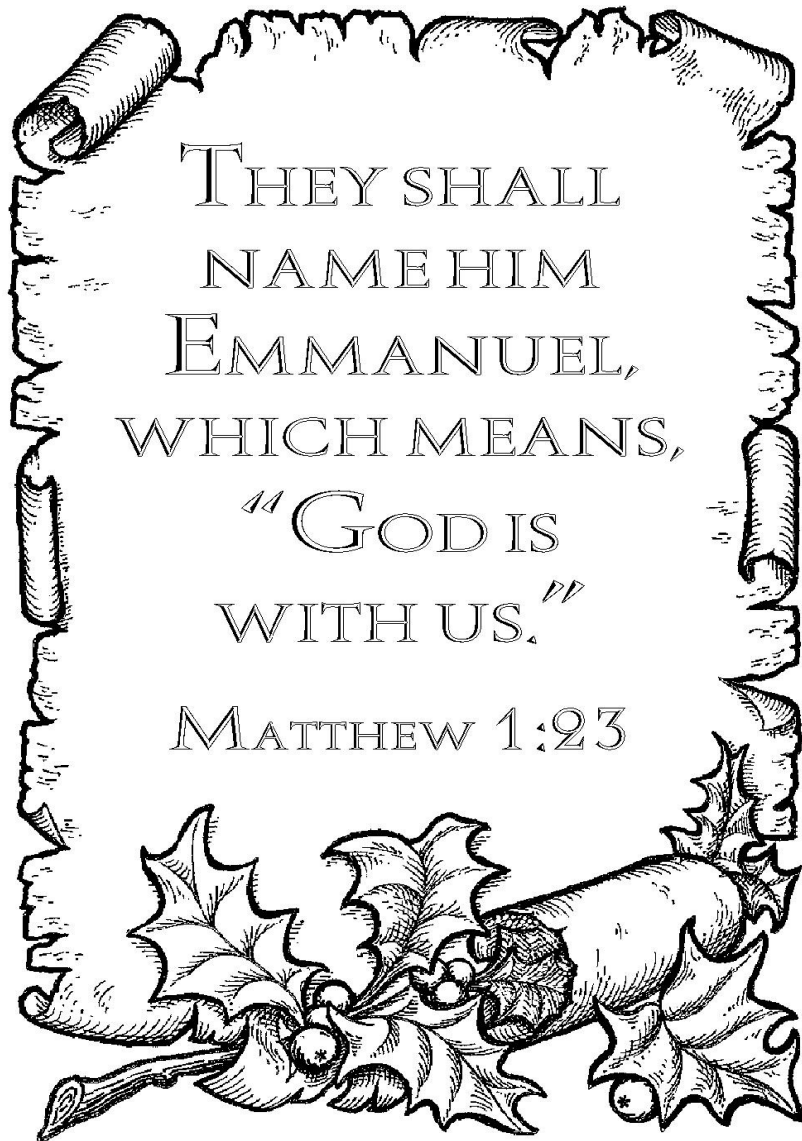


Devotions for Advent 2020

Cornerstone Community Church
Grand Marais, MN



Brought to you for God's glory
and with our hope for your eternal joy!

Devotions for Advent 2020

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The Critical Question

At some point, in every crisis, someone will ask, “Where is God in this?” It rarely fails. When we are faced with a challenge that elicits fear or anxiety or anger or pain or suffering or sorrow, which many personal crises do, we want to know what role God has in those events that lead to our discomfort.

Usually, in my experience, the question is not, “God, what are you doing for your glory and our good in this situation?” More often the intent of the question is to challenge God’s absence, for surely, if He were present and active, our circumstances would be pleasant and without challenge or pain. After all, “God is great and God is good, let us thank Him . . .,” right?! So, if our situation doesn’t feel good to us, then God must be absent. Isn’t that the argument we make?

The nation of Judah was under threat of invasion. The king was anxious for himself and his kingdom. God sent the prophet with a message of hope, that God Himself would deal with the threat. He even invited the king to ask for a sign of God’s promise. The king, thinking himself wiser than God, declined, so God gave the king a sign of His own: *The virgin will conceive and bear a son, and shall call him name Immanuel.* Immanuel means, “God with us.”

Immanuel is the name God gave Joseph to give to Jesus. God appeared to Joseph in a dream, informed him about the nature of Mary’s baby, and told him the child would fulfill the promise God made to an ancient king. Jesus is the sign that God keeps His promises to His people, that God is present with His people.

In theses next few pages you will read the thoughts and stories of those who have come to realize within their own lives that God is not some impersonal force nor far off deity that makes demands to be appeased but has no real love for his subjects. In fact, God is the personal God of love and compassion who is not merely for us, but with us.

“Where is God?” Why, He is with us, of course. Come, let us show you how we know.

Pastor Dale McIntire

From the Beginning, With Purpose

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” You have to wonder how often we have to hear that basic truth before we begin to take for granted that God created and move on to other business. “Yeah, God created. Got it. So what?”

We hear that phrase so often the fact becomes just another Thursday night trivia question:

Moderator: “For 200 points, in the beginning, who created the heavens and the earth? Team church, for the win . . .”

Team Church: “Well, Wink, we’re going to say, ‘God.’”

Moderator: For 200 points, the win, and a trip to Dairy Queen, the answer is . . . ‘God!’ Team Church wins!” (And the crowd goes wild!)

We need to take a moment here, stop, and smell the coffee! What does the statement, “God created” imply? Well, if you take into account another true statement about God, “God created” implies that God, when He created, did something that He wanted to do, exactly the way that He wanted it done, for exactly the purpose He had in mind for doing it at all. Creation was not casual, as if God ran across it on His Saturday evening to do list and did it to mark another long-term project off His agenda so He could move on to something else without regret.

Psalm 115:3 tells us, “Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.” God does what He pleases. He does what He wants. He acts according to His own interests and purposes without outside direction or guidance. God looks to no one else than His own will and pleasure for instruction, ability, or permission. All that He does accords with His nature so that He is never disappointed in what He does nor is He ever displeased with Himself in light of what He does. He does what He pleases, and, in reverse, is pleased by all He does. He does nothing that does not meet His criteria for personal delight.

God created because that is what He delighted in Himself to do, and all that He created pleased Him as He created it, for it fulfilled both His interest and His purpose . . . including me, including you.

Tuesday December 1, 2020

Read Genesis 1:26-27

In God's Own Image

Genesis 1:27 "God created man in His own image."

I have a good friend who grew up in a very different part of the country, at a different time, and with a different culture - he grew up under segregation in the deep South. We often talked about how different his childhood church was compared to where we both belong now. During the summer of 2019 he took me to visit a church in south Minneapolis at the corner of 38th St. and Chicago Ave. to share a different experience.

The people didn't look like me. They didn't talk with the same Minnesota accent I am used to. The life experiences they talked about were different from what I know. This particular service didn't even have music - unheard of in my Baptist experience!

But then I looked beyond these differences. There was an elder present to welcome us and make sure we found a seat. There were parents attempting to contain the "enthusiasm" of young children. The speaker talked about his coming to Jesus and the difference it made in his life. Despite the differences that I first noticed, we are all made in the image of God - we are more similar than different where it matters the most.

You can't park in the lot at this church right now. The streets are closed and the intersection is occupied by a memorial to George Floyd - who lost his life at the hands of a police officer right across the street from this church in south Minneapolis. I don't know the solutions to the problems facing us now, but I am going to be more deliberate in looking for the image of God in everyone I meet.

David Laine

Lord, please help me to see the image of God in those who look different, sound different, worship differently from what I am accustomed to. God made man in His image.

Wednesday December 2, 2020

Read Genesis 2:15-17

Staying Close to God

The story of the Garden of Eden is a familiar one. God was with Adam and Eve in the garden. He issued the first commandment in the Bible when He told them not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was a simple command and Adam and Eve clearly understood it. But they willfully disobeyed God and committed the first sin of the Bible. We all know the consequences.

God is holy and cannot accept sin. Sin blocks our relationship with God. God showed his love for us by sending Jesus into the world as an atoning sacrifice for sin. Only through Jesus can we have a close personal relationship with God. But I believe our closeness to God suffers when we consistently and willfully sin.

A close Christian friend of mine and his wife have been married for nearly five years. While engaged, but months prior to their marriage, they decided to live together. Although this is accepted in today's society, they knew they were clearly and willfully disobeying God's commandments. He told me he felt an emptiness in his relationship with God. He knew what they were doing was not right. They changed course. After confessing, repenting, and asking for forgiveness, they decided to live apart until after their marriage. He said he soon felt the calmness of God's presence and grace again in his life.

We all sin, but I think there is a difference between an occasional sin and staying in willful sin. I think our closeness to God's presence suffers if we are in willful sin.

Jim Chupurdia

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Jesus to earth to make things right with us, because You know we can't do it on our own. Because of Jesus, we know You are with us always.

Thursday December 3, 2020

Read Genesis 3:1-7

Temptation and Revelation

“He said to the woman, Did God really say, ‘you must not eat from any tree of the garden?...you will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman. ‘For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’”

Temptation hits us every day. Sometimes it creeps in like a dull ache. Other times, it hits us like a slap in the face. Either way, we humans have to deal with it.

The Temptation: For me, this recent temptation was the creeping kind. You see, social media allows me to see celebrities and politicians under its ever scrutinizing magnifying glass. I find it easy to tell those people how wrong they are, yell at them at how you do it Jesus’ way, even call them disparaging names. They can’t hear me. It- Makes- It-So- Easy.

The Revelation: Then God started popping little snippets of His Words into my head. “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up...” and “Honor one another above yourselves” and “...but in humility consider others better than yourselves” and “Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness,” and “But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and they make a man ‘unclean.’”

“Even when the celebrities and politicians can’t hear me?”
“Yes, Traci, even when they can’t hear you.”

This lesson in temptation and revelation has been a humbling one, opening my eyes to my sin while simultaneously reminding me that Jesus was beaten and murdered for me. He shed blood covering my sin, all so I could be made righteous before a holy God. Immanuel, God with us.

Traci Crotteau

Friday December 4, 2020

Read Genesis 3:16-19

God’s Presence

The Bible starts with Genesis where we see that God created everything good. He wanted everything for us to be good and had only one limit on us. Adam and Eve defied God and introduced sin into the world. Sin and turning against what God would have us do, makes everything harder.

I have spent my career in the automotive business, first as an auto glass technician and now in commercial sales. It seems that when I started in glass installs were much easier. Today, vehicles are more complex and have more features, such as lane departures, which makes the glass installation process more challenging. The work is no longer easy.

People make big investments when they buy cars and they expect service to be perfect the first time. This is reasonable, but it isn’t always how things work out. Mechanical features fail sometimes because they’re made by humans and humans make mistakes. Technicians make mistakes because they haven’t been trained or because they’re careless. We live in a world where sin exists and things are not perfect. But no one wants to hear that the mistake with their car is because there is sin in the world.

God reminds us in Genesis that life will be hard. Raising children is hard and work is hard. These are consequences of sin, but God provided a way for us to be free from sin, by accepting His free gift of forgiveness through the sacrifice of His son, Jesus Christ! By accepting Jesus as my Savior my life didn’t get easier, but I don’t carry the burdens of sin. The Holy Spirit helps me with the challenges I face in life. Whether it’s help with getting an install right or helping to defuse an angry customer, I feel God’s presence and His guidance in any situation.

Philip Klanderud

Dear Lord, thank you for your presence with me as I live my daily life. In the midst of my troubles you give help and encouragement. Thank you for making it possible for my sins to be paid for and forgiven in Jesus’ death on the cross. You are the God who is with us.

Saturday December 5, 2020

Read Genesis 4:1-16

The Image Broken

I work hard to look for the image of God in all people that I meet, to see in them what God sees. I love to help people. I have been part of work weekends at church, through Habitat for Humanity, and supporting ministries in the community. When storms came through town and we had 16 tornados come through our area in one evening, I was there to help people I knew and a lot I didn't. Loving my neighbors comes pretty naturally since my conversion.

That is, right up until I have to commute in the traffic we have here around the Twin Cities. I don't know if people are clueless, careless, inconsiderate, or just plain ornery. After following someone for a few miles in the left lane who is keeping pace with the driver in the right lane I am ready to burst! I don't know why I have patience when helping a neighbor, but none for the person looking at his phone instead of the road. Don't get me wrong - I don't yell, curse, or make gestures, but by the time I get to work I am not loving all of God's children.

The image of God that I bear within me was corrupted by original sin. There are times that image shows through more clearly and times it is nowhere to be seen. My example isn't as extreme as Cain's, but my reflection of God's image is just as corrupt as his was.

I cannot fix my broken image. Only Christ in me can make that whole. Through the sacrifice of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit in my heart, one day I hope to be able to reflect the Kingdom of God to all people around me, in all situations.

David Laine

Lord Jesus, through Your Holy Spirit do the work in me that I cannot do for myself, that I may be the true new creation, in Your name.

Sunday December 6, 2020

Read Genesis 6:11-18

God's Salvation Promise

By this time the world had become corrupt and violent and the Lord's wrath was going to wipe out everyone on earth by a great flood. He would spare Noah and his family because Noah was faithful and obedient. God gave Noah specific instructions as to how to build the ark that would preserve his family and the animals God brought to the ark. He also promised Noah that they would be safe.

God can be our salvation through faith and trust in Him, just like the ark was Noah's place of salvation, because He trusted God. Noah was faithful as he prepared for the flood and God was with him, just as He will be with us if we are faithful and obedient.

During these months of the Covid-19 pandemic, I have found it hard to stay close to God without the fellowship, Bible study, and worship with other believers in church. It is still important to listen to God and find Him even in the quietness of isolation. I have found myself taking more drives in the woods and enjoying the beauty of His creation and thanking God for the area in which I live.

Take this time to pray, read His Word, listen to worship songs, and listen to Him. He is still here with us. He can save you just like He saved Noah.

Valerie Gustafson

Thank you, God for the beauty of your creation and for your salvation through faith and trust in you. May we continue to listen and obey what you would have us do for you.

Monday December 7, 2020

Read Genesis 17:1-8

Trust in God

“And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.”

Wow! God wants us!

Ephesians 2:8-9 states: ‘For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no man may boast.’ 1 Peter 1:3 states, “Blessed be the God And Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” All of this because He wants us and loves us! How humbling is that? God is always there by our side and through the Holy Spirit in us.

In March, I had plans to replace the flooring in my kitchen and livingroom. It involved me packing up everything in those two rooms and moving it into other parts of the house. I also needed to find myself another place to live while they tore out the old flooring and replaced it with porcelain tiles. A dear friend offered me a spare bedroom in their home for the duration of the remodel job and it worked beautifully for they flew to Arizona during that time frame to visit their son and family.

When they tore out the old flooring, the floor studs, sill, and rim plate on the north side of the living room were rotted away. Major set back! However, the guy that was doing the remodel had a friend up for a visit and he was an expert at this type of thing and got it repaired in a day and a half. Then laying down the tiles took much longer than expected, so the one week turned into almost 3 weeks. But that worked out beautifully for my friends ended up staying in Arizona longer than expected due to the Covid outbreak. As I went through the month of March I kept holding my breath in anticipation of another setback, but each time things fell into place. God was there the entire time taking care of things for me. No worries! Trust in the Lord!!

Gine Meissner

Tuesday December 8, 2020

Read Genesis 22

Faithful and True

Abraham’s faith was tested, and it was genuine.

I don’t like to think God is testing me, but reminding me to trust Him. I am reminded that I am not alone. God is with me. Always has been and always will be.

I like to believe that my faith is genuine. I have had many trials, some would say tests, in my life, and the only way I have gotten through them is my faith. My faith that God will get me through all things. And God alone, not me.

Faith has gotten me through my mother’s sudden death when I was 17. He was there.

Through two divorces, He was there.

Birth of five children, He was there.

Now as my children are adults making their own choices, having their own beliefs, He is there.

I can and always do turn to God, because I know He is always there.

Valita Bockovich

My prayer is that I will always walk by faith and trust in God.

Wednesday December 9, 2020

Read Exodus 13:21-22

God Leads

God was with Israel as they left Egypt, leading them to the promised land. This devotional has caused me to reflect on how He has been with me and leading me throughout my life.

My parents impressed upon me as a young child God's omnipresence, which gave me great comfort when scared and great fear when tempted to do things I knew I should not. As a teenager God led me to wonderful examples of godly men; one was our pastor's father-in-law, who taught adult Sunday School. I'll never forget Bill Albertson praying at the end of his lesson, having a glorious conversation with God as though the 100+ people in his class were not there.

God led me to fall in love and ultimately marry a wonderful godly woman, my wife Laurie. God led me as a young father to Bible Study Fellowship and Faith Bible Church for a much deeper study and understanding of His Word.

As I was approaching retirement, planning summers at the cabin and winters in the warm sunshine, God led me to stay in Grand Marais and to Cornerstone Community Church, where I have developed a much deeper understanding of my sin, need for repentance, and God's perfect sovereignty, holiness and mercy.

God has been with me and leading me for a long time. My prayer for you is that this Advent season you will be open to His wonderful presence and be ready to follow His leading through these challenging times.

John Hill

Father, I praise You and thank You for being my Hope and Stay. Help us stay close and continue to follow Your lead all the days of our lives.

Thursday December 10, 2020

Read Exodus 14:21-30

God Makes a Way

Moses leads the people of Israel away from Pharaoh's pursuing army as God parts the sea to make a way.

This account reminded me that about a year ago I was called to testify to the accounts pertaining to years of abuse that I and my siblings experienced at the hands of another. Entering into court that morning I felt in my heart much like I imagine the Israelites did in front of their enemies. Our turmoil was no less real at the time.

Our pastor led us in prayer just before we all went in to testify to the judge. God calmed my heart as He did the sea for Moses. I walked on solid ground while giving my testimony.

And when it was all over, while I left the courthouse headed to my car, the lyrics of a song written by Jonathan Helser came to my heart: "I raise a Hallelujah in the presence of my enemies; I'm gonna sing in the middle of the storm. Death is defeated! The King is alive!" This has become my anthem. Now my heart can be still as my sea of turmoil recedes. Amen!

Patrick Scully

*Lord, You make a way when it seems that there is no way.
Always lead me on!*

Friday December 11, 2020

Read 1 Samuel 17:41-48

Don't Be Afraid

David was not afraid of the battle with Goliath. He ran quickly toward Goliath, ready to fight. Goliath was a huge man, a giant, and made David look very small and weak. What made David so brave? It was his trust in God and belief that God would protect him and was always with him, no matter what happened.

When I first read this, I asked myself "What am I afraid of right now?" My answer was the virus. I thought of Goliath being the virus and I was David. In early March when the virus first hit us, I remember thinking we might be stuck at home and not be able to see people for a while. We had no idea when it might end, and we still don't know. To make matters worse, we shortly found out we couldn't go to the grocery store; we had to call in our order and pick it up. I don't know why, but that was a big deal for me. It kind of put me over the edge. I felt out of control, fearful and depressed.

I prayed for help and the Lord led me to play a song called "He Will Hold Me Fast" (a song many of you probably know). Songs always help me get closer to the Lord, especially when something upsetting is happening. Playing that song helped me come to my senses and realize that God was with me, just as He was with David, and I needed to trust that He would get me through this. Seven months later I'm still playing that song when I need to. I know that He walks with me every day and always will. No matter what happens, I don't need to be afraid.

Maxine Chupurdia

Heavenly Father, thank You for your never-ending love and continued protection. Help me to trust that You are always with me, just as You were with David.

Saturday December 12, 2020

Read Jeremiah 31:31

God's Amazing Grace

The Lord declared He would make a new covenant with His people. This new covenant is not of laws for us to follow, but of grace and forgiveness through the death and resurrection of His own son, Jesus Christ. This is good news for all of us because no matter how hard we try, we cannot keep every law every time.

Years ago I was in a corporate training program that paired us up and separated us for an exercise. One set of people were told to share something personal about themselves; the other set was told to ignore what the person was telling us and show disinterest. There was some humanistic lesson in it that was worthless because I can't remember what it was. But I do remember the result of my actions.

I was the person who was to ignore what my partner was telling me. As she shared something about her life I ignored her, because I did what the instructor told me to do. She was understandably hurt by my actions and started to cry. I immediately stopped the exercise and shared with her the instructions I was given. After the exercise, the instructor gave some insights on the lesson, but all I can recall was how I made someone cry and feel awful.

Several years later, after I had accepted Jesus as my Savior, I sought my colleague out and told her how sorry I was about what had happened. A fellow Christian, she laughed that she didn't remember it (she had grace in the moment), but she felt bad for me that I had carried the regret of the exercise and offered me forgiveness. These actions of grace and forgiveness are only possible because of God's new covenant with us. It is perspective changing and life changing; it costs nothing and we gain everything.

Monica Klanderud

Dear Father, thank you for your gift of grace and forgiveness. Help me to always remember your grace with me that I will always extend it to others.

Sunday December 13, 2020

Read Daniel 3:8-30

With Us in Time of Trouble

When I think about the theme of this year's Advent Devotional, "Immanuel, God With Us", it brings to mind the significance of this meaning in today's culture and gives me great peace and hope.

In the fiery furnace described in Daniel 3:8-30, I see a very difficult situation in those cultural times. King Nebuchadnezzar commanded that his people fall down and worship a golden image when they heard music. Those who failed to do so were thrown into a fiery furnace. In this particular situation, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were in charge of the affairs of the province of Babylon.

They did not worship this false image because they were faithful servants of the Lord and would not disobey God. They were seen being thrown into the fiery furnace but came out unscathed. Witnesses saw with them in the furnace a fourth man described as looking like a "son of the gods!" This testimony changed the hearts of many to become believers.

I know I live in a world of uncertainties and troubles where life as we know it can change in a heartbeat. God is with me; there is never a time when God is not with me.

Bill Doucette

I pray the my Lord will give me and you the courage through faithfulness and obedience, to be good servants of our Lord.

Monday December 14, 2020

Read Romans 8:38-39

I'm Convinced

How many things would you be willing to say you're absolutely, 100% positively, no-doubt convinced of? This year of 2020 has given us a gazillion different views of "truth" in any of the media. My own list of what I'm convinced of has been challenged.

Our son opened up his heart to Jesus when he was a very little boy, and I knelt beside him when he did that. He dedicated his life to Jesus at Bible camp. He and his sister both decided to be baptized together when they were about twelve and ten years old. However, knowing him as a teenager and through his Great Rebellion for three long years, I began to doubt he really was a child of God.

This last Labor Day Weekend changed what I'm 100% convinced of! Our adult kids and families were traveling to Grand Marais for camping. Long story short, our son's truck had a "catastrophic engine failure" on the Interstate. This meant being towed to Duluth, a new engine, and a whole lot of money.

The next day, he talked to the dealer for the exact cost, and then talked to his Dad for counsel. He then told me that after he had managed to get his truck and RV over to the shoulder, he very quickly prayed for God to help him stay calm, and to help him to not say anything that would harm his wife and two small boys. I said, "and He answered, didn't He?" Our son said "YES"! That was the moment I was absolutely, positively **convinced** of the truth of Romans 8:38-39. NOTHING, that is ABSOLUTELY NOTHING, can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Our past, present and future cannot possibly change the grace of God and the gift of salvation through His Son Jesus Christ. If we've given our hearts to Him, He seals it with His Spirit, and writes our name in His Book of Life, never to be erased. He works in us, draws us into fellowship with Him, transforms us to become more like Jesus, and eventually will bring us Home to spend the rest of eternity with Him. This would be the perfect time to accept this Gift if you haven't already done that.

Mary Freeman

Tuesday December 15, 2020

Read John 8:12

The Light of the World

Jesus spoke: "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, ... you will have the light that leads to life." (Living translation)

When I read this verse, I had to ask myself, what exactly is Light vs Darkness? Light is the agent that stimulates sight and makes things visible. Light makes vision possible. Light is an illumination, brightness or brilliance that was not there before. Darkness is the opposite of brightness or light. Darkness is the absence of illumination, of visible light. Darkness makes human vision unable to see. Darkness is sometimes described as wickedness or evil.

For Jesus to claim to be the "light of the world" was no small thing. In fact, it is a claim to equality with God. He claims to be the light, the single, solitary source of light. Jesus shines the pure light of truth into the hearts of everyone who believes in Him. Those who follow Christ may stumble into darkness, but they will never forever walk in it. The light of His loving presence shines upon them always, even in the darkest, most difficult moments.

Jesus is always there for me. Even when I forget that He is there, He cares for me with His mighty Presence and takes me out of the darkness of my own self into His own light.

Sometimes fear tries to bring in darkness. Jesus takes me up into His light out of the darkness of my own fears. His light is strong and takes me to be healed of myself. He is refining me and transforming me from a piece of black carbon to a beautiful diamond. It is all about trusting Jesus every moment with the outcome of life. Faith in Him is working for me. In my weakness, He has manifested His strength.

Patricia Gamer

Corrie ten Boom stated - "You can never know that Christ is all you need until Christ is all you have. Dear Lord, please give me Your strength to overcome my weakness.

Wednesday December 16, 2020

Read Matthew 5:1-11

The Gift of a New Vision

We call them the Beatitudes, "the Blessings." Preachers often use these nine characteristics to call Christians to greater personal holiness. We are taught that we will be better people, "blessed" people, if we can only attain each of these traits with increasing measure in our lives. It's a tall order and not one easily filled.

In fact, as I prayed over these words, asking for understanding and wisdom, knowing that without God's help I would be helplessly lost, I came to realize something about these attributes. I got a new vision of these things: they are all best represented by Jesus. Humility, meekness, grief, righteous, merciful, pure, peaceable, and persecuted, each of these and all of these communicate the essential character of Jesus Himself. From His birth to His death, Jesus illustrated in real time what it is like to have a heart and life that God calls "blessed." This life that Jesus lived, and that He lives now through those who believe in Him, is the life Paul calls "real" in the letter to the Ephesians.

That which is real is that which is like God, eternal, holy, pure, righteous, just, compassionate, understanding, peace. Jesus is the living epitome of what is real.

So, how do I come to share in these qualities of the eternal, real God? When, by faith, I am in Christ, when I surrender my life to Him, when I follow His lead, live His way, devote my life effort and life experience to knowing Him and making Him known to others. When I am able, in faith, to embrace all that He is and surrender to Him, that is when I feel comfort, peace, and mercy. At that point, things like pandemics and politics find their right perspective.

Steve McNeely

Dear Lord, thank You for Who You are and for revealing Yourself to me. Please give me strength to stay focused on You and Your glory always. Amen!

Thursday December 17, 2020

Read Matthew 26:26-28

The New Covenant of Christ

Christians participate in and receive communion on a regular basis. As you can read, the practice was initiated by Christ Himself. No, it's not physically His body and blood but a symbolic reminder of what Christ has done for us. Christ completed many miracles while He was on earth. I feel His death on the cross and the pouring out of blood for the forgiveness of our sins is His greatest miracle.

At the beginning of communion time Pastor will often give us a few moments to reflect on and to examine our own spiritual condition. We are given a chance to repent of our sins, ask for forgiveness, and to partake in communion with a pure heart. These few moments are a significant time for me. No matter how hard I try not to sin, I always fail. In fact, I am always amazed at what a miserable sinner I am. The way I manage my sinful nature is by first being honest about my thoughts and feelings. I don't deny my sinful thoughts. I recognize them and acknowledge this is what my human nature wants. Being honest allows me to then put the thoughts away and move on to what God would want me to do. I try to take on His nature, not my own.

With Christ's forgiveness we can be released from the burden and guilt of our many sins. We can live a forgiven life, free of guilt and anguish. There is no better news we can get that beats this offer. I don't know about you, but this makes me want to jump up and sing out and say the following prayer:

Randall Boyd

Thank You, Lord, that we can have forgiveness of our sins and to then be able to spend eternity with You! Amen

Friday December 18, 2020

Read: John 14:1-4

The Way

God comforts us, tells us to believe in Him. He prepares a place for us in heaven; He will show us the way.

My father passed away 33 years ago; he visited me and my family the day before. He gave me the biggest hug and told me he loved me. A different hug, and I did not know what it meant.

The next day he passed away. He was driving his pickup truck down a country road and must have felt something coming on. He pulled over to the side and then passed away.

I was working at the Care Center when my husband came and told me what happened. I felt bad and grateful at the same time, to get that last hug and wonderful words from him. I believe he knew his time was limited.

My mother passed 4 years ago this October. She had an infection and was on powerful drugs that damaged her kidneys. The doctor said dialysis would not work for long. When I asked how long she had, the doctor said maybe a week.

Our children came to visit their Grandma; her brothers and sisters came also. She said she felt like a queen! I felt she did not know that she was near death. My husband made fishcakes like she had taught him; she ate one, and some soup.

I was rubbing her forehead; my husband was with me. I told her she was the "Best Mom!" and that I love her. She took her last breath.

At her service, a cousin told me that Mom said, "I think I am dying." The cousin asked if she was afraid. Mom said, "No. I am at peace. God will show me the way."

I am an only child, so the loss of my parents really felt final. I pray to God even more now.

Tracy Scully

O Lord, you are a father and mother to me. Help others come to trust you as I do, and help me trust you more every day!

Saturday December 19, 2020

Read John 14:4-7

Jesus the Way

As many of you know, my wife and I are planning to retire sometime next year. To get ready for that eventuality we bought land to build a retirement home on. This would be our last full time residence, so we need to consider our needs as we age. That means preparing rooms that are easy to get around and very low maintenance.

Christ is also preparing our heavenly home, and Christ is the way to get there. As Christians we anticipate that we will spend eternity with our God and all the heavenly host. But have you really thought about what that will be like? Christ states that in my Father's house there are many rooms. Just how many? I believe that there will be millions of Christians staying with God. Will there be cities with large buildings or maybe a place like Grand Marais with beautiful scenery? We know from Revelation 21 that the new Jerusalem will have streets made from gold, clear like transparent glass. It also tells us the city will have no need for the sun or the moon, for the glory of God will give it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. Of one thing I am certain: heaven will be greater than we can even imagine.

Are you ready for eternity? Have you prepared? There is only one way to get there: Jesus himself told us that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Jesus.

Jim Mattson

Christ is preparing a room for you. Please pray: Lord, as we focus on You this Christmas, help us to get ready by surrendering our lives completely to You.

Sunday December 20, 2020

Read Luke 1:26-38

Trust and Obey

Mary was visited by Gabriel and told that she would give birth to Jesus. She was surprised since she was a virgin already promised to be wed to Joseph. She found favor with God to accomplish a miracle that would forever change the world. Mary humbly and obediently complied.

We, as Christians, will all be called upon to do the work of God. It won't be announced by visiting angels or resounding trumpets. It won't be as life-changing as Mary's charge. But it will be a request filled with His grace and love. How will we handle it? Will we accept it as faithfully as Mary, or even recognize it?

Several years ago an elderly neighbor lost his wife to cancer. He was a stroke victim, somewhat physically limited. We had been friends from long before, so I was happy to look in on him from time to time. He couldn't drive; I began taking him to church, to the grocery store, checking on him almost daily. Family did not live close, so they often relied on me to see to his needs. I didn't mind taking care of, spending time with this good friend.

One day I had to take him to the emergency room. While there, he said, "How can I repay you for all you do?" Jokingly, I said "Just give me your first-born." Shortly after, I got to meet his first-born. That meeting certainly changed my life! His first-born and I have now been married (very happily!) for 14 years. Not what I expected, but God had a plan.

How will you respond when you are called upon to honor a request from God? Will you be open to the grace offered you? I was not looking for any reward for taking care of a neighbor in need, but the impact on my life was indeed life-changing.

Lynn Doucette

Father, thank You for having the faith in me to know I will share Your faith with others. Thank You for giving Your Son! I pray we recognize and honor Your request to give You glory.

Monday December 21, 2020

Read Matthew 1:18-25

Immanuel - God With Us!

The prophesy fulfilled: God with us. With us in the flesh:
Jesus, walking with us, Jesus a man.

Then think back - God with us, always! Never a time or place
when this is not true...

And for me:

Holding my child, warm in the dark, sinking in overwhelming
sorrow that change was coming - God is there. He told me so.

Working through seemingly endless days of drudgery - God is
there.

Sitting beside a struggling child or sitting beside a grieving
friend - God is there.

In the woods in autumn, picking up dead-and-down wood to
keep us warm in the cold to come - then, surrounded by His Presence,
overwhelmed by joy! God is there...

As He is there with you:

Immanuel - God with us. There is nowhere you can be where
God is not. No matter the circumstance, God is there. In times of
great joy - God is there. In the midst of great loss - God is there!
When there seems no way - God is there. A young man, desperate on
a riverbank - God is there. (This one- not my story to tell. The ones
above - yes. Mine.) When we just don't understand - God is there.

Immanuel - God with us. Jesus - God in flesh.

And now we celebrate the coming of God in flesh - Jesus - to
walk the earth with us, to the purpose of reconciliation - salvation!

Irene Laine

*Lord, wherever I am, You are. That is Your nature; that is
Your promise. Thank You for Jesus!*

Tuesday December 22, 2020

Read Luke 1:39-56

For Me

Luke writes to a man he addresses as "most excellent
Theophilus," a high ranking Gentile official with whom he desires to
share an eyewitness account of the Messiah and the activities of the
disciples as they take the message of salvation to the world around them.

He recounts the extraordinary workings of God in the lives of
two very ordinary godly women, Elizabeth and Mary, women without
social rank or economic status, favored by God to accomplish His will.
Elizabeth, an older barren woman, would be the mother of John the
Baptist. Mary, a young virgin from a small town, would, by the Holy
Spirit's working, bear Jesus, the Messiah.

Luke wants Theophilus to understand that God loves and uses
those of high degree and those others overlook. This story is amazing
and deserves your time to read it over several times to glean all the gems
to be found in it.

Reading it, I was overwhelmed by the humility of these two
women. Elizabeth was not jealous of her young cousin for being chosen
to be the mother of the Messiah, rather she offered praise to God for
allowing "the mother of my Lord should come to me." Then she was
used by the Holy Spirit to bring confirmation to Mary that what the
angel had told her would come to pass.

Mary could have been so proud and puffed up about being
chosen for this magnificent honor, instead she replies, "for the mighty
One has done great things for me." Not through me or because of me, as
though she was worthy of such a blessed call. She praised God for what
He had done for her: given her mercy, used a sinner to accomplish His
will, saw her humble standing, allowed her to be His servant, etc. She
recounts the mighty deeds of God to those who revere Him.

The Holy Spirit opened my eyes to Mary's humble response as a
servant of the Mighty One, with no prideful thought of herself. This is a
challenge to me to humbly serve God, knowing all that He has done for
me: forgiving all my sins, giving me eternal life, promising never to
leave me, but to help me, love me, and one day take me to heaven.

Linda McIntire

*Dear Gracious Lord, thank You for doing for me what I could
never do for myself and for patiently teaching me Your ways.*

Wednesday December 23, 2020

Read Isaiah 9:6-7

A Child Is Born

A young man and his pregnant wife were relocating after being discharged from the Armed Services. After visiting his parents in Minnesota, they were on their way to Virginia to visit her parents and await the birth of their child. After a long day of traveling, they stopped for the night. Shortly after going to bed, the wife woke with what she thought might be food poisoning. It steadily intensified so she called her mom, who told her to go to the hospital. The young man “Googled” the nearest hospital where in a few hours their son was born six weeks early. The young couple spent the next month watching their son develop in NICU.

Our Mighty God had His hand on that young couple in so many ways...

Originally the young wife was to fly home. She could have gone into labor all alone, thousands of feet in the air. Instead they welcomed their son together.

Of all the towns they could have stopped in, God guided them to that special one.

The hospital God directed them to (through Google) was not “the nearest hospital” after all. But it was the hospital He chose for them. A hospital with the loving care they and their son needed. Instead of having to pay for a motel room for the month, they were allowed to stay in a hospital room free of charge, so they could be with their son anytime they wanted.

The Prince of Peace gave them a calmness that amazed all those who met them. They were secure in the knowledge that their son was loved and cared for. Some might say “coincidences” and the couple was just “young and too naive” to be concerned. I choose to believe the Prince of Peace was in control

Judi Twiest

My prayer for that young family is that someday they will look back at the birth of their son and realize “The Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace, our Everlasting Father” had His hand on their lives that day and all the days to come.

Thursday December 24, 2020

Read Luke 2:1-20

What Christmas Is all About

When I was eight years old my family was burglarized on Christmas Eve. No one was home. No one was hurt, but all of the presents were taken. I was sad and angry. Later, mom shared with us kids what had been inside the packages under the tree with our names on them. Even though I was sad, it felt good to know.

The following year I watched A Charlie Brown Christmas. I watched as one thing after another went poorly for Charlie Brown. He chose the wrong cast for the play. He chose the wrong tree. His friends all laughed at him. And then Charlie Brown cries out that it had all been ruined. At that moment I felt a deep connection with Charlie Brown. Someone else knew what it was like for Christmas to get ruined by sadness and hurt.

Then Charlie Brown said, “Isn’t there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about!?” I was immediately struck by that question. I had never asked it before. What was Christmas all about anyway?

It was Charlie Brown’s best friend, Linus Van Pelt, who gave me the answer. “Sure, Charlie Brown,” he said. “I can tell you what Christmas is all about.” Then Linus recites Luke 2:8-14. I started to cry and pondered what Christmas was about. How God was in charge, not burglars. That angels tell us not to be afraid. That now there could be peace on earth and good will toward men. All because of this baby.

It would be a few years from that moment before I gave my heart to Christ. Yet, I remember thinking that no matter how much people might take away, nothing could take away what God had given us in this baby.

Pastor Abe Johnson
Emmaus Baptist Church
Northfield, MN

Friday December 25, 2020

Read John 19:16-30

The Cross - On This Day

I asked: “Why, Lord? Why remember the cross on Christmas Day? At the moment of Your birth?”

He answered me. I don’t mean I heard words with my ears, but in my mind/spirit. Understanding flooded in, and with it, peace. People have forgotten that this is what He came for: reconciliation, restoration - to take upon Himself the sin that separates us from a holy God.

He did not come for Santa Claus, though giving is good. He did not come for parties, though celebration of His birth is good. He came to die: reparation for the sin of the chosen. He came to take our sin, that we might live...

And so we celebrate His coming - His birth!

Celebrate His coming; remember why He came.

Irene Laine

Lord, because You came, we live in hope! Alleluia!

Saturday December 26, 2020

Read Luke 24:1-12

The Ever Teaching Jesus

These words begin Luke’s record of specific post-resurrection appearances of Jesus. The first, to a group of women. The second to two men traveling together from Jerusalem to the small village of Emmaus.

The women, after they arrive at the empty tomb, are asked by the angels, “Why search among the dead for the One Who lives?” Then those angels reminded them of Jesus’ words that He would be crucified and after death would rise again. The women go and tell the apostles what they have seen and heard. The apostles believed their words were “nonsense” or “an idle tale.”

In the following scene, Jesus joins these two disciples on the road, but they do not recognize Him. Jesus was in their midst, but they did not know! How often is Jesus in our midst and we do not know; or we hear a credible account of His presence and ministry, and we do not believe?

Jesus is central in my life and in the life of His disciples. But, do we know it? Does the presence of Jesus in our experience go unrecognized or rejected?

It is about three weeks before the 2020 Presidential election as I write these words. God knows what the results of that election will be. But the most important thing is: Jesus is with us! With the current restrictions on freely assembling in churches, are we suffering soft persecution? Even so, Jesus’ presence is with us! Jesus Himself promised He would be with us always! Hard persecution, soft persecution, illness, death, whatever comes our way, Jesus is the sustaining, continuous presence in our lives!

Bruce Olson

Jesus, you came to earth and took on human form. You died on the cross and were buried and rose from the dead. You live, and you always live. You are present with us. Remind us, and lead us that we might live and show the world you are present. Amen.

Sunday December 27, 2020

Read Luke 24:13-24

Immanuel - God With Us

The two men were walking together, discussing not only reports of Jesus' missing body and the news that He is alive, but also the whole course of the ministry of Christ. The disciples spoke what they knew to be true and added their hopes and perplexities.

A couple of years ago I was convicted by the Holy Spirit of my selfishness with my time. Here I am, retired, with more time than I've ever had before in my life, and I find myself more and more jealous of my leisure. Common courtesies like checking on loved ones made me feel put out. How easy to be idle and indolent! Shortly after this unsettling conviction by the Spirit, we were meeting with a group of believers from our church, discussing idolatry. We spoke of what the Scriptures said and what forms idolatry can take in today's society. We talked of how idolatry had changed over the years and the difficulties in combating it. The Holy Spirit was powerfully present that day when someone mentioned that selfishness with time and laziness was really a form of idolatry. That interpretation shocked me as I'd never considered myself an idolater, but the truth was too obvious to deny: I had made an idol of my own personal preferences and comforts. What God wanted was secondary to what I felt like doing at the moment. I had made myself and my free time my new god. I still struggle with selfishness but it's easier to deal with when I recognize it for what it is and recognize my sin for what it is.

My takeaway from the Luke passage is the great value there is in gathering with other believers - even just one- and talking over what's going on and how God's word applies. "For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst."

Laurie Hill

Father, I thank You that You are with us always in Your Holy Spirit, and thank You that You are pleased to use other human beings to help us grow more like Jesus. Amen.

Monday December 28, 2020

Read John 20:24-29

Killing Doubt

'Unless I see in his hands the mark of nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.' John 20:25b

Thomas had extreme doubt that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead. Before he would believe this "unbelievable" story that everyone around him was proclaiming. Thomas demanded spectacular physical evidence of the King's return to life.

This year, 2020, has brought new challenges into my life, from experiencing "spiritual flabbiness" and allowing myself to become irritated and impatient because of the events surrounding COVID-19. My frustration and impatience is evidence of doubt- my lack of trust and belief in the Almighty God's sovereign control over the affairs of man, earth, and the universe.

Jesus has never presented Himself physically to me nor have I ever heard an audible voice from God. He does, however, speak to me through His Word, the Holy Scriptures. They show me what God is like, who He is, and where I fit into His created order which He alone sustains. From those Words, I can see His fingerprints throughout my life and through the people and world around me. Those fingerprints, experienced through the human senses that He has given me, are reminders to me of His love, grace, beauty, power, and sovereignty and that He will never leave me.

Mike Crotteau

Father, thank you for your Holy Spirit in helping me "see," as I can do no good thing apart from you. Keep me from doubting your trustworthy and unwavering attributes and from letting the world, my flesh, and the devil distract me from who You are and your promises to me that you secured through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ. In His name I pray these things. Amen.

Tuesday December 29, 2020

Read John 21:15-19

Reconciliation

Before you read on, turn to Matthew 26:69-75. Peter has denied Jesus not once, not twice, but three times! Now fast-forward to today's passage, John 21:15-19. Got it?

Jesus came to earth as a man to take upon Himself humanity's sin, humanity's denial of God. Jesus came to restore relationship: reconciliation not just between Himself and mankind but between each of us individually and Himself.

I have denied Jesus many times, in many ways. I have laughed at jokes I should have turned away from. I have turned away from discussions I should have participated in. I have turned away from needs I could have helped with. I have done what I should not and have failed to do what I ought. Each is a denial of Jesus. He does not write me off...

He asks, in many ways, "Do you love Me?" I answer, "You know I love You, Lord!" He does know - He knows my heart better than I do. He asks because I need to affirm that love. Relationship restored: reconciliation between God and His created creature. He then shows me my part in His mission to spread the knowledge of His Glory over all the earth, and that is the evidence of restoration.

He gives me His mission and tells me:

Love one another.

Proclaim the gospel.

Be His disciple; make disciples.

Jesus does not abandon His people. Love Him; love one another.

Irene Laine

Lord, when I fail You, You never fail me. You know that I love You; I know that I am Yours.

Wednesday December 30, 2020

Read Acts 2:1-4

Jesus Did Not Leave Us as Orphans

June 10, 2020 found me in Wisconsin, camping with my daughter and a group of very dear friends. We wore masks. Socially distanced, and sanitized diligently. I was thrilled to be invited to join the gathering, as the pandemic and travel distances (550 miles) had kept us apart for many months. We were a Christ-honoring fellowship who share memories from many years.

When it was time for me to leave, Anj commented. "You know, Mom, this pandemic may last another year to 18 months." Back home mulling over her parting words, I could feel myself sinking into discouragement. My inner self-talk was negative and blighted my prayers and outlook for about 3 days. I felt cut off from my loved ones. Bereft. Twelve to 18 months seemed like forever.

Thankfully, soon I was able to recall whose I am and where my strength comes from. Its source is the Holy Spirit of our Living Lord, whose fulfillment manifested at Pentecost and transformed the disciples, the church, and earnest, seeking believers even to this day.

Out of that reminding I chose to commit to spending significantly more time with the Lord in His Word, praise and worship, study, and prayer. Like an immersion.

Although the pandemic continues, my hurting heart has been made well by the power, love, and continued presence of the Holy Spirit.

Jean Perkins

Dear Lord, thank you for your abiding presence through the Holy Spirit, who is always there to guide, encourage, and teach us until the day we see you face to face.

Thursday December 31, 2020

Read John 1:1-5

In the Beginning was the Word

I remember the first time that God revealed to me a little bit more of Himself, through His word, in John 1. At the time I was a very young Christian at church, and our pastor was reading all of John 1 to us, the congregation. As he read, it felt as if God had suddenly turned on “the light of understanding” for me!

Before this day, I struggled with understanding how Jesus, who had been God’s Son in human form, was also God and had been with God from the beginning of creation. As our pastor was going through John 1, God brought to mind a memory of when I was in college, majoring in Child Development. On this particular day of class, the instructor took us to the Child Laboratory (preschool room). She said, “You are going to experience being the teacher and the student today.” Our mission was to set up the educational environment with particular goals for our “students’. The next step was getting down on the floor (or sitting in tiny chairs) and experiencing this as the child might, even though we were also to be the adult teacher, and do observations. We were to anticipate and plan for projected outcomes.

God uses His word (spoken and unspoken) to reveal Himself to us with His goals in mind. Even though the image brought forth in my mind is not a perfect example for everyone, it was personal and revealing to my heart. He used His Word and a personal life experience to teach me about Who He really is! I now have a greater understanding of the Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). I encourage anyone who is struggling with understanding to be patient. He will help you to understand if you do not give up!

Mary Boyd

My heavenly Father, thank You for the way you reveal Yourself to me! Help us not to give up but to continue to allow You to increase our understanding of Who You really are . In Jesus’ name, Amen

Friday January 1, 2021

Read Revelation 22:12-13

Alpha, Omega, and Everything In Between

It looks a bit suspicious, I know, but I promise, we didn’t plan it this way. Here I am, the pastor, the guy who carefully and prayerfully hands out the devotional writing assignments, and I wind up with both the first word and the last word in the whole book. Honestly, not planned this way! But, in the providence of God, this is how He arranged to make this final point as each of you, dear readers, heads into 2021.

First word, last word. Beginning, end. Alpha, omega. Jesus uses these words to describe himself at both the beginning and the end of the Revelation. He means for us to understand that just as this devotional, for example, begins with Jesus and ends with Jesus, and everything in between is about Jesus, so is Christ in relation to all creation. He is the first and foremost, as well as the final and ultimate. He is the beginning of wisdom and the fulfilment of grace. With Him all begins, with Him all will reach its intended conclusion, and, along the way, we will come to realize that everything in between was also all about Him.

God really is not some disconnected figment of human imagination. God, in Christ, God come in human form, proves that He is God Who is present, active, engaged, imminent, powerful, gracious, loving, and near. He is Immanuel. Not God apart from us, but God with us. From beginning to end, first to last, alpha and omega, and everywhere in between. It is 2021, and God is with us.

Pastor Dale McIntire

You are Alpha and Omega, beginning and end. Take us O Lord, from the beginning of this year to its end, and be with us everywhere in between. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen!

