Introduction
When I was in my early twenties, I had the opportunity to do missionary work in Northern Ireland. It was an unbelievable experience that produced countless cherished memories. During my time in Northern Ireland, I had the good fortune of meeting a small but mighty man from England by the name of John Moxen. John had dedicated his life to furthering God’s kingdom in the small village of Dundrum, Northern Ireland, and it would be hard to calculate the number of lives he has touched. Among other things, John was known for his catchphrases. John had several repeatable phrases that he would say Ad Nauseam in order to help him keep his heart and mind focused on Christ. The one I will never forget was his most repeated phrase: No Bible no breakfast. No Bible no bed. Like many faithful believers that came before him, John had learned the immense power to be unlocked when we begin and end our days by aligning our hearts and minds to the word of God.
Over the next twenty-eight days, we will prepare ourselves for the celebration of Christ’s coming to earth that we know as Christmas. Liturgical calendars have traditionally called this period of time the Advent which simply translates from Latin to mean: Arriving. It’s the commemoration of Christ’s arrival on earth but those who have found hope in Christ know that this means more than that. It is not simply Christ’s physical birth that we commemorate. Advent is our opportunity to be reminded of how Christ has come and taken residence in our own hearts. This season of anticipation reminds us that we need not wait for hope. Hope is here.
So, each day of this devotional will aid us in building our sense of anticipation and celebration of that hope while also heeding John Moxen’s sage advice. You will find for each day of Advent a morning passage and devotional as well as an evening passage and devotional. May this journey ensure that for the coming weeks our waking up and our lying down are firmly anchored in the hope of the world and the word of God.
Before Breakfast: Read Isaiah 2:1-5
I grew up on a plot of land in rural central Kentucky that was surrounded by much larger farms. Most of those farms had converted to cattle or horse farms but a few still represented what that area was once known for tobacco farms. My neighbor was one of those few remaining tobacco farmers and I remember as a kid sneaking into his fields and scouring the ground for left-behind tobacco sticks. Why? Because they made fantastic swords. I had a vast collection of these former agriculture tools that now served as my means of defending myself against pirates, dragons, and the occasional stormtrooper. Isaiah prepared God’s people for a day when no longer would they invest their time and resources into crafting weapons with the intent of defending themselves against attack. These weapons would no longer be necessary. Instead, the weapons they did have would be converted into farming equipment. Though the world Isaiah points to may have seemed less exciting to a boy with an over-active imagination I think we can all agree that a world marked by complete and lasting peace is a desirable dream. However, the picture Isaiah paints is bigger than a dream. It’s far from a fantasy. It is the inevitable conclusion of God’s quest to vanquish darkness and unleash hope for everyone. That hope has a name: Jesus Christ. And He is the prince of peace.

Consider: Where do you need peace, today? What aspect of your life needs to move from war and into the calming presence of Christ?

Before Bed: Read Romans 13:11-14
Christ’s return is closer today than it was yesterday. Heaven is closer today than it was yesterday. And should the Lord bless us with another day then tomorrow this will be even more true. This is an interesting concept to consider and the direction in which Paul slants this conversation is a convicting one. As heaven rapidly approaches we must consider, do we look more like Christ today than we did yesterday? What desires of the flesh must be starved of gratification as we await Christ Jesus?
Before Breakfast: Psalm 124
I almost got bitten by a rattlesnake when I was four years old. Here's the story. We were visiting my grandmother in Kansas City. I was running around barefoot, as one from Jessamine County does, and I stepped right on the thing. It did its best attempt to bite my foot but to its dismay, it had coiled around the base of a bush and couldn’t lunge far enough to strike me. As a four-year-old, I didn’t think much about this but looking back it’s easy to see how fortunate I was that the bush was there and it’s terrifying to imagine what might have happened if it hadn’t been there. David is experiencing a similar sentiment as he reflects back on the work of the Lord. He’s also introducing a good practice for us to mimic. One of the best ways to foster excitement for what is to come is to look backward and grow in appreciation for what God has already done.

*Consider: What is your “if the Lord had not been on your side” memory?*

Before Bed: Romans 6:1-11
God’s faithfulness is not the only thing we see when we look backward. Much of our past is also riddled with our personal failures and defeats. It’s great when our celebration of God’s goodness can drown out the shame of our failures, but we all know that's easier said than done. Our enemy has a knack for rubbing our noses in our mistakes and that shame can weigh heavy. This is why the dead/alive imagery in scripture is so powerful. Christ died to atone for all the sin that ever has happened and ever will happen. Christ is alive and has invited you to enjoy that life with him free from sin’s harassment. This means that we can look back triumphantly like David taught us this morning but also looked forward with confidence that His grace is enough. So may we sleep tonight on the prayer that we would wake up tomorrow with a sense of determination to run after Christ and refuse to be held back by sin.
Tuesday, November 29, 2022

Before Breakfast: Genesis 9:1-17
I’m sure Noah and his family were very relieved to hear that the flood they had just survived would not be returning. As comforting as that notion is it’s not the important part of the covenant that God is describing. In Noah’s context, the dry ground was the root of this promise; but for us, who hold a greater context, we know this covenant carries eternal significance. We know it points to more than receding waters. We know rainbows mean more than tempered rainfall. What God was pointing to that day was a greater vessel than the ark. He was pointing to Christ. The ultimate sign of God’s love and mercy. Today, in the shadow of the cross of Christ Jesus and in anticipation of His future return we can hold tightly to signs like rainbows as promises of our future and hope in Christ.

Consider: In what storms of life do you need to cling to the promise of the rainbow? Where do you need a reminder of hope today?

Before Bed: Hebrews 11:32-40
What are you excited to ask the heroes of our faith? Have you ever thought about this? I have. I can’t wait to ask Gideon about his battles. I can’t wait to hear David tell the story of Goliath. I can’t wait to hear Daniel recount the lion’s den. As excited as I am to meet and hear the wild stories of these heroes it’s fascinating to consider these words by the writer of Hebrews. Ultimately, what they are suggesting is that despite how enamored we are with the heroes of old those same heroes are going to be enamored with us. Why? Because we have the good fortune to live on this side of the cross. The heroes of the Old Testament all longed for and worked toward a reality that we get to live every day. Let that soak in tonight as you continue to be reminded of the hope of Christ. May the power of His presence never be lost on us.
Before Breakfast: Isaiah 54:1-10
One year I received a new bike for Christmas. It was red, with big knobby off-road tires, and it was spectacular. I never fessed up, but I knew the bike was coming. I spotted it a few weeks before Christmas. I remember the overwhelming anticipation growing from the time I first saw the bike until Christmas morning when I finally got to ride it. I would lay in bed and think about that bike. It was already in my home. I knew it would soon be ridden, and it was already bringing joy yet still I had to wait. My countdown to Christmas was very different that year. It was a daily attempt to remind myself that I would be on my bike soon.

Through the prophet Isaiah God continued to push His people's attention forward beyond their present circumstances and on to the hope of what is to come. We live in a reality in which we have seen the face of that hope, Christ Jesus. Yet still, we wait. We wait for the day when Christ calls us home. Out of His compassion, the Lord renews His promise daily that we will not wait in vain.

Consider: What is the hardest aspect of a season of waiting?

As a boy, I wanted a red bike with knobby tires. The wait was excruciating. Though I wasn't interested in a scooter or rollerblades I have to wonder what may have happened in my young mind if they were offered as a means of instant gratification. Would I have held strong and continued to wait for the true prize? Christ reminds His disciples of the adamant need for patience as we await Him. Do not settle for counterfeits. May we rest tonight on our future hope and may God continue to build a resolute commitment to patience.
Before Breakfast: Isaiah 4:2-6

This passage carries three powerful images: cleansing, fire, and shelter. When I was in high school, my friends and I established a back-country campsite near the Kentucky River. It was several hundred yards off a back country road and up a very steep ridgeline. At the top of the ridge was a flat area with a large rock formation against which we built a fire pit. We kept several tarps up there that we would store in dry bags and we had anchored tie-offs in several trees so that we could make a vast canopy of tarps. It was a camping paradise. When you camp like this there are several things you come to appreciate very deeply. The fire was a major resource. The closest street light was several miles away, and the stars were mostly blocked by the trees. The fire was our only source of light and the only way finder we had in the midst of a dark night. The tarps kept us dry in the rain and helped us avoid twigs falling on us as we slept. And there was nothing I appreciated more after a few nights of camping like this than a nice hot shower to wash it all off. These images draw up many fond memories for me. The people of God are drawing on far more than adolescent camping trips when they reflect on these things. The cleansing power of the gospel, the flame of the Lord’s presence, and the shelter of His loving care are far greater than any campsite could ever boast.

**Consider:** In your life, where have you seen evidence of God’s cleansing, leading, and care?

Before Bed: Psalm 72:1-7

It may be hard to equate rain to refreshment in the month of December. This time of year rain tends to feel dreary, and cold and it stands as a reminder that the gray days of winter stand before us. So allow your mind to drift to summer for a moment. A hot July afternoon. The ground is parched and dry. The clouds roll in and a steady soaking rain begins to fall. Perhaps you are on a porch, with a cold drink, and a good book. I don’t know about you but I could sit right there all day long. That’s the picture Psalm 72 paints. A day when the soaking rain of Christ’s presence falls and does not bring with it an ounce of dreariness. It brings renewal. It brings grace. It brings sweet rest. May our minds drift to that warm afternoon as we fall asleep.
Before Breakfast: Isaiah 30:19-26
One of my favorite places is Mammoth Cave. I think it is truly fascinating. If you have ever done a tour then you have experienced the moment where deep underground your guide turns off all the lights and you experience the caves as they truly are. Spoiler alert: they are really dark. That moment is pretty crazy but the fact of the matter the entire time you are underground there isn’t that much light. It’s mainly flashlights and small lanterns but the longer the tour the more you get used to the dim lighting. So much so in fact that it takes quite a while for your eyes to readjust once you come back to the surface. The sun seems at least seven times brighter against the contrast of complete darkness. So will be the day that Christ comes back. With all darkness finally vanquished, the light will shine brighter than you or I can fully comprehend. For a moment, we’ll likely have to shield our eyes. What’s before us will simply be too wonderful for us. But He will draw close to us. He will teach us how to adjust to this new reality. And soon we will be able to take in the full presence of His radiant light.

Consider: As you imagine a day without pain, sadness, or sickness what do you specifically look forward to the most? What can you not wait to experience in the healing presence of Christ?

John the Baptist spent his entire life pointing to Christ. Let that sink in for a moment. From the time that he was in the womb to the moment of his last breath, there was a very clear and very spoken calling on his life. To prepare the way of Christ. What I appreciate most about John is his humility. He never viewed himself as being special, and Paul gives a good indication as to why in this passage. John knew that he was just a part of the story. He wasn’t the star. He was entrusted with picking up the work of so many that had gone before him. John was entrusted to pave the way for Christ’s first coming. And now we have been entrusted to help pave the way for the second coming. We, like John, get to point to Christ each and every day so that the people around us can make themselves ready. We long for the day that we get to stand in the radiant light of Christ but who do you hope to lead out of the darkness in order to join you there? Pray for that person by name now as you drift off to sleep.
Before Breakfast: Isaiah 40:1-11
Isaiah speaks of a King who comes in power and rules with a mighty hand and in the same breath speaks of that King as a loving shepherd who tenderly cares for His sheep. To put it simply, the Lord is unimaginably strong. Capable of overpowering absolutely any threat or form of resistance. The Lord is capable of absolutely crushing His enemies. Yet, the Lord is soft and tender towards His children. Toward those He loves the Lord is gentle, calm, and full of peace. It’s an incredible contrast and one in which we are wise to dwell and contemplate.
That’s why heroes of our faith went to the lengths they did to pave the path that Isaiah is describing. So that our weary eyes could rest on Christ. And so that in Him we might see the full character of God the Father. Mighty to save and quick to extend compassion to broken creatures like us.

Consider: Where do you need to be reminded of God’s power today? Where do you need to be reminded of His compassion?

Before Bed: John 1:19-28
Hopefully, you have already realized this but the heroes of our faith that paved the path by which our eyes would land on Christ are not the only ones that carry that responsibility. It’s entrusted to us. If you know Christ, you have been called to also make Him known to others. Often we refer to this as a “witness” or “evangelism” and both tend to carry heavy and intimidating connotations for most folks. Let me take the pressure off. Your only job is to do exactly what John did. Point. It doesn’t take a grand speech or endless theological knowledge. It takes a willingness to know Christ yourself and then simply point at Him for other people. So as you give in to sleep tonight, ask yourself, how does my life point to Christ?
Before Breakfast: Isaiah 11:1-10
Many daily reading plans follow a similar rhythm. As they work through a calendar week often one day (typically Saturday or Sunday) is somewhat set apart. Some plans even refer to this unique day as “Grace Day.” We will be taking a similar approach. Sunday (the day of our gatherings) is to be a day of rest and reflection. I would highly recommend that you work your way back through the readings and considerations from throughout this past week. Rest in these truths and personal observations and allow the powerful hand of God to do the tender work of a shepherd in your heart. Breathe in His presence and allow Him to build your anticipation of heaven.

Before Bed: Matthew 11:25-30
We will use this passage each Sunday evening. I would encourage you to devote this season to memorizing it. Use it as a prayer. Perhaps even say it aloud before falling asleep.