



New Life

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

Join us in discovering how God brings light and life into unexpected places. I'm excited to share this journey with you as we explore God's faithfulness and power.

We'll reflect on gratitude, highlighting the many blessings God has given us, and dive into creation, marveling at how God spoke the world into being and continues to work through us. We'll look at how God brought new life through a barren woman, reminding us that nothing is impossible for Him. This theme of hope continues as we consider how Jesus arrived in darkness—a shining light in our toughest moments. We'll ponder the mystery of Jesus' virgin birth and celebrate the gift of new life and the renewal God offers each of us.

No matter where we are in life, God is always at work, creating new life. Let's open our hearts to His incredible story of redemption and discover how He brings light to our darkest days.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a cursive 'J'.

Bryan Jones
Senior Pastor

DAILY PRAYER AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

"... Our Father in heaven..."

Matthew 6:9b (NLT)

- **What do You want to say to me today as my Father?**

"... may Your name be kept holy."

Matthew 6:9c (NLT)

- **What do You want to reveal to me about Your power today?**

"May Your Kingdom come soon."

Matthew 6:10a (NLT)

- **Help me make Your priorities my priorities today.**

"Give us today the food we need,"

Matthew 6:11 (NLT)

- **Is there anything specific You want me to do with my time or the people I'm around today?**

"and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us"

Matthew 6:12 (NLT)

- **Reveal to me anyone I need to forgive or ask for forgiveness.**

"And don't let us yield to temptation..."

Matthew 6:13a (NLT)

- **Is there anywhere I'm vulnerable to temptation?**

GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S PROVISION

I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen. **Philippians 4:18-20 (NIV)**

One of the phrases that stands out to me in that passage is when Paul said he had *more than enough*. Paul was a church planter. He didn't have a high-paying job. He wasn't employed by wealthy landowners. He traveled through villages and towns to tell people about Jesus and help them care for each other and worship God together. Since that was his job-his high calling by God-Paul relied on God to supply his needs through the people he ministered to. He didn't receive a steady paycheck. He didn't have a retirement plan. And yet, somehow, he got to a place where he was able to say that he had more than enough. He was *amply supplied*. In fact, a few verses before this (the end of vs. 12), Paul states, *I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.*

So, what's this secret? How can we get to a place of true contentment? I believe gratitude is at the center of it all. The root word for gratitude is the Latin word *gratis*, which essentially means *free*. I would say that being grateful is far more than writing down things you have and things God has done, but rather experiencing freedom from needing any of it. Simply saying, *yes, God. Because I have You, I can trust I have all I need.*

APPLICATION: Take a few minutes and imagine what it would feel like to not be worried about anything. Imagine the feeling of contentment, knowing God has everything under control, and at any given time, He can give you anything you need, even before you ask.

PRAYER: Lord, You have given me way more than I deserve, and You care for me in ways far beyond what I can count or name. Help me slow down and recognize specific ways You provide for me each day. Move my heart to a place of greater gratitude for how You care for me. Amen.

GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE

The LORD will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.
Isaiah 58:11 (NIV)

If God is always guiding me, and I emphasize *always*, then I'm sure I'm missing a lot! I don't always seek God's guidance; when I do, I'm not always sure it's Him leading me. Have you ever felt lost? Have you ever made a bad decision or said things without thinking? If so, you're not alone. When left on our own, we can (and do) get into all kinds of trouble.

I'm encouraged by a few things in this passage. First, I'm thankful that God's guidance is even *available*. He hasn't left me to wander around, all by myself, trying to figure out what's going on and find my way. God, who sees everything and knows everything, is able and willing to guide me in every step along the journey. Second, God is *always* guiding me (one translation says *continually*). For me, this means that even when I make a bad decision or travel down a wrong path, God's guidance is always and only one prayer away. He is closer than I think and has promised to guide me. Always. This is great news! Third, I can trust His guidance because He promises to satisfy my needs and strengthen my frame (literally, *give strength to my bones*) even during the hardest times, even in the scorching heat. Thinking about this helps me feel more settled. I feel relieved that it's not all up to me to make life work.

I also love how the passage ends. God promises that when we seek (and follow) His guidance, He will quench our thirst, sustain us and make our lives fruitful and productive. Let's be thankful and seek His guidance together.

APPLICATION: Take brief pauses throughout the day and ask God what He wants you to know. Allow space for Him to stir your heart and put thoughts in your mind. Practice these times of silence so His voice will become louder than anything else you hear.

PRAYER: God, no matter what comes my way and no matter where You lead me, I pray that my eyes will be focused always and only on You. Help me learn to discern Your guidance more now than ever. Amen.

GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S GRACE

At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

Titus 3:3-7 (NIV)

Those are some harsh accusations. When I first read those, I thought to myself, *gosh, I'm not that bad, am I? And if I am, I surely don't want to stop and think about it.* When I reflect further, though, and if I'm honest with myself, I can relate to each of the charges listed in this passage. I haven't been as foolish as I could be, but there have been countless times I've lacked wisdom. I'm not as disobedient as I could be, but I've certainly not obeyed all of God's commands. I'm not as enslaved to passions and pleasures as some other people I know, but it's true that I am deceived (more often than I'd like to admit) into thinking those things will somehow satisfy me. I envy other people's stuff, and surely, I can admit I don't love everyone as I should. Ugh. I guess those things are true. The reality is, in one way or another, in one degree or another, we are *all* guilty of *all* those charges. As Scripture says, *all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23 NIV), and as such, *the wages of sin is death* (Romans 6:23a NIV). There's no escaping it. Humanity is broken. We are broken.

Here's where the good news comes in. His name is Jesus. If we go back to the passage, we not only find out about who we are, but we quickly discover the nature and character of God. He is kind and full of love. He saves us. He cleanses us (of sin and filth and dirt and all the stuff we hate about ourselves). He renews us (literally *makes us new*). And what's more, God does this extravagantly (poured out, not just a drip) and generously (eager, not because He has to).

For from His fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. **John 1:16 (ESV)**

APPLICATION: Pause and reflect on the incredible gift of grace freely given through Christ. Because of Him, you now have a place to go with your guilt and shame, you no longer have to be alone, and your life matters more than you know.

PRAYER: God, thank You isn't enough to say for Your gift of love and redemption. When I wander from Your love today, I pray You'll bring me back home to You. Amen.

GRATITUDE FOR THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a deacon in the church in Cenchrea. Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people. Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me. Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches. Also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home. Greet my dear friend Epenetus. He was the first person from the province of Asia to become a follower of Christ. Give my greetings to Mary, who has worked so hard for your benefit. Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews, who were in prison with me. They are highly respected among the apostles and became followers of Christ before I did. **Romans 16:1-7 (NLT)**

Paul was surrounded by really good people. They had become so dear to him that he concluded the book of Romans listing many of them by name. It seems God values community so much that He included all these people in the Bible!

Here are some observations that come to mind as I read this passage. I see the tenderness and kindness of Paul. He says Phoebe is worthy of honor. I see how this group supported each other. They spent time together. Paul calls them co-workers, meaning they were on some sort of mission together. They risked their lives, and certainly their reputations, for each other. The harmony and unity they experienced impacted so many other people's lives. They worked hard for each other. They lived in such a way that they gained the respect of others.

Community wasn't just a general concept for Paul. You can tell this because he mentioned several specific people by name. This passage gives me hope that true, beautiful, healthy community is possible.

Satan watches for vessels that sail without a convoy.

George Swincock, Puritan Pastor.

APPLICATION: Reflect on specific people that enrich your life. Consider one or two specific ways you can strengthen those relationships this week.

PRAYER: God, You know how difficult relationships are. You see our brokenness and the way we often hurt each other. Thank You for the picture Paul paints of true friendship. I long to be part of this kind of community and to help others experience this, too. May Your Spirit knit Your church together like never before. Amen.

GRATITUDE FOR CREATION

How many are Your works, LORD! In wisdom You made them all; the earth is full of Your creatures.

Psalm 104:24 (NIV)

The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.

Psalm 19:1 (NIV)

I was at a conference a couple of weeks ago. It was in a very large city, one I'd never been to before. The airport was confusing (and dirty). The shuttle to the rental car place was almost impossible to find. The people weren't very friendly or helpful. When I finally got in the car and pulled up the map, I discovered I still had a 30-minute drive to the hotel. It was very disorienting. I was exhausted. Have you ever felt like that? Tired? Just trying to get through the day? If so, you're not alone.

Here's where the beauty comes in. My hotel ended up being on the edge of town. It was close enough to the city where I had to go each day but was far enough away from all the traffic and noise (it's quite stunning to think about how much traffic and noise we've created). That first night was when it hit me. I was in the parking lot, and it was very dark outside. I looked around. Then I looked up. I was immediately taken aback. The stars were brighter than I remember seeing them in a long time. The moon was full and lit up the sky. And as I stood there, for those few magical moments, I forgot all about the cares of the day. All I'd been through slipped away from my mind, and I simply stood there in awe. I was overwhelmed with a sense of peace and wonder.

When Moses wrote about the beauty of creation (written in the form of a poem), and when the writers of the Psalms talk about the stars and the skies and all the creatures, I think they're onto something. It's as if creation itself is meant to ground us. To center us. Adam was made out of dirt, after all! That in reflecting on all that God has made, we are reuniting ourselves with the Creator.

APPLICATION: Find time today to enjoy the beauty of creation and the wonder of God's handiwork. Reflect on the smallest details to the vast universe. He made it all. And today, imagine that He made it just for you.

PRAYER: God, You are bigger than I ever imagined, and everything You create is full of life and beauty. Help me walk slower today so I may see Your hand in all You've made. Amen.

GRATITUDE FOR GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

As you enter into this time of devotion, take a deep breath and remember that no matter what lies ahead, God will provide all you need to help you and sustain you.

Lamentations was likely written soon after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC. By this time in Israel's history, the temple had been destroyed, God's people had become slaves to a foreign nation (which is the reality of much of the Old Testament), regular national worship gatherings had ceased (imagine not having a place to go to church every Sunday). To say that things looked bleak is an understatement. Lamentations is just that... *a lament*. A cry for help. A picture of desperation. We see this happening in our culture, and certainly, each of us has experienced some of this pain and loss over the years.

But what I love about today's passage is that the writer declares several very important things about God. [Side note: Lamentations is an anonymous book traditionally ascribed to Jeremiah. Many scholars, however, have very good reasons to reject this claim. But that's a study and story for a different time.]

Here are some truths that help reorient my perspective: God's love doesn't end no matter what's going on around me. He doesn't always bring judgment/justice according to my timing (this is a good definition of mercy). I have the opportunity for a fresh start with God every morning when I wake up. God is faithful even when I don't understand what's happening. Lamentations is a difficult book to read, but it's helping me grow closer to God, and it's filling me with hope I didn't know I needed.

God writes with a pen that never blots, speaks with a tongue that never slips, acts with a hand that never fails.

C.H. Spurgeon

APPLICATION: Spend time praying for yourself, your friends and family, Brookwood and our surrounding community. Pray we would see who God really is in the midst of a culture of chaos and confusion—He is faithful. And for that, we can be grateful.

PRAYER: Lord, today I align my heart with the truth that You are faithful. Amen.

GOD'S GRAND DESIGN

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters. **Genesis 1:1-2 (NLT)**

The first verses of the Bible introduce us to a remarkable scene: nothing but a vast emptiness, a formless void. Yet God was already there, preparing to create something magnificent. With a word, He transformed the chaos into a beautifully ordered universe, bringing light, life and purpose to every corner of creation.

I can still remember the awe I felt during my first visit to the Grand Canyon. As I stood on the edge, gazing at the endless expanse of rock carved by time, I was overwhelmed by the sheer grandeur of God's creation. In that moment, I realized how small I was compared to the vastness of His handiwork—and yet, at the same time, I felt deeply known by the Creator of it all. The God who shaped the universe also shaped my heart.

In our everyday lives, it's easy to forget this awe-inspiring truth. We get caught up in the busyness of life, often overlooking the fact that we live in the midst of God's grand design. Every sunrise, every star-filled night, every breath we take is a testament to His creative power. And just as God brought order to the chaos in Genesis, He continues to bring order and purpose to our lives when we invite Him in.

Take a moment to reflect: What areas of your life feel formless or chaotic right now? Just as the Spirit of God hovered over the waters, He is present and ready to work in the spaces where you feel overwhelmed or uncertain.

APPLICATION: This week, take time to marvel at God's creation—whether in a park, under a starlit sky, or simply in the quiet of your own home. As you do, ask God to reveal His purpose in the areas of your life that feel disordered. Trust that He, the same God who brought beauty from chaos, will continue His grand design in you.

PRAYER: God, help me to remember that You are with me. You're omnipotent and omniscient, yet You still choose to know and love me. Help me to draw comfort from this truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

CREATOR'S CAREFUL CRAFTSMANSHIP

You made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank You for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. **Psalm 139:13-14 (NLT)**

One afternoon, my wife was knitting a blanket for a close friend's newborn baby. She carefully chose the colors and worked with intentionality to form something special. Slowly, stitch by stitch, the fabric began to take shape. What started as a ball of yarn became something intricate and useful (I have no idea how she did it, to be honest).

As she worked, Psalm 139 came to mind, reminding me of how intimately involved God is in our creation. He didn't just throw us together carelessly—He *knit* us together with intentionality and love. Just as she poured care into making that blanket, God meticulously crafted us, knowing exactly what He was doing. Each part of our being, from our physical bodies to our emotions, reflects the care of a Creator who is deeply involved in every detail of our lives.

This truth hit home when I struggled with insecurity about myself. I used to pick apart every little flaw or perceived shortcoming, forgetting that I was designed by the hand of God. But the more I meditated on this passage, the more I realized I am not a mistake—I am the intentional creation of a loving Father.

Have you ever felt inadequate or insecure, like you don't measure up? Remember, God's craftsmanship in you is marvelous. You are exactly who He designed you to be, and your worth comes from being His creation, not from meeting worldly standards.

APPLICATION: This week, take time to reflect on your identity as God's masterpiece. Write down three things about yourself for which you are thankful. As you do, praise God for His careful craftsmanship in your life. Let His love and intentionality shape how you view yourself.

PRAYER: Lord, I know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Thank You for Your master craftsmanship on display in me. Help me to live in awe of You every day. In Jesus' name, amen.

MARVELS OF THE MAKER

Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of His understanding.

Isaiah 40:28 (NLT)

As a child, I loved lying on the grass at night, gazing up at the stars. Even now, I am still filled with wonder at the vastness of the universe. I love to be in my hammock in the woods and stare at the vastness overhead. How could something so immense exist? The stars, distant galaxies and the seemingly infinite sky speak to the greatness of our Creator.

Isaiah reminds us that the same God who placed the stars in the sky and crafted the earth is everlasting, never tiring and never confused. His wisdom is beyond our comprehension, and His strength is limitless. Yet, despite His grandeur, He cares for us individually. The God who made the universe knows us intimately.

This became real to me during a particularly stressful season of my life. Juggling work, family and personal struggles left me feeling exhausted and overwhelmed. I remember sitting outside one evening, looking up at the stars, and feeling small compared to the universe's expanse. But that night, I also felt a sense of peace. If the God who sustains the universe never grows weary, then surely He could handle my burdens, too.

Are you carrying burdens that feel too heavy? Take heart in knowing that the God who never grows weary is holding you. His power is unmatched, and His understanding of your situation is deeper than you can imagine.

APPLICATION: This week, when you feel overwhelmed, go outside and look up at the sky. Let the vastness of God's creation remind you of His strength. Surrender your worries to the One who never grows weak, and trust that He is in control.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to remember that You are, in fact, Lord of all. Help me trust You in every circumstance, especially when I feel overwhelmed. In Jesus' name, amen.

FORMED BY THE FATHER

"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as My prophet to the nations."

Jeremiah 1:5 (NLT)

I remember the moment I held my first child in my arms. It was overwhelming to think that this tiny, perfect human had been growing inside my wife for months, and I hadn't even known them yet. But God had known them—He had already planned every detail of their life before they were born. It was a humbling realization that life is not just a random occurrence but part of a divine plan. It was so overwhelming that all the nurses in attendance were concerned that I was going to fall over—but I'm happy to report that I managed to pull it together and remain upright.

Jeremiah 1:5 gives us a glimpse into God's intimate knowledge of us. Before we even existed in the physical sense, God had already formed us in His mind. He knew our personality, our talents, our struggles and our purpose. And then it was God Himself who formed us within our mothers—what a beautiful truth to grasp! Just as He set Jeremiah apart for a specific task, He also has a unique plan for each of us.

It's easy to feel lost or insignificant in a world full of people. We might wonder if our lives really matter or if we're making any difference at all. But this verse reminds us that we were created on purpose, for a purpose. God knows us fully and has set us apart for His work in ways we may not even fully realize yet. You matter. You're not here by accident. You have a purpose in this world—even if right now it's difficult to fully grasp what it may be.

APPLICATION: Spend time in prayer this week, asking God to reveal the specific ways He has set you apart for His purpose. Reflect on how you can use the unique gifts He's given you to impact the lives of those around you. Trust that your life is part of His bigger plan.

PRAYER: Father, I know You created me on purpose for a purpose. Help me live from the confident assurance that You created me at this exact moment in history, exactly as I am, that I might glorify You. In Jesus' name, amen.

SKY AND SEA SHAPED BY SOVEREIGNTY

"God stretches the northern sky over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing. He wraps the rain in His thick clouds, and the clouds don't burst with the weight."
Job 26:7-8 (NLT)

One summer, I had the opportunity to visit the beach during a storm. As I stood there, the power of the wind and waves took my breath away. The ocean roared with a force that was both beautiful and terrifying, and the sky was a tapestry of dark, swirling clouds. I felt so small and vulnerable in the face of nature's might. Yet, despite the storm's intensity, there was a strange sense of peace in knowing that this powerful display was still under God's control.

Job's words in today's passage paint a picture of God's sovereignty over creation. He is the One who *stretches the northern sky over empty space and hangs the earth on nothing*. When we look at the night sky or contemplate the vastness of the universe, we are reminded of how small we are in comparison. And yet, the God who holds the cosmos in place is the same God who cares deeply for us.

The image of God wrapping the rain in thick clouds, ensuring they don't burst with the weight, is a powerful reminder of His control over the seemingly uncontrollable. Imagine the complexity and balance required to keep the rain suspended until the right moment or to maintain the delicate balance of the earth in space. It's awe-inspiring to think that the same God who manages the forces of nature is also involved in the details of our lives.

During that stormy day at the beach, I realized the chaos I witnessed was not outside God's command. He wasn't worried or overwhelmed by the crashing waves or howling winds—He was orchestrating it all. Similarly, the storms in our lives, though they may feel overwhelming, are not beyond God's control. He sees the bigger picture and knows exactly what we need and when we need it.

APPLICATION: If you're facing a storm in your life—be it emotional, relational or financial—remember that the same God who shapes the sky and sea is holding you. Take time this week to meditate on God's sovereignty. Go outside, look at the sky, and let it remind you that the One who controls the universe also cares for you. Trust Him to hold you steady, just as He holds the earth suspended in space.

PRAYER: God, help me to observe Your power in nature. I ask that You would never let me grow numb to the fact that You are omnipotent. You are Creator and Sustainer—help me to trust You more and more. In Jesus' name, amen.

PROCLAIMING HIS POWER IN CREATION

For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see His invisible qualities—His eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Romans 1:20 (NLT)

I've always enjoyed hiking and camping in the mountains. For me, there's little that compares with reaching the summit of a mountain and looking out over the breathtaking view of valleys, rivers and endless blue sky. It's truly awe-inspiring. You may not be a mountain climber—that's okay! Perhaps it's a multi-hued sunset or an awe-inspiring lighting storm. The changing of the leaves in the fall or the vast expanse of the ocean as you stand on the beach. No matter where you look, it's impossible to deny God's presence when you look at His handiwork. Creation glorifies the Creator!

Romans 1:20 tells us that creation reveals God's power and divine nature. The world around us is a constant proclamation of His existence. From the grandeur of mountain ranges to the intricacy of a flower petal, all of creation speaks of a Creator who is powerful and purposeful. It leaves us without an excuse—God is evident in every corner of the world.

As believers, we have the responsibility to help others see this truth as well. Sometimes, people are so caught up in the busyness of life that they fail to recognize God's hand in creation. We can help open their eyes by pointing out the beauty of the world and attributing it to the One who made it.

APPLICATION: This week, be intentional about proclaiming God's power in creation. Share with someone how a specific aspect of nature has reminded you of God's presence and character. Whether it's through a conversation, a social media post, or simply expressing your gratitude for creation, let others know that the beauty of the world points to a powerful Creator. And if that appreciation is low, take some time first to get out and experience nature and His handiwork!

PRAYER: God, thank You for revealing Yourself to us in so many ways. Help me to remember You in all that I see in nature. In Jesus' name, amen.

DIVINE DELIVERANCE

Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent His angel to rescue His servants who trusted in Him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."

Daniel 3:28 (NLT)

Imagine being in a situation where standing up for what you believe could cost you everything—even your life. That's exactly what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego faced when King Nebuchadnezzar ordered everyone to bow down to a golden statue. Defying the king's command, they stood firm in their faith, willing to face the fiery furnace rather than worship a false god.

Their story reminds me of a modern-day account of a young girl named Rachel. In 1999, during a tragic school shooting, she was asked if she believed in God. Knowing that her affirmation could mean her death, she said, Yes. Her bravery and faith were a powerful testimony to many who heard her story.

In both cases, we see the courage to stand for God no matter the consequences. For Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, their unwavering faith resulted in a miraculous deliverance. God sent His angel to protect them, and they emerged from the furnace without a single burn. This act of divine intercession not only saved their lives but also led King Nebuchadnezzar to acknowledge the power and sovereignty of God.

God may not always deliver us in the way we expect, but He is always present, interceding on our behalf. Whether He protects us from danger, gives us strength to endure hardship, or uses our faithfulness to inspire others, His deliverance is always at work.

APPLICATION: Consider an area in your life where you need God's deliverance—whether it's from fear, a difficult situation, or a challenging relationship. Ask God to intervene and show you His power and presence. Take a step of faith, trusting that He will meet you where you are, just as He did for Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Remember, God honors those who stand for Him, even in the face of adversity.

PRAYER: God, grant me a faith that endures even in the face of adversity. Help me to hold fast to You in every circumstance, especially persecution. I trust and love You. In Jesus' name, amen.

PROVIDENTIAL PROVISION

"For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the LORD sends rain and the crops grow again!" So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her family continued to eat for many days. There was always enough flour and olive oil left in the containers, just as the LORD had promised through Elijah.

1 Kings 17:14-16 (NLT)

There's a story about a single mother who lost her job and struggled to make ends meet. With just a few dollars left, she worried about how she would feed her children. That night, she prayed for God's provision, unsure of what to do next. The following morning, she found a basket of groceries on her doorstep with a note that said, *God provides*. Tears filled her eyes as she realized God had heard her cry and provided for her needs.

This story mirrors the experience of the widow in Zarephath. With just a handful of flour and a bit of oil, she was preparing what she thought would be her last meal for herself and her son. Then, the prophet Elijah arrived, asking for water and bread. Despite her dire situation, she obeyed Elijah's request, trusting his assurance that God would provide.

True to His word, God miraculously kept her flour and oil from running out, not just for one meal but many days. His provision was not only physical but also spiritual, as the widow's faith grew through this divine intercession. He is Jehovah Jireh—the Lord who provides!

Often, God's provision comes when we least expect it and in ways we don't anticipate. It might be through a kind word, an unexpected gift or an opportunity that appears out of nowhere. Just as He did for the widow, God sees our needs and steps in to provide, sometimes in miraculous ways.

APPLICATION: If you're facing a situation where resources are scarce, trust in God's provision. Offer what you have—whether it's time, talent, or resources—and watch how He multiplies it. Seek opportunities to be a vessel of God's provision for others, just as He may use them to bless you. Remember, God is faithful and will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory.

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, for how You have provided in the past. Help me to trust that You will continue to provide all the days of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

HEAVENLY HEALING

So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times as the man of God had instructed him, and his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed!
2 Kings 5:14 (NLT)

There's a famous story about a woman named Joni Eareckson Tada. Paralyzed from the neck down after a diving accident, she prayed fervently for physical healing. Although she wasn't healed as she had hoped, she found a different kind of healing through God's presence and purpose in her life. Today, Joni is an inspiration to many, sharing her story of faith and perseverance.

Naaman's story is a bit different but equally powerful. A mighty commander, Naaman suffered from leprosy, a disease that isolated him from society despite his status. Desperate for healing, he sought the help of the prophet Elisha, who instructed him to wash seven times in the Jordan River. Initially resistant, Naaman eventually obeyed and was miraculously healed.

Naaman's healing wasn't just about curing his physical ailment. It was also a lesson in humility and obedience. God's intercession in Naaman's life showed that His healing goes beyond the physical—it's about restoring our hearts and aligning us with His will.

Sometimes, God's healing may not look the way we expect. It might be physical, emotional, or spiritual. Like Naaman, we may need to let go of our pride or preconceived notions and trust God's method and timing.

Where do you need healing? Do you believe that God can miraculously intercede on your behalf? What stops you from believing He can and will bring healing in your situation? Take some time to be honest with yourself and God.

APPLICATION: If you're seeking healing today—whether physical, emotional or spiritual—take a step of faith. Pray and ask God to show you His way and be open to His leading, even if it's unconventional. Consider reaching out to someone you trust to pray with you. And remember, God's healing is not always immediate, but His presence and peace are available to you right now.

PRAYER: Father, Your ways are higher than my ways, and Your thoughts are higher than my thoughts. Help me trust that You are good and will ultimately bring healing in every situation, even if it doesn't come when or how I desire. In Jesus' name, amen.

MIRACULOUS MULTIPLICATION

Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward He did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. **John 6:11 (NLT)**

I once heard a story about a small church that wanted to host a community meal but had very little food and money. They prayed, trusting God to provide. As word spread, people began showing up with food donations, and what started as a modest meal turned into a feast that served everyone in need. The church marveled at how God took their limited resources and turned them into more than enough.

This reminds us of when Jesus fed over five thousand people with just five loaves of bread and two fish. The Bible uses that number of 5,000, but that would likely only refer to the men. How many more women and children were there? We could reasonably speculate that this was a crowd of 10,000-15,000 people! Faced with a hungry crowd and seemingly insufficient resources, Jesus gave thanks and distributed the food. Miraculously, everyone ate their fill, and there were even leftovers!

God's intercession in this miracle shows us that He can take what little we have and multiply it beyond our expectations. When we place our trust and resources in His hands, He provides abundantly. This story isn't just about physical provision; it's about God's ability to exceed our limitations and meet every need. Sometimes, we may feel that what we have to offer—whether time, money or skills—is too small to make a difference. But when we give it to God, He can use it in ways we never imagined.

What can you give to God for Him to multiply? How can you make yourself available to be used by Him? Just like the little boy in the story—be faithful to bring what you have and trust Him with the rest.

APPLICATION: Think about something in your life that seems insufficient—your finances, time or abilities. Offer it to God in faith and ask Him to multiply it for His purposes. Look for opportunities to serve or give, trusting that God will use your offering to bless others. Remember, in God's hands, even the smallest gift can become a miracle.

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, for Your abundant blessings. Use my life to advance Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

PERFECT PEACE

When Jesus woke up, He rebuked the wind and said to the waves, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm.

Mark 4:39 (NLT)

I know an old *preacher* story about a pilot flying through a severe storm. The plane shook, passengers were terrified, and chaos ensued. Amid the turmoil, one young boy sat calmly, playing with his toy. When asked why he wasn't afraid, he simply replied, *My dad's the pilot. He'll get us home safely.*

This story beautifully illustrates the kind of peace Jesus brought to His disciples in the storm. As they battled the fierce winds and waves, panic set in. But when they woke Jesus, He spoke three simple words: *Silence! Be still!* Immediately, the storm ceased, and calm returned.

Jesus' intercession in that moment didn't just calm the storm; it calmed the hearts of His disciples. It reminded them that no matter how turbulent the circumstances, He was in control. So, do you understand and believe in the depths of your soul that He is in control no matter what comes?

We all face storms in life—unexpected challenges, fears and anxieties that threaten to overwhelm us. Like the disciples, we can feel helpless and afraid. But Jesus is with us, and His presence brings peace that surpasses understanding. But we must not FORGET that He is with us, and He is omnipotent. I've found that so often, the storms and chaos in my life are a direct result of me trying to handle things on my own. Instead of a last resort, may we run to our Father first, firm in our faith that He will sustain us.

APPLICATION: When life's storms rage, take a moment to turn to Jesus in prayer. Speak His words over your situation: *Silence! Be still!* Trust that He is with you and has the power to bring peace during chaos. Share this peace with others by being a calm presence in their storms, pointing them to the One who calms all fears.

PRAYER: Help me to trust You in the midst of storms, Lord. Grant that Your peace, which surpasses all understanding, may rule and reign in my heart and mind. In Jesus' name, amen.

REDEMPITIVE RESCUE

Suddenly, there was a bright light in the cell, and an angel of the Lord stood before Peter. The angel struck him on the side to awaken him and said, "Quick! Get up!" And the chains fell off his wrists. **Acts 12:7 (NLT)**

There's a story of a man who had been struggling with addiction for years. Trapped in a cycle of substance abuse, he felt imprisoned by his choices and circumstances. One night, in desperation, he cried out to God. The next day, an old friend reached out, inviting him to a support group. That encounter marked the beginning of his journey to freedom and healing—a clear sign of God's intercession in his life.

Peter's experience in Acts 12 is a powerful example of God's rescue mission. Imprisoned and bound in chains, Peter faced what seemed like an impossible situation. But God had other plans. He sent an angel to break Peter's chains and lead him out of the prison. This miraculous escape demonstrated God's power to deliver His people, even in the darkest circumstances.

God's redemptive rescue isn't limited to physical chains. He breaks the chains of addiction, fear, guilt, and sin, setting us free to live in the fullness of His grace. No matter how trapped we feel, God is able to intervene and bring us out of bondage.

Is there an area of your life where you feel trapped? Chained? In need of rescue? What's standing in the way of you crying out to God to intercede? Do you believe that He can rescue you? Sometimes, we can believe that we're too far gone for God to redeem us. That's a lie from the enemy. God can and will meet you in your darkest moments and redeem you.

APPLICATION: Reflect on areas in your life where you need God's rescuing power. It could be an addiction, a toxic relationship or a persistent fear. Surrender it to God in prayer, asking Him to break the chains and lead you to freedom. If you know someone struggling, be a beacon of hope and support, pointing them to the God who rescues and redeems.

PRAYER: Thank You, God, for rescuing me. Help me to continue to trust You to rescue me in every circumstance. In Jesus' name, amen.

PRESENCE IN THE PIT

So when the Ishmaelites, who were Midianite traders, came by, Joseph's brothers pulled him out of the cistern and sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the traders took him to Egypt. **Genesis 37:28 (NLT)**

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people." **Genesis 50:20 (NLT)**

We all have moments when life takes a nosedive into the pit. You're betrayed by a friend, passed over for a promotion, or left out of a plan. It's in these dark moments that we wonder: *Where is God?* This was certainly the case for Joseph, who found himself betrayed by his own brothers, sold into slavery and forgotten in a foreign land. From the bottom of the cistern, it surely seemed like his life was over. But God was working, even in the pit.

Corrie ten Boom, a survivor of a Nazi concentration camp, famously said, *There is no pit so deep, that God's love is not deeper still.* She experienced unimaginable suffering, yet she clung to the belief that God's presence could reach her, even in her darkest moments. Like Joseph, Corrie's story is one of God's redemptive power. Her life, like Joseph's, is a testimony that even in the pits of despair, God shows up.

In Genesis 37, Joseph is pulled from the pit and sold into slavery. It's hard to see God in that moment. But as we follow Joseph's journey, we see that God was present every step of the way, working behind the scenes. Years later, after rising to power in Egypt, Joseph is able to say to his brothers, *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good"* (Genesis 50:20). The pit was part of God's plan to bring about a greater good, not just for Joseph, but for an entire nation.

We may not understand why we end up in life's pits, but we can trust that God is present and working through them.

APPLICATION: When you find yourself in a *pit* of difficulty, reflect on Joseph's story. It can be easy to focus on the betrayal or hardship, but trust that God is working even when you can't see it. Take time today to pray and ask God to reveal His presence to you in your circumstances. What might He be orchestrating in your life for a greater good? Trust that no pit is too deep for His love and redemption to reach.

PRAYER: God help me to trust and believe that You are always working, even when hope seems lost. You are sovereign and are working all things for my good and Your glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

DELIVERANCE IN THE DEN

"My God sent His angel to shut the lions' mouths so that they would not hurt me, for I have been found innocent in His sight. And I have not wronged you, Your Majesty."
Daniel 6:22 (NLT)

When Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, his fate seemed sealed. His crime? Remaining faithful to God when the king's decree demanded otherwise. The lions' den represents the situations in life where fear seems overwhelming, where we feel powerless to change our circumstances.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *Be sure of this: You may trust the Lord too little, but you can never trust Him too much.* Daniel's trust in God was unwavering. He didn't fight or beg for his life but simply trusted that God would either deliver him or walk with him into eternity. In this moment, Daniel's faith met God's miraculous power.

We know the rest of the story—God sent an angel to shut the mouths of the lions, and Daniel emerged unscathed. But the true miracle was Daniel's faith before the deliverance came. Even when we are surrounded by our own *lions*—whether they be financial struggles, health crises or relational conflicts—God is able to deliver us. His presence goes before us, and He is always in control.

The lions' den reminds us that even when the world turns against us, God never leaves our side. We may be thrown into frightening situations, but God's deliverance will come in His perfect time and way.

APPLICATION: Are you facing a situation that feels like a den of lions—one filled with fear or uncertainty? Remember Daniel's example of faith and trust. Instead of focusing on the threats around you, fix your eyes on God's ability to deliver you. Spend time in prayer today, asking for God's protection and deliverance. Whether He shuts the lions' mouths or simply gives you peace in the storm, know that He is with you.

PRAYER: God, You are the great Deliverer. When I am surrounded, help me to remember that You are with me and for me. That ultimate, eternal victory is secured in Your Son, Jesus. Give me a faith like Daniel's. In Jesus' name, amen.

COMFORT IN THE CAVE

"Go out and stand before Me on the mountain," the LORD told him. And as Elijah stood there, the LORD passed by, and a mighty windstorm hit the mountain. It was such a terrible blast that the rocks were torn loose, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire, there was the sound of a gentle whisper.

1 Kings 19:11-12 (NLT)

Elijah was a man on the run, filled with fear and exhaustion. After a great victory over the prophets of Baal, his life was threatened, and he fled to a cave, feeling alone and defeated. It was in this moment that God chose to speak—not in a mighty wind, earthquake or fire, but in a gentle whisper.

Blaise Pascal is quoted as having said, *In difficult times, carry something beautiful in your heart.* Elijah needed something beautiful to restore his soul, and it came in the form of God's quiet presence. God didn't speak through dramatic displays of power, but in a way Elijah needed—a still, small voice that reminded him that he wasn't alone.

Sometimes, we expect God to show up in big, dramatic ways, but more often than not, He comes in the quiet moments. When we're in our own caves—whether they're caves of fear, depression, or isolation—God whispers His comfort and presence to us. His voice brings peace in the midst of chaos.

Elijah's story reminds us that God is always present, even when we feel alone, and comforts us in ways we might not expect. Are you looking for *mountaintop moments*, or are you willing to seek God in the seemingly ordinary? The quiet? The still moments of a regular day? He is speaking; if only we can slow down and listen! If we never slow down and listen, how can we expect to hear what God wants to say to us?

APPLICATION: If you find yourself retreating to a cave of isolation or fear, listen for God's gentle whisper. He is with you in the stillness, offering comfort. Take time today to sit quietly in God's presence. Turn off distractions, quiet your heart and ask God to speak to you. His presence is often found in the still moments.

PRAYER: Lord, I ask that You would help me hear Your voice and sense Your leading in the everyday, ordinary parts of my life. Thank You for mountaintop moments, but help me seek You in the seemingly ordinary as well. In Jesus' name, amen.

PEACE IN THE PRISON

Around midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening. Suddenly, there was a massive earthquake, and the prison was shaken to its foundations. All the doors immediately flew open, and the chains of every prisoner fell off! **Acts 16:25-26 (NLT)**

Paul and Silas had been beaten and thrown into a prison cell for preaching the Gospel. Chained and locked away, it seemed like their ministry had come to an abrupt and unjust end. But instead of despairing, they responded in an unexpected way: they sang hymns and prayed. Even amid a dark, hopeless situation, they experienced God's peace.

Martin Luther once said, *I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess.* Paul and Silas didn't allow their circumstances to dictate their peace. Instead, they placed their trust and hope in God, knowing He could intervene at any moment.

And intervene He did. As they worshiped, God caused an earthquake that broke their chains and opened the prison doors. This miraculous event not only set them free but also led to the conversion of the jailer and his family. God showed up in the prison, turning a night of despair into a moment of deliverance and salvation.

When we find ourselves trapped in situations that feel like a *prison*—whether it's a dead-end job, an oppressive relationship or even internal battles with anxiety and fear—God's peace is still available to us. Like Paul and Silas, we can choose to worship in our trials, trusting that God will bring freedom in His time and in His way.

APPLICATION: Are you feeling *imprisoned* by a difficult situation? Like Paul and Silas, turn your focus to God through worship and prayer. Ask Him for peace in your heart, even if your circumstances don't change right away. Trust that He is working behind the scenes to bring freedom and deliverance. Choose to praise Him today, no matter what your situation looks like, and watch how His peace can transform your perspective.

PRAYER: Help me to worship You at all times, Lord. When everything is going my way, I thank and praise You for Your blessing. When I'm in the valley, I praise You because You are greater than my circumstances, and I know that You can and will ultimately deliver me. Grow my faith day by day. In Jesus' name, amen.

FAITHFULNESS IN THE FURNACE

"Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!" **Daniel 3:25 (NLT)**

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood before King Nebuchadnezzar with unwavering courage. Faced with the threat of being thrown into a blazing furnace for refusing to bow to the king's golden idol, they made one thing clear: they would remain faithful to God no matter the cost. In one of the most powerful declarations of faith, they said, "*If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. ... But even if He doesn't, we want to make it clear to you...we will never serve your gods...*" (Daniel 3:17-18).

Their faith wasn't dependent on whether God would deliver them from the flames—it was rooted in trust that God's plan was greater than their present suffering. They believed that even if God didn't rescue them from the fire, He was still worthy of their obedience.

John Calvin once said, *There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.* Even in the midst of what seemed like certain death, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego had a reason to rejoice: God's faithfulness. When the king looked into the furnace, he was astonished to see not three men burning but four—one of whom he described as *looking like a god*. This fourth figure was a divine presence, likely a manifestation of God's protection, symbolizing that the Lord was with them even in the fire.

God didn't just deliver them from the flames; He walked with them through it. And when they emerged from the furnace, not a hair on their heads was singed, and they didn't even smell like smoke (Daniel 3:27). Their faith in God was rewarded not just by deliverance but by a powerful testimony to those around them of God's ability to protect and save.

We may not face a literal furnace, but we all face trials that test our faith. God's faithfulness is steadfast, and He walks with us through every fire. Sometimes, He delivers us from the trial; other times, He strengthens us through it, but either way, He is present.

APPLICATION: Are you walking through a *furnace* of trial right now? Know that God is with you in the fire. He may not take you out of the trial, but He will sustain you through it. Reflect on the challenges you're facing today. How might God be asking you to trust Him in the midst of them?

PRAYER: God grant me strength to endure through every circumstance. Help me to take solace in the promise that You are with me always. In Jesus' name, amen.

LIGHT IN THE LAND OF DARKNESS

The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. **Isaiah 9:2 (NLT)**

Darkness can be terrifying—it certainly is for my four-year-old. If he had it his way, we'd leave every light in his room (and the rest of the house) on all night. Whether it's literal darkness or the metaphorical kind—times of confusion, despair or uncertainty—it's easy to feel lost, alone and afraid. The people of Israel knew this feeling well. Isaiah's prophecy in chapter 9 was spoken during a time of great spiritual and political darkness. Israel had turned away from God, and they found themselves oppressed and without hope. Yet, amid this darkness, Isaiah gives a word of hope: the promise of a great light.

This light wasn't just a metaphor for better days ahead; it was a prophecy about the coming of Jesus, the Messiah. He is the *great light* who would pierce through the deepest darkness, bringing hope, redemption and salvation to all who walk in despair. In John 8:12, Jesus proclaimed, *"I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."*

C.S. Lewis once said, *I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.* The coming of Christ not only brings light into our personal darkness, but it also illuminates everything else in our lives. It gives us clarity, purpose, and hope, even in the bleakest times.

We all go through seasons where we feel like we're living in a land of darkness. Maybe it's the darkness of grief, depression or uncertainty about the future. In these moments, it's easy to believe the light will never come. But Isaiah's prophecy reminds us that God's light will always break through. No matter how dark the night seems, the dawn is coming. Jesus is that dawn. He is the light that can shine into every corner of our lives, no matter how deep the darkness may seem.

The darkness may be overwhelming, but the light of Christ is always greater. And just as the sun rises after the darkest night, His light will rise in your life, bringing hope and new life.

APPLICATION: If you're walking through a season of darkness right now, take heart. God's light is near. Spend time reflecting on Jesus as the Light of the World. Consider reading John 1 or John 8 and meditate on the promises of Christ's light in your life. Pray for His light to shine into the dark areas of your heart and circumstances, and ask Him to guide your steps as you walk toward hope and healing.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to live in the light, as You are in the light. Help me to shine for You like a city on a hill. Grant me endurance and perseverance in a dark world. In Jesus' name, amen.

ASTONISHING ARRIVAL

But the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David!"

Luke 2:10-11 (NLT)

The night sky was a canvas of darkness, illuminated only by the twinkling stars above. In the quiet fields of Bethlehem, shepherds kept watch over their flocks, unaware of the monumental event about to unfold. Suddenly, the stillness was shattered by the dazzling light of an angel. Fear gripped their hearts, yet the angel's words pierced through the fear: *Don't be afraid! I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people.* This announcement marked the arrival of the long-awaited Savior, Jesus Christ, born in the humble surroundings of a stable.

This astonishing arrival was not merely a birth; it was the fulfillment of centuries of prophecy and hope. Imagine the joy that swelled in the hearts of the shepherds as they realized that the Savior, the Messiah, had come to them! The significance of this moment cannot be overstated. God chose the lowly shepherds to receive this heavenly message, illustrating that the Good News of Christ is for everyone—rich and poor, powerful and meek.

As you reflect on this miraculous event, consider the words of the beloved Christmas hymn *O Holy Night*. The hymn beautifully captures the awe of Christ's coming: *Fall on your knees, O hear the angel voices!* Just as the shepherds were called to witness the miracle, we too are invited to kneel in worship and adoration of the newborn King.

In a world filled with distractions and noise, it's easy to overlook the profound joy of Christ's birth. This season, take intentional time to pause and reflect on what His arrival means for you personally. How does knowing that the Savior has come bring joy to your life?

APPLICATION: This week, set aside a moment each day to meditate on the miracle of Christ's birth. Create a quiet space in your home where you can read the Christmas story in Luke 2. Consider writing down what this astonishing arrival means to you and how it impacts your daily life. Share this joy with someone else—perhaps through a card, a conversation, or by inviting them to join you for a Christmas service. As you do, let the truth of His arrival fill your heart with peace and gladness, knowing that the Savior has come to bring hope to a weary world.

PRAYER: God thank You for sending Your Son Jesus into this world. Without His life, death and resurrection, I would be lost. Help me to remain focused this holiday season on the true reason, I to celebrate. In Jesus' name, amen.

BENEVOLENT BLESSINGS

Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.

James 1:17 (NLT)

In the homestretch of the Christmas season, it's easy to get caught up in the busyness of shopping, decorating and planning gatherings. Amidst this whirlwind, we must remember the true source of all good gifts: our Heavenly Father. James reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from God, the Creator who remains constant and unchanging.

Christmas is the ultimate demonstration of God's benevolence. The birth of Jesus is the greatest gift ever given to humanity—God's love wrapped in swaddling clothes. This Child would grow to offer us grace, mercy and eternal life, all freely given despite our unworthiness. Imagine the blessings that overflow from the humble stable in Bethlehem. God chose to send His Son, not to the powerful or the elite, but to the ordinary, the meek and the lowly.

The beloved hymn *What Child Is This?* beautifully encapsulates this wonder. Its lyrics prompt us to ponder the identity of this child and the profound gift He represents: *This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing.* Each line draws our attention to the magnificence of Christ, inviting us to acknowledge the incredible blessing He is to our lives.

As we celebrate Christmas, let's remember that every blessing we experience comes from God's hand. Take time to appreciate the small wonders around you—a child's laughter, the warmth of family gatherings, the beauty of a snowy landscape. Each moment is a gift, a reflection of God's generosity.

APPLICATION: This week, make a list of blessings in your life. Include the simple joys, as well as the profound gifts that have shaped your faith journey. As you reflect, express gratitude in prayer, thanking God for these benevolent blessings. Additionally, consider sharing your list with someone who might need encouragement. By acknowledging the good in our lives, we can inspire others to see God's hand at work, fostering a spirit of thankfulness this Christmas season.

PRAYER: God, thank You for every blessing in my life. I didn't earn them or work hard enough to achieve them—You gave them to me in Your graciousness. Grow within me a sense of enduring gratitude. In Jesus' name, amen.

CELESTIAL CELEBRATION

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”

Luke 2:13-14 (NLT)

In the quiet night of Bethlehem, a heavenly chorus erupted, proclaiming the arrival of the Messiah. The shepherds, awestruck by the sight of the angelic host, witnessed a celestial celebration like no other. This moment marked not just the birth of Jesus but a cosmic event that bridged heaven and earth. The announcement of His birth brought glory to God and the promise of peace to humanity.

The hymn *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* resonates beautifully with this celebration. The lyrics invite us to join the angelic hosts in glorifying God: *Hark! The herald angels sing, “Glory to the new-born King!”* Just as the angels rejoiced, we are called to share in that joy, recognizing the significance of Christ’s coming.

This celebration is an invitation to each of us. The peace proclaimed by the angels is not merely a distant hope; it is a present reality for those who accept Christ. His birth signifies that God is with us, a promise that transcends our circumstances. Even amidst chaos and uncertainty, we can find solace in the peace that Christ brings.

As we reflect on this celestial celebration, let’s allow the joy of His arrival to fill our hearts. Just as the angels praised God, we too can lift our voices in worship, acknowledging His greatness and the love He has shown us through Jesus.

APPLICATION: This week, create your own celestial celebration by incorporating worship into your daily routine. Whether through singing, listening to Christmas music, or reflecting on Scripture, make it a point to praise God for the gift of His Son. Additionally, consider inviting a friend or family member to join you in worship—whether by attending an upcoming service together or sharing a favorite hymn. Let the celebration of Christ’s birth resonate in your heart and spill over into your interactions with others, spreading joy and peace. Merry Christmas!

PRAYER: Father may the whole of my life be marked by celebration of who You are and what You’ve done. May the joy of Your salvation fill me all year long. In Jesus’ name, amen.

DIVINE DEMONSTRATION

So the Word became human and made His home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen His glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.
John 1:14 (NLT)

The Christmas story is not just about a baby born in a manger; it's about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us. John's profound declaration highlights the divine nature of Christ and His mission on earth. In the incarnation, God demonstrated His love by entering our world, experiencing our struggles and offering us redemption.

This moment is a beautiful display of God's faithfulness. He fulfilled His promise to send a Savior, not from a distance, but by intimately engaging with humanity. Jesus' life, characterized by love and faithfulness, reveals the heart of the Father.

The hymn *O Come, All Ye Faithful* echoes this theme of divine demonstration. It invites us to come and behold Him: *O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord*. This adoration is not just for the miraculous birth but for the incredible love that led God to become one of us.

In a world that often feels distant from God, the incarnation serves as a reminder that He desires relationship with us. Jesus came to share in our humanity and to demonstrate the depths of His love. This season let's embrace the truth that God is not far off; He is present and active in our lives.

APPLICATION: This week, spend time reflecting on the ways God has demonstrated His love to you personally. Write down instances where you've felt His presence, guidance, or provision. Let these reflections deepen your understanding of His faithfulness. Additionally, find a moment to share this love story with someone else. Perhaps share your testimony of how Christ has impacted your life. As you do, remember that the greatest gift we can give is the message of His love.

PRAYER: Lord, You changed everything through Your Son Jesus. Help me to live by His power and for His glory. Thank You for being present and active in my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

FAITHFUL FULFILLMENT

For a Child is born to us, a Son is given to us. The government will rest on His shoulders. And He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6 (NLT)

The prophecy of Isaiah paints a picture of hope and promise, declaring the birth of a child who would carry the weight of the world on His shoulders. This child, Jesus, embodies the fulfillment of God's promises throughout history. Each title ascribed to Him reveals different facets of His character, emphasizing His divine authority and compassion.

In the midst of our trials and tribulations, it's comforting to know that we have a Wonderful Counselor who understands our struggles, a Mighty God who possesses all power, an Everlasting Father who offers unconditional love, and a Prince of Peace who brings solace to our hearts.

The hymn *O Little Town of Bethlehem* encapsulates this fulfillment. Its poignant lines remind us of the hope found in Christ's birth: *The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight*. The birth of Jesus signifies the convergence of our deepest longings and fears, reassuring us that God is with us.

As we celebrate Christmas, let's reflect on the incredible truth that in Christ, all our hopes find their fulfillment. His arrival offers us the promise of peace, guidance, and everlasting love, transforming our fears into faith.

APPLICATION: This week, take a moment to meditate on one of the titles of Christ mentioned in Isaiah. Consider how He fulfills that role in your life. Write down specific areas where you seek His guidance, power or peace. Share your reflections with a friend or family member, discussing how Christ's presence can transform our fears into hopes. By recognizing His faithfulness, we can walk through this season with renewed joy and assurance in His promises.

PRAYER: God, I thank You for the hope that I have in You, my Wonderful Counselor and Prince of Peace. Help me to never forget that the all-powerful Creator of the universe chooses to know and love me. In Jesus' name, amen.

JOYFUL JOURNEY

When they saw the star, they were filled with joy! They entered the house and saw the Child with His mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasure chests and gave Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

Matthew 2:10-11 (NLT)

The journey of the Magi to see the newborn King is a remarkable story of hope, determination and joyful worship. Guided by a star, they traveled from afar, driven by the promise of a Savior. These wise men set out on a journey that was undoubtedly filled with challenges and uncertainties, yet their hearts were filled with anticipation. When they finally arrived and beheld the child Jesus, their joy overflowed, prompting them to worship Him and offer gifts.

The joyful journey of the Magi serves as a powerful reminder that the pursuit of Christ is a journey worth taking. They recognized the significance of what they had found—not merely a child, but the King of Kings. Their act of worship and the gifts they presented highlight the appropriate response to encountering Christ. Each gift—gold, frankincense, and myrrh—symbolizes aspects of Christ's identity: gold for His kingship, frankincense for His divinity, and myrrh for His future sacrifice.

The beloved hymn *We Three Kings* captures the essence of this journey, celebrating the gifts brought to Jesus: *Bearing gifts we traverse afar, field and fountain, moor and mountain, following yonder star.* It reminds us that our journey toward Christ is one filled with purpose and joy, inviting us to give our best in response to His greatness.

As we reflect on our own journeys, we must consider how we are responding to the Christ child. Are we filled with joy and anticipation as we seek Him? The Christmas season is a beautiful opportunity to realign our hearts and prioritize our pursuit of Christ amidst the chaos of holiday preparations.

APPLICATION: This week, take time to reflect on your personal journey toward Christ. What has motivated you to seek Him, and what gifts can you offer Him in worship? Perhaps you can give Him the gift of your time—setting aside moments for prayer, Scripture reading, or quiet reflection. You might also consider the gifts of service and love, reaching out to those in need during this season. Additionally, consider sharing your journey with someone who may be seeking encouragement. As you engage in this joyful journey, let it inspire not only your heart but also the hearts of those around you.

PRAYER: God, I thank You for Your faithfulness toward me, even when I have not been faithful to You. I pray that as this year comes to a close and another begins that I would live out of the wellspring of joy that comes from relationship with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

THE LIGHT OF CHRIST – CHRIST IS THE LIGHT

Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life."

John 8:12 (NLT)

It's 2 o'clock in the morning and, unfortunately, you're awake. Nature calls and refuses to leave a voicemail. You don't want to turn on the light, so you shuffle with outstretched arms to the bathroom. After you're done, you shuffle back to your bed, only to bang your shin against the metal frame. Now it's 2:01 am, your shin is on fire and you're more awake than ever.

We've all experienced this scenario or something remarkably like it (author's note: I'm usually tripping over my wife's clothes or shoes). This may be a humorous—and infuriating—example of how walking where you can't see makes life harder, but it doesn't take much imagination to relate this story to life, and how walking in darkness can have consequences we'd rather not experience.

The darkness you're facing can take many forms. The obvious example is Satan and the demonic realm, wanting to steal, kill and destroy. There's also the world, constantly corrupting and seeming to grow darker with each passing day. But your darkness may feel more personal, more intimate. Maybe it's a past mistake that still has consequences to this day. Perhaps it's an illness, a broken or lost relationship, a boss who's making your life miserable or the voice keeping you from experiencing victory. Jesus defeated all darkness on the cross and wants to shine light on all these areas and so much more.

Read the first two words of John 8:12 again: *Jesus spoke*. How often do we take for granted the reality that God is among us, active, working and speaking? Jesus didn't come to earth as a silent observer or a wrathful judge but as a light to repel darkness. He came to share that light with you! He loves you, wants to lead and guide you and will take you step by step into a full and abundant life that you never knew could be possible. He is the light of the world, so it all starts with Him illuminating the darkness.

APPLICATION: Take a moment to identify the darkness you're facing. What's an area of your life that needs the light only Jesus can provide?

1. If you've accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior, this darkness may be sin, and you need to repent. It may be a relationship that's darkening your life and heart. Or it may be something beyond your control that you need to entrust to Jesus. Take time to do that now and ask for Jesus' guidance on how to move forward.
2. If you haven't accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, the darkness you need to face is your sin. Christ came to Earth, lived a perfect life, died for the sin that separates you from Him and rose from the grave so you can live a new life today. That new life, a life with God at the center, can begin today. If you have questions, concerns or just need to talk to someone, please contact us. We'd love to talk with you!

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for being light. I don't want to stumble in the dark. Instead, I want to walk the path You have for me, step by step, listening to Your voice and obeying Your direction. Lead me and give me a heart that seeks You!

CHRIST'S HUMILITY

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though He was God, He did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, He gave up His divine privileges; He took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When He appeared in human form, He humbled Himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Philippians 2:5-8 (NLT)

A professor was interviewing for a teaching position at a university. He arrived early so he could get his lay of the land, see what the school was all about. While walking, he saw a gardener and started up a friendly conversation to ask questions about the school, its students and staff. He learned what he wanted to know, and after their pleasant chat came to a close, he went to his interview. It went well, so the staff wanted him to meet the president of the school. The professor walks into the president's office and, lo and behold, the gardener is the president. The president was impressed with the professor's willingness to talk to a lowly gardener, so, coupled with his good interview, the professor was offered the position and worked at the school for over a decade (this story is true, by the way).

Many would wisely view the story above as a cautionary tale to be kind to whoever you meet, because you never know what position they may prove to hold later. But the other detail to note is the humility of the university's president. We often hear stories of people abusing power, so it's refreshing and much easier to respect leaders who are willing to put power aside to do what needs to be done.

Christ humbled Himself to a degree we can never truly comprehend. The God of the universe became a man, lived a human life, hung out with sinners and wrongfully died a criminal's death on a cross. A president planting flowers is inconsequential compared to that.

Jesus didn't do this begrudgingly. He did it with enthusiasm, because it's His nature to love and serve. When God asks you to do something, He isn't asking you to do anything harder than what He's already done. That's the Lord and Savior He is. That's the God we know, love and serve.

APPLICATION: Take a moment to reflect on humility.

1. Can you compare who you were to who you are and pinpoint areas where God has strengthened your humility? If so, take time to thank God for making you more like Him in those areas.
2. Is there an area where you need more humility? Take time to invite God into that part of your heart and ask for His guidance in quelling your pride.
3. Reflect on the God of the universe becoming a man to save fallen man, to save you. As you reflect, thank Him for any insight he brings to your mind.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for Your humility. You call me to be humble, and I can only grow in humility through Your power and strength. Jesus, thank You for modeling this for me and making me more like You. Amen.

EMMANUEL – GOD WITH US

“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a Son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

Matthew 1:23 (NLT)

What does it mean for God to be with you? Countless factors could affect your answer to this question. If you grew up in church and constantly heard about baby Jesus in the manger, then Matthew 1:23 may be the first thing that comes to your mind. If you didn't meet God until you were older, your conversion experience may be your understanding of God drawing near to you. Today you may be closer to God than ever, feeling His love like a warm hug, or you may be going through hard circumstances that refuse to get better, questioning whether God is with you at all. If you're fasting, God may seem further away than the burger you're craving.

God knows what you're feeling, wherever you are. He speaks to all these situations and more, which is why the Bible is filled with revelations, ruminations and reminders of his nearness:

Jesus said, “...I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Matthew 28:20 (NLT)

Come close to God, and God will come close to you.

James 4:8 (NLT)

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted; He rescues those whose spirits are crushed.

Psalms 34:18 (NLT)

When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. ...

Genesis 3:8a (NLT)

The world isn't God's ant farm, where He observes humanity from afar, keeping His hands clean and leaving us to fend for ourselves. He's constantly pursuing us, always listening and watching, ever there. This was already the case in the Old Testament, but the reality of Jesus is how God came to earth by becoming a man to show us the depth of His commitment to His presence in your life.

God became the human you could never be, died on a cross to save you from a debt you could never pay and rose from the grave to give you a life you could never live on your own. Satan will use your circumstances, your feelings, the world and any other force he can throw at you to make you believe God has abandoned you, doesn't care or isn't there. Fight those lies with the truth that Jesus is named Immanuel, the God who is with you. He identifies Himself by His nearness to you.

APPLICATION: Take a moment to be honest with yourself about God's presence in your life in this moment. Does He feel near?

1. If so, thank Him for the reality of that nearness and give Him glory for being a God who's present. Think of people in your life who need to experience that nearness and pray for them.
2. If not, take another look at the verses above. Which experience of God's presence do you need the most right now? Preach that verse to yourself as a reminder that God is with you, even if you may not feel it at this moment, and ask God for that nearness.

PRAYER: Lord, thank You for being near me, regardless of whether I feel it or not. Make Your presence real to me. Give me a spirit to receive it and a heart that shares it with others. You are good!

THE WORD BECOMES FLESH

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14 (ESV)

Think of the profound things many of us get to experience in life. We breathe air into our lungs and our bodies can fight sickness and disease. We can make a call and connect us to people on the other end of the world. You can literally buy a ticket and fly, something that wouldn't have been imagined in Jesus' day. Our galaxy is almost limitless, yet earth is really the predominant life on a tiny dot, and the conditions had to be perfect for us to live here. There are everyday miracles that we take for granted. As great, as these things are they don't compare to what we read in John.

The opening verses of John present one of the most profound mysteries of the Christian faith: the Word becoming flesh. This simple yet powerful declaration captures the essence of God's redemptive plan—God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, taking on human nature to live among us, die for us, and rise again to offer us eternal life.

He is not a mere thought or concept, but a person who existed before time began. In Greek, the term *Logos* is used for *Word*, which carries the sense of divine reason or wisdom. The *Logos* is the creative force of the universe; the means by which everything was made.

Then comes the stunning moment in John's gospel: *The Word became flesh*. God, in His infinite majesty, took on the limitations of humanity. He was born in a humble manger, wrapped in swaddling clothes. He experienced the full range of human emotions and suffering. He walked, ate, slept and wept. Yet, He remained fully God, without sin, revealing the divine nature of God through His life and actions. God did not stay distant or detached from the pain and brokenness of humanity. He entered it. He entered *our* world. He lived among us. He showed us the way to God, not by pointing to a distant truth but by embodying it in His own life.

John emphasizes that Jesus, the Word made flesh, was *full of grace and truth*.

APPLICATION: Take a moment to marvel at modern life—talking to loved ones worldwide, traveling across continents in hours, and witnessing incredible scientific feats. Nothing compares to the miracle John describes: The Word becoming flesh. Jesus came to be close to us, showing God’s love in a tangible way we can touch, hear, and follow.

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, thank You for coming to us in human form. Thank You for revealing the fullness of grace and truth through Your life. Help us to respond to Your love by drawing near to You, and may we reflect Your glory in the world around us. In Your name, Amen.

THE GREATEST GIFT

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. **John 3:16 (NIV)**

What's the greatest gift you've been given? Can you remember it? People always say it's better to give than to receive, which is true, but I've gotten some awesome gifts in my life! One thing I'm bad at is slowing down and reflecting on the gifts I've been given. In the hustle and bustle of life, it's easy to lose sight of what truly matters, especially during seasons of giving, when gifts are exchanged, and material items often dominate our attention.

The Bible offers a radical answer: God's greatest gift is Jesus Christ, His Son, given to the world for our salvation. This gift is not temporary or fleeting, but eternal. Unlike the gifts we exchange with one another, this gift doesn't come with a price tag, nor is it based on our merit. It is given freely, motivated by God's love for us.

Lets be honest John 3:16 is a verse we've probably seen some guy with crazy hair and poster sharing on a street corner or at a sports game. Don't let your familiarity cause you to take this gift for granted! God's love is so deep and expansive that He gave His Son, the most precious gift, so that we could have the gift of eternal life. Jesus didn't just come to heal physical ailments or to perform miracles.

APPLICATION: Make sure to unwrap and treasure this gift in this season!

- 1. Receive the Gift:** If you have not yet received the gift of Jesus, know that it is available to you today. It's as simple as believing that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died for your sins, and that He rose again to offer you new life. Accept Him into your heart, and begin a relationship with Him.
- 2. Share the Gift:** The greatest gift we have ever received is not meant to be kept to ourselves. Once we experience God's love and grace, our hearts should overflow with the desire to share it with others. This could mean sharing your faith, showing kindness to someone in need, or simply extending love in practical ways.
- 3. Thank God for the Gift:** When we truly grasp the magnitude of God's gift, it transforms the way we live. We no longer live for ourselves, but for the One who gave His life for us. Live with gratitude, knowing that nothing in this world compares to the eternal life you've received.

PRAYER: Spend time thanking God for the gift He's given you! Ask God who you can text an encouraging word or thought to? Make sure you pray for them! Then share the gift with them!

TRUTH AND GRACE

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14-18 (ESV)

Jesus is the perfect balance of these two attributes revealed. Grace speaks to God's unmerited favor and love, given freely to humanity. Truth reveals God's character, His righteousness, and His justice. In Jesus, grace and truth come together in a way that was previously unknown to the world. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises—He is both the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world and the faithful King who brings the Kingdom of God to earth.

Through the incarnation, Jesus not only revealed God's grace and truth but also invited us to partake in it. His presence among us is a call to live differently—to live as those who have encountered grace, who understand the truth of God's love for the world.

His life and death on the cross display both the severity of sin (truth) and the boundless love of God (grace). Where we fall short, grace abounds; where we are lost, truth leads us to salvation.

APPLICATION:

- 1. Living in Grace:** If we truly understand the grace of God, we should be radically different in how we treat others. Grace calls us to forgive those who have wronged us, to offer second chances, and to see people not for their failures but for the potential they have in Christ. How can you extend grace to someone today?
- 2. Living in Truth:** Embracing truth means accepting both the reality of our brokenness and the hope of transformation through Christ. Truth calls us to live authentically, to align our actions with God's Word, and to be honest with ourselves and with others. Is there an area of your life where you need to walk more fully in the truth of God's Word?
- 3. Balance of Grace and Truth:** It's easy to lean too heavily on one or the other. Without grace, truth becomes harsh, and without truth, grace can become shallow. But Jesus models for us a perfect balance. His grace doesn't excuse our sin; it redeems it. His truth doesn't condemn us; it frees us. Where in your life do you need to invite both grace and truth to work together?

PRAYER: Spend time asking God to guide you where you need to show grace and where you need to show truth today. What truth is the Spirit wanting to reveal to you, and where do you need to be reminded of His grace today. Who do you need to speak truth to or show grace to?



BROOKWOODchurch

LOVE GOD • LOVE PEOPLE

580 Brookwood Point Place • Simpsonville SC 29681
864.688.8200 • brookwoodchurch.org