LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.*
¹⁴ *Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.*
¹⁵ *Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.*
¹⁶ *May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.*
¹⁷ *May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us— yes, establish the work of our hands.*

1 Thessalonians 4:11

¹¹ *and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you,*

Colossians 3:23

²³ *Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters,*

Practicing The Presence Of God by Drew.

Day 1: Meet Brother Lawrence

Soldier, footman, cook, these were the occupations of Nicholas Herman, known to history as Brother Lawrence. He was the man who taught us, perhaps more than any other, to integrate our work and faith, to chip away at that old barrier between sacred and secular. Lawrence was born into a peasant family during the tumultuous sixteenth century in France. The great turning point of his life came at age twenty-nine when he entered the monastery in Paris. For the next five decades, he quietly pioneered a new way of life, a way of blending daily work with an ongoing conversation with God. He writes,

“We can do little things for God; I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and [when that’s] done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him, who has given

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me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king. It is enough for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God.”

The effect of his fifty-one year experiment, of making his work an offering of love, was a man made humble, simple, and joyful, in short – a saint. *The Practice of the Presence of God*, written by Lawrence, is one of the treasures of Christian devotional writing. It’s a collection of notes, letters, and interviews given by Lawrence that show us how to develop a conversational relationship with God right in the middle of our ordinary life. One of the great ironies of the book is that he never sought to make it public. It was only those closest to him, the ones who experienced the fruit of his practice, that finally made it available to the world. After his death in 1691, they published his story and the workings of his spiritual practice, and since that day, this enduring little book continues to nourish and strengthen those who work through its pages. Brother Lawrence was a mustard seed man, a simple cook who trained for years to hold God in his mind until it became routine, second nature, a holy habit — the mature tree. We can learn to live in his shade, under the strong branches of his life-with-God. With this plan we can make a beginning.

Reflection

1. Have you ever considered inviting God into your workplace, involving Him in the actual work you’re doing? What would it look like? How would it work?
2. What do you hope to learn from this listening plan? What could this spiritual discipline of practicing the presence mean for your life with God?

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Saturday December 29

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

13 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

⁸ Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. ¹¹ When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. ¹² For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. ¹³ And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

John 15:1-5

15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Psalms 119:1-3

¹ Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.

² Blessed are those who keep his statutes and seek him with all their heart—

³ they do no wrong but follow his ways.

Practicing The Presence Of God by Drew.

Day 2: The End of all our Practice

Many of us wake up every Monday through Friday and head to a job for the express purpose of providing for our family and ourselves. We may enjoy the work or we may not, but the ends—supporting the ones we love—justify the means. We work because we love.

Our practices or disciplines of the spiritual life have a similar end, and before we begin exploring the riches of Brother Lawrence’s method of “practicing the presence,” we should take great care to firmly plant in our hearts the ultimate end of all our spiritual striving. This too, would be the first lesson Brother Lawrence would wish to teach because it is the very thing that drove all of his practice.

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In the opening pages of his book Lawrence reveals that our driving pursuit ought to be a resolute love for God. He notes that those who do not advance in spiritual practices most often, “neglect the love of God which is the end.” He goes on to say that what we do, or how we do it is not near as important as “a heart resolutely determined to apply itself to nothing but Him.”

In any spiritual practice, if an ever-deepening devotion to God is not its ultimate aim, then the point of the practice has been missed. In Brother Lawrence’s words we hear echoes of what Paul was communicating to the young and unruly Corinthian church in his first letter to them when he writes, “if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have...but have not love, I gain nothing.” Action, then, that is void of love is worth little in the kingdom of God.

This should not, however, deter us to act. We know down deep that if we do not live the Christian life, we cannot say we really believe it. The good news is that all of our means can be beautiful things when we hold fast to the proper ends. Our spiritual activities, whether they be “practicing the presence” or feeding the homeless, can be a fragrant aroma to God and inwardly and outwardly fruitful—when the motivations of our heart are fixed on Him. Recall Jesus’s words to his disciples: “As the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.” Christ goes on to say that, “whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

God is our great end. That is the lesson Lawrence teaches. But he would also be eager to teach us that God is equally our means: “This King, full of mercy and goodness, very far from chastening me, embraces me with love, invites me to feast at his table, serves me with his own hands, and gives me the key to his treasures. He converses with me, and takes delight in me, and treats me as if I were his favorite.”

Let Lawrence’s words soak in. Our ever-present King embraces us, invites us, serves us, converses with us, takes delight in us, and gives us grace upon grace. In other words, our heavenly Father pours out means upon immeasurable means. The result? Our spirits soar. Thus, we not only live for him, we live from him. For man, God is both his end and means. The proper end of all our practice is a deep, abiding love of the Father. And he who began a good work in us will be sure to complete it.

Reflection

1. Life is full of competing ends. Where does God stack up among your list? Is He ultimate in your heart?
2. How have you felt God’s presence in a previous spiritual practice? Chronicle that experience by writing it in your journal.

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Sunday December 30

Psalm 139

- ¹ *You have searched me, LORD, and you know me.*
² *You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.*
³ *You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.*
⁴ *Before a word is on my tongue, you, LORD, know it completely.*
⁵ *You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.*
⁶ *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.*
⁷ *Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*
⁸ *If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.*
⁹ *If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,*
¹⁰ *even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.*
¹¹ *If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me,"*
¹² *even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.*
¹³ *For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.*
¹⁴ *I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*
¹⁵ *My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place,*
when I was woven together in the depths of the earth.
¹⁶ *Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.*
¹⁷ *How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them!*
¹⁸ *Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.*
¹⁹ *If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!*
²⁰ *They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.*
²¹ *Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you?*
²² *I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.*
²³ *Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.*
²⁴ *See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

Practicing The Presence Of God by Drew.

Day 3: Practicing His Presence

How do we make a start in practicing the presence of God? Let's take it in three steps:

Recognize God Is Already Present

The first step is to recognize that God is already present where we are. Remember the story of Jesus walking to Emmaus with two of his disciples? He was present among them but they didn't recognize Him. Have we recognized Him? Have we acknowledged that He's already with us? Brother Lawrence helps us see this when he writes:

“All we have to do is to recognize God as being intimately present within us. Then we may speak directly to Him every time we need to ask for help, to know His will in moments of uncertainty, and to do

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whatever He wants us to do in a way that pleases Him. We should offer our work to Him before we begin and thank Him afterward for the privilege of having done it for His sake.”

Before we begin our next work day, perhaps we could write out the following prayer, offered by Lawrence, and place it in the path of our work.

“My God, since You are with me and since, by Your will, I must occupy myself with external things, please grant me the grace to remain with You, in Your presence.”

Name Our Pots And Pans

How do we spend our days? What’s in our hands? For Brother Lawrence, he spent his time in a kitchen preparing meals and cleaning pots and pans. What are our pots and pans? What is the work that’s right in front of us, for God wants to work with us. Brother Lawrence writes:

Lord of all pots and pans and things, since I've no time to be a great saint by doing lovely things ...make me a saint by getting meals, and washing up the plates. Warm all the kitchen with Thy Love, and light it with Thy peace; forgive me all my worrying, and make my grumbling cease. Thou who didst love to give men food, in room, or by the sea, accept the service that I do, I do it unto Thee. Amen.

It is in the details, the nuts and bolts, the ins and outs, where God truly wants to work with us. The second step in practicing the presence of God is to claim our work for God, to acknowledge He wants to work with us, whether that’s selling cars, writing code, keeping children, or building homes. It’s in our actual work, the menial and the momentous, that God uses to shape us more and more into the image of His Son.

Speak To God Continually Throughout Your Day

The final step is simple and at the same time difficult: we have a continuous conversation with God as we move through our day. It’s simple because we’re used to making conversation, we do it everyday. It’s difficult because, on the whole, we’ve not been taught to chat with God as intimately as a friend and co-worker. Brother Lawrence writes,

“During my work, I would always continue to speak to the Lord as though He were right with me, offering Him my services and thanking Him for His assistance. Also, at the end of my work, I used to examine it carefully. If I found good in it, I thanked God. If I noticed faults, I asked His forgiveness without being discouraged, and then went on with my work, still dwelling in Him.”

Reflection

To help us build this practice of a continuous conversation with God, there are a couple triggers we can use:

1. If any good thing, large or small, happens in our day we can immediately, right where we are, thank God for it. We can say it out loud, quietly under our breath, or if we’re in the middle of a conversation we can think it in our minds.
2. If anything unpleasant happens in our day, ask God what he may be wanting to show us. Is there something in us that He wants to change or transform?

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Monday December 31

Luke 9:18-27

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say I am?”

¹⁹ They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life.”

²⁰ “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”

²¹ Jesus strictly warned them not to tell this to anyone. ²² And he said, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.”

²³ Then he said to them all: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. ²⁵ What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? ²⁶ Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.

²⁷ “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

Hebrews 12:11

¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Practicing The Presence Of God by Drew.

Day 4: Meeting the Resistance

If you’ve begun making a preliminary go of practicing His presence, then it’s likely that you’ve already run into that oppositional force called resistance. It can take on the form of an unvanquishable foe, stopping us cold, and causing us to question the feasibility of developing a perpetual conversation with Father, Son, and Spirit. Of course, Brother Lawrence was no stranger to this peculiar enemy, and his writings offer up key insights that can help us repel it.

Know Your Enemy

The first insight is this. We must come to grips with just who the enemy is. Brother Lawrence keenly observed that resistance does not come from outside ourselves, but originates from within. He writes: “Do not be discouraged by the resistance you will encounter from your human nature; you must go against your human inclinations.

In other words, Lawrence is telling us that we should prepare to battle our own self-defeating thoughts, feelings, and habits, when attempting to permanently establish a continual conversation with God. We know that even after receiving Christ, there will still be lingering factions at war in our interior. We “still have a little bit of the world in us” as Lawrence writes elsewhere. It turns out then that resistance really arises from the “sin

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within our members.” How miserable! Our own sinful human nature works against us. What is the solution? Jesus Christ! He is the one who is capable of fully freeing us. But how? By embracing the obstacle that our Savior has set before us.

Embrace the Obstacle

Brother Lawrence observed that if we are to think often on God by day and night, we must: “Continually live and die with Him. This is the glorious employment of a Christian...this is our profession.” In other words, Lawrence exhorts us to take up our cross and follow Jesus in his manner of dying and rising. Now cross-bearing is undoubtedly the great paradox of the Christian life. When one reads in entirety the good news story, the first thing one has to indeed grapple with is the conundrum of the cross. Even Jesus’ disciples couldn’t fathom that this obstacle that looked so very much like a dead end, was, in fact, the way of redemption, salvation, and eternal life. The very impediment that stood in the way of the Son of God was the way. Isn’t ironic? The cross—that thing our sinful human nature so often tries to avoid—is the very thing that will lead us to liberation. Christ says as much when he declares, “if anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily...whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”

The key then is to embrace the cross, that instrument by which we repel the undercurrent of sinful tendencies in the body that so manifests itself in the form of resistance. We’re not alone in this endeavor though. Far from it. The Holy Spirit is with us in all of the trying moments, taking our simple effort and accomplishing infinitely more than we could imagine. Brother Lawrence notes:

“Comfort yourself with him who holds you fastened to the cross. He will loose you when he thinks fit. Happy [are] those who suffer with Him.”

We therefore gladly persevere through the resistance that arises when we take up the practice of the presence of God. When we meet it, we count it as joy, and lean heavily into the Spirit. As we act, we do so for the love of God. Responding to our faith (demonstrated in our action), He performs the heavy lifting of routing the enemy within by reshaping us into the image of Christ. Lawrence concurs, reminding us that all our victories “are to be attributed to the mercy and goodness of God, because we can do nothing without Him.”

Reflection

1. Resistance can express itself in many different ways. Procrastination and rationalization are two common manifestations. How does it most often present itself to you?
2. We know that Christ died for us on the cross, so why does He ask us to take up our own and follow Him? Is the idea of personal cross-bearing a shift in mindset for you?

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Tuesday January 1

John 17:20-26

²⁰ Jesus prayed, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³ I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

²⁴ “Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.

²⁵ “Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.”

2 Corinthians 3:18

¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Practicing The Presence Of God by Drew.

Day 5: Second Nature

We’ve uncovered quite a lot from this enduring book. Brother Lawrence has not only given us the practice, but the vision of what our life with God can become. One almost gets the sense, as we read over his words, that he recovered that Edenic spirit, that divine friendship of God and Adam in the Garden. Perhaps that’s the foremost result of this spiritual practice, it carries us home, to the Garden, to God.

All of this reverberates with glory, but we must say with all the frankness we can muster, that the practice of the presence of God, like all spiritual practices, takes a long obedience in the same direction. It takes time, diligence, and a holy grit. It’s natural to romanticize the spiritual life, to reduce the struggle and ignore the stamina required for the journey – to whitewash the cross and all its agony – to try and set up resurrection as the wall-to-wall experience in the life of faith. But Brother Lawrence won’t let us get away with that, he says: “When I finally reached a point where I wanted to quit...”

There’s some real honesty. Even the humble cook wanted to throw in the towel, to abandon the practice, to be done with it all – but he didn’t. He persevered. Patience, on the spiritual journey, never fails. Here’s the full excerpt with the result of his persistence,

“When I finally reached a point where I wanted to quit, I found myself changed all at once. In my soul, which until that time was in distress, I suddenly felt a profound inward peace as if it were in its true place of rest. Ever since that time I have walked before God in simple faith, with humility and with love.” Practicing His presence is a process that takes years not weeks or months. All that is required, is to persevere. If we do, we’ll come to see the fruit that Lawrence found. He writes:

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“...when we are faithful in keeping ourselves in his holy presence, keeping him always before us...it brings to us a holy freedom, and if I may say so, a familiarity with God wherein we may ask and receive the graces we are so desperately in need of. In short, by often repeating these acts they become habitual, and the presence of God becomes something that comes naturally to us.”

As we move through the weeks and months and years, building this conversational relationship with God, it will slowly develop into habit, meaning we'll do it instinctively, without thinking. Whenever we leave our home for an evening walk, we don't think about the process of walking, of keeping one foot in front of the other or swinging our arms back and forth. We do all these things by habit. It's second nature. We just step over the threshold and make our way. We don't fret about mechanics, we simply enjoy the stroll.

This is what the fruit of our practice and the grace of God can produce. It becomes less and less about what am I supposed to be doing or saying or praying, and more about enjoying our conversation with God. There's a sense of oneness and with-ness. We work, God works. He speaks, I listen. I speak, He listens. Could there be any greater outcome of a spiritual practice? Now you see why this little book has persisted for the last four hundred years. It's an invitation to the with-God life. The life that Brother Lawrence persevered to acquire. Here's how he put it towards the end of his life:

“As for what happens to me these days, I cannot express it. I no longer have any pain or difficulty because I have no will except that of God's, which I endeavor to do in all things....I make it my business only to persevere in his holy presence wherein I keep myself by a simple attention and a general fond regard to God, which I refer to as an actual presence of God. Or, to put it another way, an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God.”

Who can we hope to become? We can become like Christ. What we find so attractive about Brother Lawrence's life, what draws us in, what we've admired and even longed for as we read, is the Christ life inside him. Was it not Jesus who pioneered and perfected the practice of the presence of God? Listen to what He said, “Father, I thank you that you heard me. I know that you always hear me.” Or “the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing.” Or “I and the Father are one.” This is the Christ life. The union of God and man. The recovery of what was lost in the Garden. This is the life that Brother Lawrence points to. Practicing the presence of God, is practicing to become like Christ. Let us now move forward and in the words of the Apostle Paul, press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of us.

Reflection

1. As you worked through this plan, what is the one insight about Brother Lawrence's life that has helped you most?
2. What would your life look like if you formed this spiritual discipline? What dispositions, emotions, and actions would naturally become yours?

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Wednesday January 2

Isaiah 43:15-19

*Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea
And a path through the mighty waters,
Who brings forth the chariot and horse, The army and the power
(They shall lie down together, they shall not rise; They are extinguished, they are quenched like a wick):
“Do not remember the former things, Nor consider the things of old.
Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth;
Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert.*

New Roads – New Rivers by Bryan Houston

BEHOLD I do a New thing! That was the declarative word spoken by God to His people in Isaiah 43. He spoke a faith-path out of their seventy-year captivity into liberation and redemption. God was calling His people out from the old and into the new. He was calling things that were not as though they had already happened. As far as God was concerned, it was already a done deal.

Behold. It actually means to stand in awe and be amazed – WOW! Why did God say this? His announcement was a statement of His character- Redeemer. In fact, in the same breath, God was also announcing hope for humanity through Jesus Christ, and the grace of the Gospel.

Today, I believe the Lord is saying to His people, “BEHOLD! I am doing a new thing.” He is calling us to come up and out of the ordinary and rise above our limits. He is asking us to SEE and RESPOND to His hand of preparation in our lives and in the Church - His Bride.

Are you expecting God to do a new thing in your life? That may seem overwhelming when you consider your present circumstances but take courage - God has made a way, a road to lead you with rivers of provision and refreshing. *If anyone thirsts, let him COME to me and drink. Rivers of living water will brim and spill out of the depths of anyone who believes in me this way, just as the Scripture says. – John 7:38 (MSG)*

So much is on the horizon, so much lies ahead. Taste and see what God is doing in your life, your church, across the world and be amazed.

Prayer:

Father God, thank You for going ahead of me to plan the path for my life. Help me to expect something new, and I ask for the wisdom to respond rather than react to Your guidance. I choose to acknowledge and be thankful for your rivers of provision along the way.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Thursday January 3

Galatians 3:15-28

¹⁵ Brothers and sisters, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. ¹⁶ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. ¹⁷ What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. ¹⁹ Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. ²⁰ A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. ²¹ Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. ²² But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. ²³ Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up until the faith that was to come would be revealed. ²⁴ So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. ²⁵ Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian. ²⁶ So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, ²⁷ for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:13-14

¹³ Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

New Roads – New Rivers by Bryan Houston

God made three amazing declarations to His people in the passage from Isaiah 43 we looked at yesterday –

"I am the Lord, your Holy One, The Creator of Israel, your King."

"Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters... Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old."

1. I've Got This

Verse 15 says, “I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.” Before He made His promise, God declared His ultimate title – I AM. Immediately He followed that up with four others: Lord, Holy One, Creator and King.

He is your Lord. He is your Holy One, He is your Creator and He is your King. He is well able!

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



What do you believe Him for in the second half of this year? Can you see it in your heart and in your mind's eye? God has got it. You can trust Him. Are you going to release your faith and take hold of His promises for your life?

2. I've Done it Before

Verse 16, "Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea and a path through the mighty waters..." God reminds us that He makes a way, a path through the impassable. Why is He reminding us? He is stating His qualifications to handle the dreams and desires of your heart. God wants to reassure you that you can trust Him.

The question is: Do you believe it?

3. I'm Going to do it Again

Verse 18, "Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old."

Do not remember the disappointments, regrets or losses of the past. It's far too easy to allow sentiment to erode your significance. Significance is about the future and all that is ahead, but sentiment is about the former things. If you are the kind of person who looks back, remember, your significance is in what is ahead of you, not what is behind you. God says He is going to do a new thing. "Now it will spring forth." Do you expect God to do a new thing in your life? Are you looking ahead to where it is? The new thing is not behind you but in front of you.

Prayer:

You are my Lord, my Holy One, my Creator and the King of my life. I choose to put my trust in You. Holy Spirit, remind me not to look back at the things that have been, but to fix the eyes of my heart on the new thing You have planned for me in the future.

Keep the Christmas spirit all year



Friday January 4

Jeremiah 29:10-14

¹⁰ *This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. ¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back from captivity. I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the LORD, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.”*

John 14:12

¹² *Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.*

New Roads – New Rivers by Bryan Houston

*Behold, I will do a new thing, Now it shall spring forth; Shall you not know it?
I will even make a road in the wilderness And rivers in the desert. (Isaiah 43:19)*

When God makes a declaration, there is often a challenge connected with it. And the challenge usually boils down to this: Will you believe it? In this passage from Isaiah 43, God’s challenge to Israel and to us today is: Can you believe I will do this for you?

1. Can you lay hold of it?

As followers of Christ, we are called to lift our beliefs above what we see with our natural eyes to what God declares in His Word to be truth.

That means that when your child is sick, you lift your belief above the fact that they are ill and onto the truth that they are already healed by the stripes that Jesus took on the cross. (Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24) It means when your wallet is empty or you cannot pay your bills, you lay hold of the truth declared in Philippians 4:19 that, “My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” It means when the desires of your heart appear impossible, you lay hold of His promise in Psalm 37:4 to give them to you.

2 Corinthians 5:7 sums it up – “For we walk by faith, not by sight.” To embrace all that God has planned for your life, you must lay hold of His promise to make a way for you through the wilderness and valleys.

2. Shall you not know it?

God speaks into our future just as He did to Israel and Judah’s future. Exodus 14:3 says that, “[Israel] were cornered in the wilderness” and at that point, God brought His people to an impassable place as they saw

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Pharaoh's armies approaching. There was no way forward, no way back and no way through. They were cornered. Then, when God told Moses to lift up his rod, the people could not see ahead to where they were going. Yet God provided a way.

Sometimes life feels like that. Many years ago, when Bobbie and I first came to Sydney, we had no clue what God would do, or what was ahead. All we had to go on were God's promises and the dreams of our heart. The call of God is truly an adventure, with plenty of challenges and not much idea of what lies ahead, other than the fact that He has promised us it is going to be good! So we need to settle in our hearts that it is a journey navigated by faith – not by sight. Remember – wherever God leads you, He provides the way for you to reach your destination.

Prayer:

Father, I know that Your Word is the truth and that it overrides the facts that I face from day to day. I choose to lay hold of all that You have promised concerning the dreams and desires of my heart, and by faith I will see them unfold.

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Saturday January 5

John 7:37-41

³⁷ *On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." ³⁹ By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.*

⁴⁰ *On hearing his words, some of the people said, "Surely this man is the Prophet."*

⁴¹ *Others said, "He is the Messiah."*

New Roads – New Rivers by Bryan Houston

It's a common but true metaphor that life is a journey... A journey we take along the roads and seasons of growth, opportunity and experience. These roads of life are rarely straight, flat and wide like a runway – at least not for very long!

Proverbs 15:24 says, "The way of life winds upwards for the wise." That image makes me think of a winding road that leads up to a mountain peak; you can't see very far ahead because the road bends and twists with steep and narrow paths. At times you need to stop for rest in order to regain the strength to continue. The road is for 'the wise' who understand that their life has a purpose that unfolds along the way. And the higher you go, the better your perspective! Remember - the view at the top is magnificent!

Oftentimes, an upward winding road follows the path of a river. In God's economy, where there are roads there are rivers - with God's purpose comes His provision.

Think about roads that lead upward to Heaven's purpose and rivers that flow downwards with Heaven's provision - new roads winding upwards, new rivers flowing downwards.

The Bible has a lot to say about rivers. In John 7 Jesus declared, *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."*

Ezekiel 47 speaks of rivers that flow from the temple bringing life to everything as they wind their way into the Dead Sea. Just like those rivers, I love the thought that life and healing flow from God's House in Jesus' name.

Micah 4 paints a picture of a river of people flowing into the temple. What an awesome dichotomy that is when it comes to the House of God. We believe for people to flow into the temple and for life to flow out of the temple.

A life in Christ has new roads of purpose and vision, and new rivers of life and provision along the way. Roads of faith always lead to rivers of blessing.

I pray that our lives and our churches will be a roadmap of His faithfulness and the source of life and healing to others.

If the entire gospel message were concentrated into a single passage, perhaps the final paragraphs of the Bible best bring it into glorious perspective –

The Spirit and the bride say, "COME!" And let the one who hears say, "Come!" Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life.- Revelation 22:17 (NIV)

Prayer:

Lord, may my life be a portrait of Your goodness, a source of hope and encouragement to others, and a channel of life and healing to the world - in Jesus' name.

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Sunday January 6

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

¹¹ Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. ¹² We are not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart. ¹³ If we are “out of our mind,” as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴ For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin^[b] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

New Roads – New Rivers by Bryan Houston

This year, I believe God is declaring over your life: “Behold, stand in awe and be amazed. God is going to give you a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.” Can you see something new and miraculous in your life? Do you believe it? Do you expect it? Can you lay hold of it? Shall you not know it?

The big question is: What is in you? What is in you right now? It’s invisible and it’s unexplainable but it is born of God, and the day is coming when it will spring up because God knows about it and declares it before it springs up.

2 Corinthians 5:17 testifies of the new thing that God has begun and is doing - Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

Don’t underestimate the amazing things God has placed in you and what they can become when they spring forth. What are you beholding? The truth is that we become what we behold. If you are looking fully into His face, then that is where the new and miraculous – the WOW - is going to come from. That is the place from where your ‘stand in awe and be amazed’ moments will come.

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18). We are being changed from glory to glory.

In your life, expect new roads of opportunity, new possibilities, unusual miracles, new horizons, pioneering again, places yet untouched. I believe God is opening up new heights from where you will have an amazing perspective. What you can conceive and believe, you can achieve.

What is God doing across the earth right now? Do you want to be a part of it? Today is the day of the new road and the new river for your life. It is time to step into all the promises of God for you, trust in His ability to bring them to pass and - GO change your world!

Prayer:

Today I make the decision to behold Your face as I look to the future. Holy Spirit, I ask for the courage to represent Jesus to the world in all truth. I trust You to do new things in and through my life, and I pray that countless lives will be rescued and transformed through Your Church of which I am a part - in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.