

# INSPIRATION

*Blessed to Be a Blessing*

DECEMBER 2019



## IS IT A *W*ONDERFUL LIFE?

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BREAKS THROUGH

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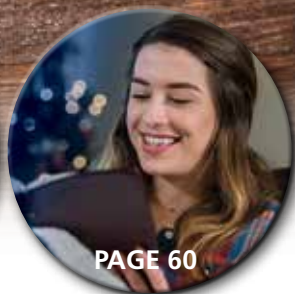
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## *This Month's Theme Is...*



### **Wonderful God, Wonderful Life**

Are difficult life circumstances causing you to doubt your blessings and favor? Check out David's article on **page 5** as he shares three keys to trusting God and believing in His powerful promises.

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# Give the Gift of INSPIRATION



**If you're looking for an inspirational and life-changing gift to give your friends and loved ones this Christmas season, this may be the idea you've been waiting for...**

For a gift of just \$25 [£19], you can bless a friend or loved one with a one-year subscription to the *INSPIRATION* devotional magazine. Every month, they'll receive this publication filled with uplifting teaching articles...faith-building testimonies from partners who've received breakthroughs in their health, finances, or relationships...and daily devotionals to help them grow in their knowledge of God's Word.

To begin giving one or more of these gift subscriptions, all you need to do is provide the name and address of your loved one and an extra offering of \$25 [£19]. You can do this on the enclosed response form or by calling our Partner Services representatives:

**US / CAN / CAR: +1 (803) 578-1899**

**UK / Intl: +44 (0) 84 5683 0580**

**What a great way to bless and inspire those you love this Christmas – a gift that will stir their faith each month for an entire year!**





# Wonderful GOD, Wonderful Life



**STRENGTHEN**  
*your walk*  
with David Cerullo

As we approach the Christmas season and the close of another year, I realize there are so many important things I could reflect upon right now.

And yet, I find myself thinking about George Bailey.

You remember that character in Frank Capra's classic movie *It's a Wonderful Life*, don't you? Played by the great actor Jimmy Stewart, George was facing tough times and was doubting whether his life mattered at all.

Fortunately, God sent an angel-in-training to shake George out of his doldrums, and he showed him just how blessed and favored his life really was.

The movie makes me think of all the believers who often feel the same way George did – maybe not completely hopeless and helpless, but definitely doubting whether they are truly in God's good graces. Perhaps even you are shaking your head at your circumstances, asking the question:



## *Is it a wonderful life after all?*

Of course, I don't know anything about what you're going through or how much pain you've endured, but I can tell you that God loves you and wants you to have a new revelation of Him today.

I encourage you to resolve in your heart that you will trust God and believe His promises – whether for your healing, your financial breakthrough, or any other blessing you need. Take authority over the devil's work, and choose to believe God to fulfill His Word. Remember, God is a faithful God...and He's working in you and through you to bring about your breakthrough!

## **ENTER INTO HIS FAVOR!**

You can read a powerful proclamation of Jesus' love for us in His very first sermon after beginning His ministry. Quoting a beautiful passage from Isaiah 61:1-2, He said:

*The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD (Luke 4:18-19).*

Right from the beginning, Jesus wanted people to understand His heart to give them His amazing favor. This was a message of good news...physical and emotional healing...and liberty for those who were oppressed by the devil in some area of their life.

Notice that this is not just a *momentary* breakthrough, as wonderful as that might be. Jesus was proclaiming something quite amazing...

## **You can enter into a wonderful, enduring life of God's favor!**

As we head into 2020, that is my prayer for you, my friend. And I want to share a few keys for what you can DO to unlock more of God's favor and blessings in your life.

### **1. PROCLAIM IT**

According to Jesus' words here, there's a vital step you need to take in order to make this a new season of blessings in your life:

## **You must PROCLAIM God's favor!**

This is a very practical thing, for the Bible says, "*The tongue has the power of life and death*" (Proverbs 18:21). Your words have a major impact in shaping your future.

But what if you're facing a "winter season" of some kind, such as a job loss, an illness, the loss of a loved one, a financial setback, or struggles with your children? If so,



you don't have to be a passive victim. Speak boldly to your circumstances, declaring God's promises for your victory. Tell your difficult circumstances that your life WILL be an example of God's wonderful blessings and breakthroughs!

## 2. GO BEYOND SUPERFICIAL RESOLUTIONS

After this Christmas season, many people will begin making New Year's resolutions of some kind. Losing weight...getting out of debt...rekindling romance in their marriage...spending more time with the Lord or their children – people are seeking fresh starts in many different areas of life.

Although I'm certainly not against resolutions, I believe God wants to give you something much greater than just a bunch of superficial, short-term resolutions:

**God can give you a New Year's revolution!**

Instead of just changing a few troublesome symptoms, I'm convinced the Lord can transform *every* area of your life – dealing with root causes that have hindered you for years.

What difficult situations do you need God to turn around today? Has the enemy stolen something precious from you – whether it be your health, a close relationship, your finances, or simply your peace and joy?

Let's pray BIG, audacious prayers today, claiming God's promises like this one in Jeremiah 30:3 from The Message:

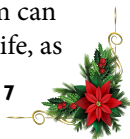
***“The time is coming when I will turn EVERYTHING around for My people!”***

Isn't that fantastic? When you draw near to the Lord and follow His instructions, He can “*make ALL things new*” in your life (Revelation 21:5; 2 Corinthians 5:17).

## 3. SEEK GOD'S WISDOM

I meet many people who are frustrated that something seems missing in their Christian life. Perhaps they attend church, pay their tithes, and even sow additional financial seeds to reach the world with the Gospel. Although they've heard God's promises about health, prosperity, and an abundant life, for some reason they aren't seeing those promises activated.

What could be the missing ingredients in the lives of these well-meaning believers? Often I've found that people simply aren't walking in God's wisdom. You see, when you open your heart to God's wisdom, *everything else* in your life is impacted. Not only will He reenergize your spiritual life, but there will also be a transformation of your health, finances, and relationships. In fact, His wisdom can change EVERY area of your life, as



King Solomon describes:

*Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or turn away from them.*

*Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding. Cherish her, and she will exalt you; embrace her, and she will honor you. She will give you a garland to grace your head and present you with a glorious crown (Proverbs 4:5-9 NIV).*

God's wisdom and His favor go hand in hand. And if you sense a need for more of His wisdom and favor in your life, all you have to do is ASK:

*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should **ask God**, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you (James 1:5 NIV).*

Take a few minutes right now to pause and ask the Lord to fill you with His wisdom as you spend time reading His Word and coming into His presence. His wisdom will change your life!

I am praying for you, dear friend. We believe great things are ahead for you and for this ministry we share together.

Remember, **it is a wonderful life**, and He is a faithful God. As you put these three keys into practice, I'm convinced that your turnaround is just around the corner, bringing you more joy and victory this coming year than you've ever known before.

Your Partner to Reach the Lost,



P.S. **Turn to page 32** to see the great resources we'll send you as our THANK YOU GIFTS to help make this Christmas season a time of God's abundant favor.



## READY TO DISCOVER THE MYSTERY?

Go on a journey that untangles ancient mysteries and sheds new light on the events of today.

See page 32 for details.







# THE END *(of the year)* IS NEAR!

**Don't miss out on the great tax and income benefits available when you make a special year-end gift to win souls and disciple believers!**

**SAVE MONEY ON YOUR TAXES.** If you live in the United States, you may be entitled to a charitable deduction on your taxes when you give a gift of cash or property. And gifts of real estate or stock can enable you to avoid any taxes that would otherwise be due upon sale.

**RECEIVE GUARANTEED FUTURE INCOME.** When you invest in a Charitable Gift Annuity through Inspiration Ministries, you receive fixed payments for life, with rates based on your age. Not only can you benefit from a charitable deduction for the value of your gift, but a portion of the income you receive can be tax free.

**EXPERIENCE NEW PEACE OF MIND.** Many people procrastinate when it comes to creating their Wills and Estate Plans. However, the process is actually a lot easier than you might think. Our Partner Relations Team can help you find the resources you need to take care of this important part of sound financial stewardship.

*Remember:* The best retirement or Estate Plan balances your personal and family needs with your heart to keep fulfilling the Great Commission even after you've gone to be with the Lord.



Let our Partner Relations Team help you create a more secure future for your family and an eternal legacy of winning souls for God's Kingdom!

**US: 1 (855) 702-7042**  
**[plannedgiving.inspiration.org](http://plannedgiving.inspiration.org)**



# When Hope

It had been just an ordinary day for the shepherds watching over their flocks near Bethlehem. But suddenly they received a message that would change their lives forever.

*An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:9-10 NIV).*

The silent, pitch-black night was suddenly interrupted by brilliant light and a loud angelic proclamation. The frightened shepherds were assured by the angel that his message was one of “good news that will cause great joy.”

My friend, even if you’re going through a dark night right now, when God has seemed silent, everything can change in a moment of time. The breakthrough may not be dramatic, but the message will be the same: good news and great joy!

## TODAY COULD BE YOUR DAY

The shepherds were awakened by a quite extraordinary message: “*Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord*” (v. 11). Hundreds of years before, God’s people had been promised that one day their Savior and Messiah would come. They waited and waited, until many had given up hope.

Could it be that the angel’s message was true? After waiting so long, could “today” be the day when the prophecies would be fulfilled and the Savior would come?

There’s a powerful lesson here for each of us. God has made many wonderful promises to us in His Word, yet sometimes we can get weary in waiting for our breakthroughs. At such times, we must remember the shepherds. Little did they know that “today” would be the day when everything would change, as light pierced the darkness with hope and favor.



# Breaks Through

## A PERSONAL ENCOUNTER

When the angels told them about the newborn King, the shepherds could have just taken their word for it. But they concluded that they needed to *act upon* what they had heard: “*Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about*” (v. 15). They already had *heard* the news, but now they wanted to also “*SEE this thing.*” The angels had been telling the truth, of course, and the shepherds discovered that Jesus was “*just as they had been told*” (v. 20).

Many people today have heard the message of Christ and His favor, but they’ve never taken the next step – finding out *for themselves* whether it’s true. Their faith is secondhand, based on hearsay instead of firsthand experience. No wonder they experience so little of the favor of God.

Pause and ask yourself whether your relationship with God is based on personal experience or

just secondhand truths you’ve read in books or heard from preachers or friends. Go to “*Bethlehem*” and see *for yourself* what God has done.

Once you know the Savior, you will want to make Him known to others. The more you *see Him*, the more you will want to *show Him* to others. The more you experience His life-changing favor, the more you will want share His grace and goodness with the people around you.

Give Him *thanks* this Christmas! He left the grandeur of Heaven to become the Son of Man, so that you might become a child of God and ultimately have a home in Heaven for all eternity.



**Mike Evans** is a best-selling author, Middle East analyst, and worldwide Christian ambassador.





## Michele's Christmas Bonus

As Michele was watching a broadcast of Inspiration Campmeeting, she felt the tug of the Holy Spirit to pledge a seed of \$300 into the Good Ground of Inspiration Ministries. But before mailing her check, she had second thoughts. "My faith hit a low point because of the financial pressures of the holidays," she explains.

Michele decided she would wait until her next payday to send her seed. However, she didn't have peace in her heart about this. "I was disappointed in myself because I remembered the joy I had when I phoned Inspiration Ministries to make my pledge."

When Michele told her husband of the decision to delay her seed, he reminded her of the fire in her heart when God first led her to respond to the Campmeeting message.

"The Lord was speaking through him!" Michele concluded. "So I immediately wrote my check, and great joy and peace filled my heart once again. I felt the Lord patting me on the back, and tears flooded my eyes at His goodness."

Just a short time later, Michele began to reap unexpected harvests. First, her boss from a part-time job sent her a text message that said, "Michele, I'm sending you a Christmas bonus of \$250." Then her boss said, "Let's make the bonus \$500 since I never gave you a bonus last year!"

Instantly, God told her, "There's your harvest, Michele." God had acted quickly to honor His Word... but the harvests weren't finished yet. Just an hour later, her mother-in-law called and said she was sending her \$1,200 for Christmas.

The Seedtime and Harvest Principle was an exciting discovery for Michele and her husband. "Now I want to share my story with others, so they will see God's power and glory too!" she exclaims.

*What God did for Michele, He can do for YOU. Trust Him with your Christmas Seed, and wrap it in faith for your Christmas miracle!*







# I Sowed a Seed and Trusted God!

What do you do when someone accuses you unfairly and takes you to court?

When a customer with a delinquent account sued Loyle, he chose to sow a seed. “The problem began when I trusted a customer to do what was right,” explains Loyle. “But after the lawsuit, I chose to sow, pray, and trust God.”

It was almost two years before the phone call came announcing his harvest. “I have some strange news, Loyle,” the attorney reported. Loyle knew immediately what it was, declaring, “It’s the customer lawsuit, isn’t it?”

With a puzzled voice, his lawyer proceeded to tell him that his case had been completely dismissed. “But how did you know

this?” the attorney wondered. Loyle simply responded, “Because I sowed a seed and trusted God.”

Since then, Loyle has gained an even greater understanding of what it means to be a witness to others by sowing a seed to the Lord.

“Over the years, I have learned from Inspiration Ministries that I can access God’s Kingdom. I sow a seed and give my money an assignment. I am purposeful about my sowing,” explains Loyle.

He encourages everyone he knows to understand and use this principle as well. “Sow a seed, give it a job assignment, and find a Scripture that fits your situation. Stand in faith on that Word from God and trust Him. God will come through!”

**Have YOU discovered God’s amazing law of Seedtime and Harvest? When a seed leaves your hand, a harvest leaves God’s hand on your behalf!**

Visit [inspiration.org/souls](https://inspiration.org/souls) today to give your one-time gift or to become a Monthly Inspiration Partner.



# You Need God's **POWER**

We are not to wage war according to our own resources. The power that leads to victory is not in us or from us; it is with God and comes to us from his hand. But that same power has to be wielded. Having it and using it are two completely different things.

My brother bought me a movie pass card that allows me to see a movie in the theater every twenty-four hours. It sits there in my wallet whether I see any movies or not. The same is true of gym memberships; just because you have the right to go to the gym and freely utilize the equipment doesn't automatically mean you get a six-pack. You have to walk in and take advan-

tage of what your membership gives you access to.

So it is when it comes to the arsenal of power at your beck and call as a child of God. Peter wrote, "*His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue*" (2 Peter 1:3). Do you have all things that pertain to life and godliness? Potentially you do, but practically you have to tap into what belongs to you one moment at a time.

Paul made a similar statement: "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual bless-*



*ing in the heavenly places in Christ*” (Ephesians 1:3). Are you thinking, wait a minute, I have “*every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ*”? Where are all these blessings? They are at the same place the biceps and abs you wish you had are – waiting for you to take advantage of. They won’t work if you won’t work them.

One of the biggest mistakes you can make is to try to do God’s work without God’s power. There’s a great scene in *Iron Man 3* where Tony Stark’s auto-pilot malfunctions, and he flies hundreds of miles out of the way, crash landing in snow-covered Rose Hill, Tennessee. Feeling claustrophobic, he ejects. But then once he realizes how brisk it is in the snow, he wishes he had stayed in the coziness of the suit.

He trudges through the snow, carrying the Iron Man suit behind him like a kid pulling a sled. He is totally huffing and puffing as he slowly pulls it one foot at a time. It’s a perfect visual because the suit wasn’t designed to be carried by him; it was designed to carry him as he executed his calling as a superhero.

The Bible says that we are in Christ. “In Christ” is a theological

term to describe the way God sees us as being completely covered in Jesus. But when it comes to fighting battles, you can also think of being in Christ the way Tony is in the Iron Man suit. Through our continued reliance on Jesus, we tap into an arsenal of protection, ammunition, and navigation.

When God makes the ground shake with energy, be ready to occupy the territory He has cleared.

So many Christians are struggling to pull what should propel them, trying to fight the battles of this life with their own strength, waging war according to the flesh. Don’t make that error! Stay in the suit. Jesus is not something to carry like a religious

trinket or good-luck charm; He is the risen Lord who will carry you. Call for firepower, and when God makes the ground shake with energy, be ready to occupy the territory He has cleared. You have to maintain what he gives you the power to obtain.



**Levi Lusko**, best-selling author and pastor of Fresh Life (a multi-site church), travels the world speaking about Jesus.

Excerpted from *I Declare War* by Levi Lusko, © 2018. Used by permission of Thomas Nelson.





# My Dreams Are Coming True!

**James, a Christian rapper, received an amazing turnaround in his finances and ministry when he took a step of faith to sow a \$1,000 seed during Campmeeting.**

*"In the first nine months of the year, I received double the income I made all last year!"*

From his home in Rhode Island, James listened intently as one of our Inspiration Campmeeting speakers described how he broke the back of poverty in his life by sowing a \$1,000 seed into God's Kingdom. Although he was skeptical at first, when he prayed about this message, he distinctly heard the Lord's words in Malachi 3:10: "Prove Me now" (KJV).

"I immediately grabbed the phone and sowed my seed in faith," James says. And God responded in a dramatic way. "The very next day, I received a \$600 check for something that had been owed to me for a while. But that was just the beginning."

For several years, James had been reaching out to troubled

kids through positive rap music; he was known as Mr. Deep Positivity. When he watched the Campmeeting broadcast, he was experiencing a desperate need for sponsors to help him hold more concerts and give away more of his uplifting, educational CDs for children.

"Just a few weeks after sowing my \$1,000 seed, I received a contract for \$17,000," James reports. "This covered 10 free school concerts and a 'positivity contest' in which those schools competed for free materials."

Because of this unexpected contract, James was able to provide several elementary schools with free CDs for every student – a total of 4,000 CDs!

"But the blessings didn't stop





there,” James says. “God then gave me enough income to take the whole summer off. During that time, He blessed me with the inspiration to create three board games, and I now have an opportunity to market the games to a major game company. God also has helped me form a partnership with Big Brothers to seek grants to cover free concerts and CDs for every school in my state.”



James knows that none of these things would have happened without God’s favor in his life. “What a blessing this all has been. My dreams are coming true!”

He now looks back at his step of faith during Inspiration Campmeeting as a major turning point. “The Lord has truly blessed my seed, and I’m grateful Campmeeting taught me about

wrapping faith and expectancy around my seed sowing. In the first nine months of the year, I received *double* the income I made all last year!”

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*“God has truly poured out blessings greater than I’ve had room to receive them!”*

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James now believes God for new harvests so he can impact more lives for the Kingdom of God. “There is so much more I could write about the blessings I’ve received since sowing my \$1,000 seed during Campmeeting,” he says. “I thank God for proving Himself faithful and His Word true.”

As he has learned the joy of sowing and reaping, James has increasingly reflected on the name Mr. Deep Positivity. His expectancy for blessings has grown and grown.

“What a joy it’s been to expect the windows of Heaven to open when I sow my financial seeds,” he says gratefully. “God has truly poured out blessings greater than I’ve had room to receive them!”

**What God has done for James, He can do for YOU.**

**Take a step of faith to sow a financial seed into God’s Kingdom, wrapping it in faith and giving it a Specific Assignment for the turnaround you need.**



# The Snow Globe

Friend, do you find YOUR heart agitated by the cares of life today? Are you struggling to hear the tender voice of your Heavenly Father amid the hustle and bustle of this holiday season?

It was Christmas Eve, and eight-year-old Joey was opening presents with his family at Grandma Baker's house. Several presents remained, but Joey's attention was distracted by the snow globe on Grandma's credenza.

Over and over, he shook the globe, watching in awe as the snow hid the cottage scene from view. It was as if he could make the cottage disappear!

"Joey, you have more presents to open," his dad reminded him.

But Joey persisted. The snow globe had captured his attention, and he couldn't imagine any presents being as fun.

Finally, Grandma Baker went over to Joey and tried a new tactic. "Joey, I love that snow globe, too.

Can I tell you why?"

"Sure, Grandma," he replied, still gazing at the globe.

"Joey, I've lived a long time, and I've found that life is often just like this snow globe. Sometimes we get all shaken up inside, and we can't even see the things that are right in front of us."

"What do you mean, Grandma?" he asked quizzically. "How could we get shaken up like that?"

"Well, you'll understand a lot more about that as you get older, Joey. Sometimes things just don't go our way. Or maybe someone is mean to us. Or perhaps we're feeling sick. When things like that happen, our hearts can become shaken up like the snow globe."

"What's so bad about *that*? I think the snow is pretty."





“Yes, it’s pretty, but it hides the beautiful scenery, Joey. When that happens in our hearts, we can’t see the Lord or His plan for us very well, and sometimes we don’t even know where we are!”

“That sounds bad. What can we do when our hearts get that way? How can we see the picture again?”

Grandma Baker smiled and picked up an old Bible from the coffee table. “There’s a Scripture passage that describes this, Joey.”

“The Bible talks about *snow globes*?”

“No, not snow globes, but about what happens when our hearts get cloudy like that.”

Flipping through the well-worn pages, she continued, “Psalm 46:10 tells us, *‘Be still, and know that I am God.’* When we quit what we’re doing and quiet our heart in God’s presence, the cloudy circumstances sink to the ground and let us see the beautiful picture again.”

“Wow, that’s cool, Grandma! I’m going to remember that story *forever!*”

### **Remember the lesson of the snow globe.**

*Take time to get away from the commotion around you and quiet your heart in God’s presence. Allow all the cares and questions to settle to the bottom, revealing the Lord’s beautiful plan for your life once again!*



# Let God Prove His Faithfulness

**This Christmas season, win souls and disciple believers all over the world by becoming an Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partner!**



An **Inspiration Ministries Monthly Partner** is someone who joins hands with our ministry and commits to **sowing monthly seeds** in any amount to impact people through our worldwide media outreaches. As you bless others with the Good News of Jesus, you can trust God to reap a harvest of blessings in your own life as well:



*“Before becoming an Inspiration Monthly Partner, I was skeptical. But when I sowed an Uncommon Seed of \$58, I went from making \$150 a week to a new job making \$1,100 a week. I know firsthand that expectantly sowing financial seeds really works. Now I encourage others to let God prove His faithfulness by trusting Him with their finances and sowing seeds to impact lives for Christ.”*

– GALEN, Pennsylvania

Call one of the numbers below or visit [inspiration.org/mmp](http://inspiration.org/mmp) to find out more about this convenient way to *automatically* partner with Inspiration Ministries each month to win souls and disciple believers.

**US: +1 (877) 578-7979**

**UK / Intl: +44 (0) 80 0043 8420**





TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 18

An open position in a major orchestra is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a musician.

Determined to win a particular position, one man spent a year preparing, practicing up to twenty hours a day. Nearly 300 musicians applied, but this man was one of only 35 invited to audition in person.

When the day came, he traveled more than a thousand miles to the site. He readied himself, hoping to impress the selection committee. In that moment, it didn't matter how hard he had practiced, how many college degrees he had, or which acknowledged masters he had studied with. All that mattered was his performance.

He took his place behind a screen (set up to keep the process impartial). Describing the 10-minute audition, he reported, "It wasn't terrible." After the audition, he returned home and waited. But the call never came. He had not been chosen.

In the following days, he continually was haunted. Why didn't he win? How could he have done better? Would he ever have another chance?

Our lives can be marked by moments like these when we fall short. In this world, second chances might never come. But the Bible reminds us that God continually gives us second chances. Peter was given a second chance after he denied Jesus. He was forgiven and went on to have a powerful ministry.

If you have failed, don't give up. Turn to God. Be forgiven, and receive a new start.

*"You're not one of his disciples, are you?" He denied it... One of the household slaves... asked, "Didn't I see you... with Jesus?" Again Peter denied it.*

John 18:25-27 NLT

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for forgiving my sins. Thank You for giving me second chances. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.



# Practical Proof

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JEREMIAH 7

*“Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.”*

Jeremiah 7:3 NKJV

## PRAYER:

Father, forgive my sins. Help me to act in ways that demonstrate my love for You. In Jesus' name, amen.

God was not pleased with His people. They had violated His laws, yet claimed to have changed. Should He believe them?

He knew that they had made similar promises before and failed to keep them. How were they to demonstrate that they *really* had changed? By the things that they did.

They were to do the right thing and avoid oppressing others. They were not to “walk after other gods” (v. 6) or “steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely” (v. 8).

God's most serious complaint was that they dared to stand before Him and say, “[By the discharge of this religious formality] we are set free! – only to go on with this wickedness and these abominations” (v. 10 AMPC). But religious formality wasn't adequate. They needed to abandon their wicked ways.

They might have justified their actions, but He reminded them that His Word still was the only standard that mattered. He promised blessings if they made real changes, but their own actions had convicted them.

Ultimately, this measure applies to us as well. Do we take His Word seriously? Do we want His blessings?

The Bible confirms that He is ready to bless us. He looks deep into our hearts to examine our true motives. But He also looks at our lives. What messages are we sending by our words and actions?

Ask God to help you live according to His principles. Seek to be a faithful witness.



# Be Honest With God

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JEREMIAH 32

Jeremiah could not understand God's request. He had asked him to buy a field in Jerusalem at a time when *"the city has been given into the hand of the Chaldeans"* (v. 24). This made no sense to Jeremiah. Why would God ask this?

God reminded Jeremiah, *"Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"* (v. 27).

His request was not a mistake. In fact, God had developed a plan Jeremiah could not understand at first. By buying the land in Judah, Jeremiah was assuring God's people that He had not abandoned them. It was a sign of His continuing love and care.

How often do we react just like Jeremiah – puzzled by God's will, doubting and questioning, surprised by the way our lives unfold? We go through situations that don't seem to make sense.

At times like these, we can be honest with God, like Jeremiah was. He would rather we talk with Him than grumble to others. We also need to learn to *trust* Him, to know that, in every circumstance, He is Almighty God.

Today, commit *your* way to the Lord. Let Him direct *your* steps. Ask Him your questions and be honest, always remembering that you can trust Him. He can do all things. Have faith in Him. And remember, His ways may not be *your* ways.

*Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for You.*

Jeremiah 32:17 NKJV

## PRAYER:

Father, I surrender my mind and will to You. Help me complete the work you have given me. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.



# Attitude Matters

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JEREMIAH 35

*We will not drink wine,  
for Jonadab the son  
of Rechab, our father,  
commanded us, saying,  
“You shall not drink  
wine, you or your sons,  
forever.”*

Jeremiah 35:6 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, help me obey  
Your Word and have an  
attitude that is pleasing  
to You. I commit my life  
to You. In Jesus' name,  
amen.

At God's insistence, Jeremiah asked the Rechabites to drink some wine. It seemed like an innocent request. But Jeremiah learned that, for generations, this family had followed the words of their ancestor, Jonadab, who directed them not to ever drink wine. They would not drink even when told to by a prophet.

God used this example to point out what was wrong with *His* people. He had provided for and protected them. Yet even though He spoke to them *“again and again,”* they did not *listen*. He *“called to them, but they did not answer”* (v. 14, 17).

To that disobedient generation, God wondered why they did not have the same kind of commitment as the Rechabites. Why would they not obey Him?

In contrast, God promised continued blessings for the Rechabites because they were obedient people, displaying a consistent *attitude* that was pleasing to God.

The Bible makes it clear that God honors obedience. Obedience is an attitude that breeds trust and peace, order and stability. Those characterized by conformity put themselves in a position to experience more of His blessings.

Sadly, many choose to ignore God and go their own way. Like those people in Jeremiah's time, they refuse to listen and obey, and then they wonder why they haven't been blessed.

Seek to be a person of conviction with a heart pleasing to God. Seek to be faithful and obedient to Him.



# Following Your Dreams

THURSDAY

December

5

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: GENESIS 37

There seemed no reason to expect the man was destined for greatness. Looking back, he admitted that his “school career was not a success.” Part of the problem was that he “never could focus.” As an average violinist, he knew he “could just manage.”

After enrolling in a conservatory, he felt the desire to become a conductor. He approached the director of the school orchestra, asking for conducting lessons. Unimpressed, he responded, “I’m terribly sorry. I don’t think you have talent.”

His dreams could have ended there. But he continued to hold out hope, advancing in his studies, practicing his violin. Then out of the blue one day, the conductor asked the young man to step in during a rehearsal and lead the orchestra, so he could check the sound.

The young man took advantage of this opportunity, demonstrating enough potential for the director to change his mind and agree to give him lessons.

No one knew that Bernard Haitink would go on to become one of the world’s great conductors, admired by musicians worldwide.

Many dreams are crushed by people who can’t see into the future or don’t recognize factors that may blossom in future years with just the right encouragement. Some people give up on their dreams. But others persist and keep believing.

If God has given you a dream, don’t give up, even if you face doubters and skepticism. Have faith and stay faithful.

*Joseph had a dream,  
and when he told it to  
his brothers they hated  
him even more.*

Genesis 37:5 ESV

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your plans for me. Help me fulfill the dreams You have given me. I trust in You. In Jesus’ name, amen.





# The Timeless Story

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: 1 TIMOTHY 1

*This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."*

1 Timothy 1:15 NLT

"It can be a difficult time of year for a pastor," commented a seasoned minister, reflecting on the challenge of presenting meaningful messages during the Christmas season. What makes it so difficult?

Only a few key Biblical passages relate to Christmas, he explained, all of which have been the subject of countless sermons, messages, books, and hymns. How difficult to find a unique slant to really make an impact!

In many ways, the problem is not with the story itself, but in the way it has been embellished. Layers upon layers have been added to the point that many overlook the core message. For some, it has become an event dominated by traditions and interpretations, at times far from its origins. Others adopt an attitude of competition, driven to find something new and different.

During this season, we need to remember the basics. We need to wipe away everything secondary and focus on the truth that God sent Jesus into the world to be born as a human being who would live a sinless life and provide a way to receive forgiveness of sins. He showed God's power at work and demonstrated the life He wanted for His people. This Christmas season, don't let clutter clog your schedule or allow secondary concerns to dominate your heart and mind. Focus on the simple truth of the life-changing story of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world as a baby. Thank You for all that He has done for me. In His name, amen.



# The Gift of Salvation

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ROMANS 1

For many, the giving of gifts is the dominant feature of Christmas. Believers are reminded of God's amazing gift of salvation. He sent Jesus, so our sins can be forgiven. He offers His salvation for *anyone*, regardless of our age, income, personal history, or status in the world. This truly is a *gift*, offered whether or not we think we deserve it.

Paul knew that we could find it hard to understand the depth of this forgiveness. He wrote, "Most people would not be willing to die for an upright person." But God is different! He "showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us." And He did this "while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:7-8).

Christmas is a particularly appropriate time to remember this amazing gift and to *accept* all that God offers.

No matter what your background is or what you might have done, He offers you complete and total forgiveness. Because of the Gospel, you can be saved. Because of His love for you, you can have a deeper relationship with God Himself. You can have hope and peace, joy and victory, and confidence in your eternal destiny.

Today, accept the salvation that God has promised you. As He leads, be bold in sharing your faith. Do not be ashamed of the Gospel, but be ready to let others know about the best gift of salvation this Christmas season.

*I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes – the Jew first and also the Gentile.*

Romans 1:16 NLT

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# Born of God

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 1

*To all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – children born not of natural descent... but born of God.*

John 1:12-13 NIV

## PRAYER:

Father, I believe in Jesus and know that You sent Him. Thank You that I am Your child. Thank You for loving me. In Jesus' name, amen.

How wonderful to think about the birth of Jesus during the Christmas season. We love the songs, festivities, gifts, and traditions. But it is most important to remember that the reason Jesus came into the world was to bring *salvation*.

God loved us so much that He sent Jesus to grow up to be a man and die for the sins of people.

Because of Him, we can be part of God's *family*. This is true no matter who we are or what we have done. He offers us the opportunity to be part of His family in the same way that children are born into their natural families. Each of us can "*become children of God*" even though we do not deserve that privilege.

We cannot become good enough to be His children. We cannot do enough righteous acts, reform ourselves enough, sacrifice enough, give enough, dedicate ourselves enough, or achieve enough to earn that position. This is a *spiritual* birth. We must be "*born of God*" through the work of Jesus on the cross.

Today, pause to thank God for sending Jesus. If you have committed your life to Him, rejoice that you have become His child. But if you have any doubts, this is the time to be sure. Talk with Him and believe on His name. Confess your sins and believe that Jesus died to pay the penalty for them, so you wouldn't have to.



## TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 3

A recent poll revealed that a surprising number of people don't know that the purpose of Christmas is to celebrate Jesus' birth. This startling fact should help us understand why there is so much confusion in the world and why so many people have the wrong priorities.

Millions simply assume that Christmas is a time for parties, gift exchanges, and visiting friends and family. They do not realize that Jesus is more important than any of these things.

The Bible urges us to remember how many people do not realize that God loved the world so much that He sent Jesus, so we can have everlasting life and be freed from the burden of sin. He brings meaning and purpose to our lives.

Christmas reveals that God's heart beats with compassion for lost souls. He knows that we cannot be free or find fulfillment on our own. We cannot save ourselves. But God loved us and sent Jesus to be our Savior. As Paul wrote, *"God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8).

What are *you* putting first this Christmas? Presents? Parties? In the midst of the celebrations, don't forget lost souls. Think about the people you know who need salvation! Make this a time to reach the lost with the Gospel and help others discover the joy of salvation!

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*

John 3:16 NKJV

### PRAYER:

Father, these people need salvation: \_\_\_\_\_. Draw them into Your kingdom that they may have everlasting life! In Jesus' name, amen.



# The Gift of the Spirit

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 14

*If you love me, you will do as I command. Then I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you.*

John 14:15-16 CEV

The commercialized spirit of Christmas often is dominated by the superficial and temporary – even the most thoughtful gifts can be quickly forgotten. But God gives us gifts that last. They help us today and continue to bless us throughout our lives and into eternity.

We see this principle in His gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus told His disciples that when He returned to heaven He would “*send the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you.*” Eventually they would learn the many other blessings of the Spirit.

The Bible describes how the Spirit gives us life (John 6:63) and teaches us (John 14:26). He convicts us of sin and guides us into truth (John 15:26). He fills us (Acts 2:4) and gives us His gifts (1 Corinthians 12) and fruit (Galatians 5:22-23). He gives us power to resist the devil (1 Peter 5:9) and “*makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered*” (Romans 8:26-27). He reveals the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-12) and the mystery of Christ (Ephesians 3:3-5).

What an amazing gift!

This Christmas season, ask God to help you become more sensitive to the Spirit in your life. He is available to be your comforter, to grant you peace, to provide you access to God's power, to guide you, and to warn you of danger.

The Holy Spirit is God's ever-present gift. Celebrate His presence!

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending the Holy Spirit. Fill me anew with the Spirit. Help me share His fruit and gifts with others. In Jesus' name, amen.





# Light from Heaven

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: ACTS 9

On this day in 1719 for the first time in recorded New England history, people throughout that area saw the northern lights. To those stunned observers, these lights seemed beyond explanation. We can't imagine what thoughts went through their minds with the appearance of a "pillar of smoke and a flame ascending in heaven" (Mather).

They could not have known what actually was taking place or the cause of this phenomenon. To this day, these lights remain a sight of amazement and wonder as well as continued mystery.

Throughout history, the skies have born witness to other mysteries, like the star that led the magi to the baby Jesus. Years later, Saul (later Paul) encountered a mysterious light on the road to Damascus. Jesus spoke to him through this light and changed his life.

The Bible reminds us of the importance of light for the work of God. He guides us through His light (Exodus 13:21) and in His light "we see light" (Psalm 36:9). Jesus was the "true Light" (John 1:9) and came "as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness" (John 12:46). And because Jesus has come and given His light to us, now we are the light of the world (Matthew 5:14).

Let God shine His light into *your* life. Let the light of His Kingdom shine through you for all to see!

*He was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground.*

Acts 9:3-4 NASB

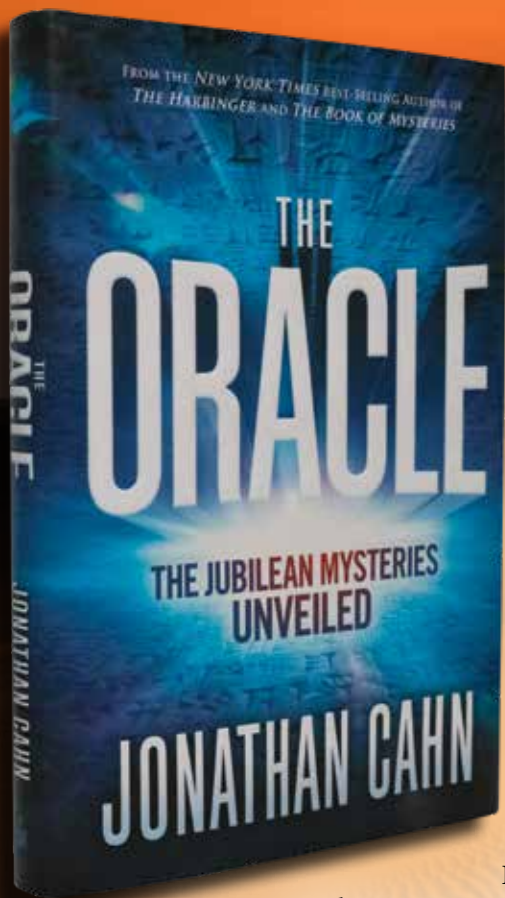
## PRAYER:

Lord, speak to me through Your Word. Let me hear Your voice. Let Your light shine through me. Use me for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.



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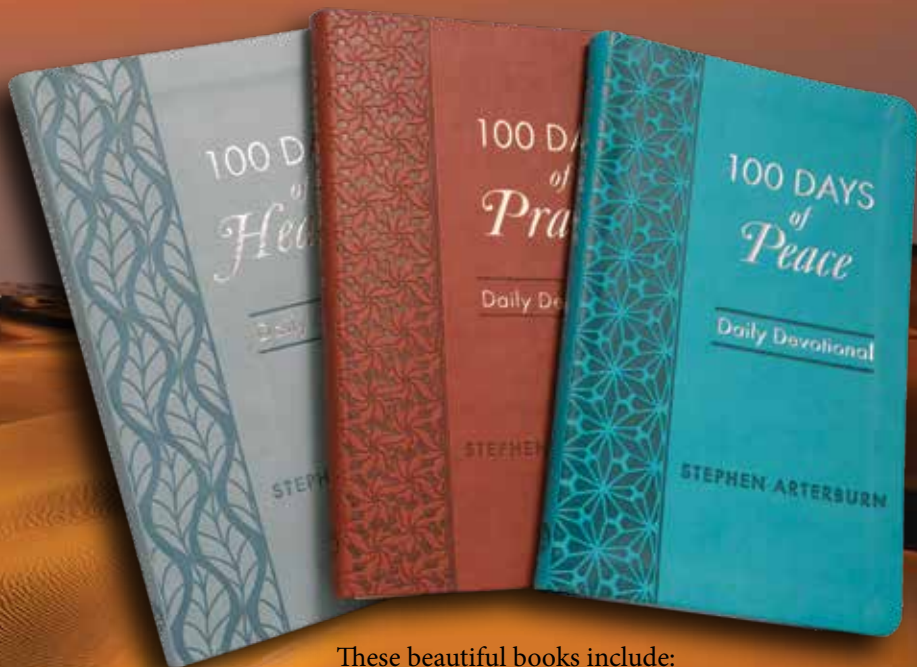
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# Conceived by the Spirit

TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 1

*Do not be afraid...  
for that which is  
conceived in her is of  
the Holy Spirit.*

Matthew 1:20 NKJV

When he learned that Mary was pregnant, Joseph could have reacted in many ways. He could have been angry, afraid, or worried about his own reputation. After all, others *expected* him to put Mary away secretly or even shame her publicly. Then an angel appeared and gave him God's perspective. He was not to be afraid or react as others might have expected. The reason was simple: "*That which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.*"

This did not mean that Joseph understood everything that would take place. But he could be confident that God was at work and that this baby was part of His plan. Joseph had to trust God regardless of how others reacted.

This principle applies to us as well. We may experience things that we do not understand. We need to remember that God sees beyond our time and circumstances. He causes things to take place to achieve His ends. In the process, things may happen that do not seem to make sense to us. These are moments to seek God. Instead of fighting Him or reacting in the flesh, we should trust Him.

Today, be careful about reacting in the flesh to the events in your life. Ask God to give you greater sensitivity to His Spirit. Stay in tune with Him. Seek His wisdom and guidance. Trust Him, remembering that His ways are higher than yours are.

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for loving me. Thank You for Your plans for me. Deliver me from fear. Help me to trust You. In Jesus's name, amen.



# Herod the Great

FRIDAY  
December  
13

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

During his 41 years as sovereign of Judea, Herod the Great became known as a builder. His legacy included a fabulous palace, fortresses, theaters, and other public buildings, including the temple in Jerusalem.

Born in 73 BC, Herod was not a Jew but an Idumean. He was a close friend to many leaders in Rome. These connections helped him gain power, but made him hated by many Jews.

Herod also was feared. He could be a ruthless and cunning. Often driven by jealousy, he arranged for the murder of one of his wives and several family members. Of Herod, Caesar Augustus said, "I'd rather be his pig than his son."

This is the man whom the magi visited who directed them to go to Bethlehem to find the "king of the Jews" (v. 2). He lashed out when the magi did not tell him the location of this king and slaughtered all the male children near Bethlehem. Joseph fled with Mary and baby Jesus into Egypt to escape from him.

Today, the lands Herod governed (modern-day Israel and Palestine) are the center of frequent unrest. Some, like Herod, think that the solution is through power or military might. But the only real answer is the Baby who was born when Herod was king – Jesus, the Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God. "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

*After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem.*

Matthew 2:1 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, open eyes throughout the world. Help the lost see Jesus. Use me to spread the Gospel. In Jesus' name, amen.





# The Magi

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

*Magi from the east  
arrived in Jerusalem,  
saying, "Where is He  
who has been born King  
of the Jews? For we saw  
His star in the east  
and have come to  
worship Him."*

Matthew 2:1-2 NASB

Who were these magi? In a recent book about Persians, scholar Tom Holland described the Magi as "a whole class" who studied the meaning of signs and events. Their beliefs generally developed from "the native paganism of the Persians" as well as "the teachings of Zoroaster." They also were well informed about the Jews and their history.

From their study of the stars, they recognized that something unusual was happening and knew enough to follow the star, believing that it would bring them to a baby King. Their goal: to worship this King and bring Him gifts.

The actions of these magi confirm God's sovereignty over all creation and every corner of the globe. No matter their motivation, these magi somehow felt drawn to seek the King of Jews. They also demonstrated the importance of worship as the culmination of their journey.

They did not travel hundreds of miles empty handed, but came prepared with gifts worthy of a king.

Each of us can repeat their journey in our own hearts and lives. We can see God's hand in every area, guiding us and speaking to us. And we can come into His presence with worship and praise as our gifts.

Today, dedicate your life to Him. Trust Him to guide you. Worship Jesus as your Lord! And express your worship by giving Him gifts worthy of a King. Give Him your best!

## PRAYER :

Dear Lord Jesus, I worship You. I will serve You with my time, talents, and treasures. Use me to impact lives for Your Kingdom. In Your name, amen.



# Awaiting the Promise

SUNDAY  
December  
15

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

Jews everywhere hoped the Messiah would come soon. Interpreting ancient texts through their understanding, many theories developed. When would He come? What would He be like?

From time to time, someone would arise who seemed to fulfill some of the criteria, including men like Judas Maccabeus. Yet inevitably that anticipation led to disappointment. The Messiah, in fact, had not appeared, and some had given up hope.

The story of Jesus' birth demonstrates that God *never* forgets His promises. In fact, every promise will be fulfilled. But the birth of the Messiah proves that God often fulfills His promises in ways we never anticipate. Our vision can be cloudy and our understanding can be limited by our experiences.

The scholars who advised King Herod knew, in general terms, where the Messiah would be born. But so much escaped them. Many hopeful Jews assumed that the Messiah would lead a military revolt against Rome and establish a new political kingdom.

But it seemed that no one really fully grasped God's plan. Even His closest disciples seemed mystified. Only with time and the revelation of the Holy Spirit would the clear picture emerge.

God continues to *surprise* us. As we watch His plans unfold, we need to stay sensitive to His Spirit, to seek His insight, and to pray for wisdom. We should not be discouraged by delays to our timetable, but remember that His timetable is always just right.

*Assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet."*

Matthew 2:4-5 ESV

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for sending Jesus into this world. Thank You that Your ways and Your timing always are perfect. I trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.



# Confirmation

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

*When they saw the star,  
they were overjoyed  
beyond measure.*

Matthew 2:10 HCSB

The magi had traveled hundreds of miles because of unusual events in the sky. The appearance of a special star indicated that something *unprecedented* was taking place – a special king had been born. They were so convinced that they traveled hundreds of miles to worship that king.

The star led them to Jerusalem. But there, they did not receive the kind of welcome they might have anticipated. In fact, they arrived “*unexpectedly*,” as if no one there could confirm the purpose for their journey (v.1). And no one else shared their excitement or commitment. Did the star not announce the birth of a king?

King Herod finally reported that they should travel to Bethlehem, “*search carefully*,” and report back (v. 8). Before that moment, they might have been wondering if their journey had been in vain. Then they saw the “*star they had seen in the east*” (v. 9).

In that moment, they were “*overjoyed beyond measure*” (v. 10). It was a moment of relief and confirmation, proving they were on the right track. They would see the King they believed had been born.

In our journey, each of us faces moments like this when we are called to step out in faith and follow a star. Seek to stay sensitive to the Spirit. Study the signs and seek God, seeking confirmation about His leading.

As you obey, you can understand the joy of confirmation felt by these magi.

## PRAYER:

Father, give me discernment and wisdom. Help me to make right decisions. Guide me. In Jesus' name, amen.



# True Priceless Treasure

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 2

The world kept shrinking. The empire created by Alexander the Great introduced countless Europeans to the delights of Asia. As part of this exchange, merchants traveling by sea and land brought their wares from far-away China.

Romans, Persians, and Egyptians exchanged ideas and brought new standards in fashion and comfort to the rest of the world. The Roman Empire, with its fabled road system, made widespread travel more convenient and safe.

Men such as the magi were part of this ever-expanding cavalcade. Some, like the magi, seemed driven by religion or their studies of the skies. Others were motivated by riches or science. All were curious and willing to travel long distances to test their theories and seek out new lands.

What these magi discovered in Judea must have both thrilled and puzzled them. Many of their expectations had been fulfilled. They had seen a child who was the King they sought.

But this child was not draped in luxury, but rather in humble conditions. Far from being greeted with reverence and acclaim, He seemed almost to be an outcast, not celebrated by the ruling elite class.

Today, we see the impact of a global economy everywhere. Merchandise produced in distant lands fills our stores. Stories about people thousands of miles away often dominate our news. Yet the most precious news continues to be the Babe found in the manger. This priceless treasure is worthy of our worship.

*When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy... They fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.*

Matthew 2:10-11 ESV

## PRAYER:

Jesus, I bring You my offerings. I praise your name. In Jesus' name, amen.



# A Charge to Keep

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LEVITICUS 8

*At the doorway of the tent of meeting, moreover, you shall remain day and night for seven days and keep the charge of the Lord.*

Leviticus 8:35 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for Your calling. I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. Help me to be faithful. In Jesus' name, amen.

Charles Wesley was influenced deeply by the writings of Matthew Henry. Born in 1662, Henry devoted much of his life to Bible study and prayer. His insights had such an impact that he began publishing a commentary in 1708. His writings still are used widely throughout the world.

Wesley, who was born on this day in 1707 in northern England, particularly was blessed by Henry's insights on Leviticus 8. Henry described how each believer has "a charge to keep, an eternal God to glorify, an immortal soul to provide for, needful duty to be done, our generation to serve." This, he reminded us, is God's call for each of us.

In 1762, inspired by Henry's comments, Wesley wrote a hymn, called "A Charge to Keep I Have." Here, Wesley expressed his sense of God's call on his own life.

In this hymn, Wesley realized his mission was to *glorify God*, "to serve the present age, my calling to fulfill." He desired to engage all of his powers "to do my Master's will." Wesley knew he would need to give "a strict account" of all that God had given to him. He prayed, "Help me to watch and pray," relying on God for the strength and resources He needed.

Today, remember that God has given *you* a charge to keep. You have a *special* call and unique gifts and talents. Dedicate your life to serving Him and seeking first His kingdom.





# A Different Kind of King

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

Looking at the world, we wonder how many of today's leaders will still be in power a year from now. In five years? Who will fall, and how will they fall? Some will remain in power for years, others for just months or weeks.

As Gabriel announced to Mary, Jesus, too, was a ruler. But He was different. He would reign, but *"of His kingdom there will be no end."* Never!

History reminds us that the kingdoms of this world *all* will pass away. But Jesus' Kingdom is different. It has *no* end, and He reigns forever.

When Jesus was born, Herod was King of Judea. Like other kings, he expected (and even demanded) that his subjects submit to him. But Jesus is not that kind of a king. He does not impose His will or force us to submit to Him. Rather, we must determine on our own to obey Him. Of our own free will, we must declare that He is Lord.

Every day, He gives us choices. He looks for people who will submit their lives to Him, serve Him willingly, seek first His Kingdom, and let Him be their Lord.

Today, remember that Jesus is not just the baby whose birth we celebrate during the Christmas season. He is your King! You have the privilege of being part of His Kingdom! Serve Him! Worship Him! Declare Him the Lord of your life!

*He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.*

Luke 1:33 NKJV

## PRAYER:

Father, I honor Jesus as my King. I willingly submit to Him as my Lord. Thank You that His Kingdom will never end. In His name, amen.



# Family Infighting

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

*A decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.*

Luke 2:1 NASB

## PRAYER :

Father, I humble myself before You. Help me to be like Jesus. Use me to point others to Him. I dedicate my life to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Luke pinpoints Jesus' birth from the moment Caesar Augustus called for a census. This began a chain of events that led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. But what of Augustus? When Jesus was born, how was he occupying his time?

Ironically, Augustus largely was consumed with family squabbles and political infighting.

Augustus had a complicated relationship with Tiberius, his stepson. A few years earlier, Augustus had forced Tiberius to divorce his wife (whom he loved) to marry Augustus' daughter Julia (whom he came to hate).

The irritations mounted after Augustus assigned Tiberius the task of settling unrest in Armenia. He shocked Augustus (and the Roman hierarchy) by announcing that he was "weary" and would retire. When his desires weren't immediately approved, he went on a hunger strike until Augustus finally relented so Tiberius could retire to the island of Rhodes.

In the words of Roman historian Suetonius, at the prime of his life, Tiberius was withdrawing "as far as possible from the center of the stage." Ironically, after Augustus's death, Tiberius succeeded his stepfather as Caesar. While these men were worried about power, prestige, and personal promotions, Jesus was born in far-off Bethlehem. His humble birth demonstrates that God is not caught up in worldly politics or control. Greatness comes through faithfulness and humility. His plans are more important than all the world's crafty schemes.

Today, choose to serve Jesus! He never will disappoint you!



# God Is With Us

SATURDAY

December

21

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

Born to wealthy parents in Paris in 1848, Henri Lerolle became a painter who frequently turned his attention to Biblical subjects. Many consider his most celebrated painting to be “The Arrival of the Shepherds.”

Here, there were no ornate figures, like many classic paintings. As was typical of his style, Lerolle captured the scene described in Luke’s Gospel in a natural way. The setting is a dark cave with huge beams providing the frame. Mary sits on straw, holding baby Jesus as Joseph looks on.

Our focus is drawn to the shepherds. They were simple men dressed in plain wardrobes. Their faces were only lit by light from a distant opening, and we sense curiosity, reverence, and wonder.

Lerolle depicted both the humanity and divinity of this mysterious moment. Into this scene of utter humility, the light had come, for Jesus is “*the Light of the world*” (John 8:12).

This painting gives us Lerolle’s interpretation of this scene. But each of us has the opportunity to reflect on this moment from our own perspective. How would we have reacted to the sight of the heavenly hosts praising God? What would it have been like to enter that stable for ourselves and see the baby Jesus? Would we have realized that God Himself was visiting His people?

Today, we can celebrate! God is with us. Jesus has come! He was born, lived, died, and rose again. He is our Savior.

*Today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior... Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened.*

Luke 2:11, 15 NASB

## PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for coming to the earth and dying in my place. I worship and praise You. In Your name, amen.



*All who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart.*

Luke 2:18-19 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, give me a fresh vision of the Christmas story and a new revelation about Your truth. Thank You for sending Jesus as a baby. In His name, amen.

Everyone who heard the shepherds tell about the birth of Jesus was filled with wonder. But Mary reacted differently, *treasuring* and *pondering* these things.

The shepherds were not wrong to express joy or to react in such a visible way. But perhaps Mary had a sense that her Son's life would not be so uniformly well received. She responded as only a mother could, reflecting on Jesus' miraculous birth, what was to come, and what these events might mean.

She also had to have been filled with a unique sense of the overwhelming mystery and miracle that had taken place. The shepherds could rejoice, but they also could return to their normal routine. Mary could not do that; she was the mother of the Son of God.

Mary knew *how* He had been conceived. She had carried Him for nine months in her womb and gone through the pain of child-birth. For her, Jesus was not a teacher or prophet, a theory or a symbol. He was her flesh and blood.

Today, *ponder* what Jesus means to you. Think about the implications of His Word and His example. *Treasure* the things He has done for you. Think about the long-term impact. Consider what it means to be His disciple. And ponder the mysteries of His birth, life, death, and resurrection.

Allow God to overwhelm you with the depth of His love and the mysteries and miracles of Christmas.



TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 1

Some think of Jesus' birth as a myth, just a story. But the Bible makes clear that it is true, a first-hand report from "eyewitnesses." The Greek word, used here for the only time in the Bible, means seeing with our *own eyes*. Often used in medicine, it was a word familiar to Luke, the physician.

Thus, the story of Jesus' birth, like the Bible itself, provides an account without embellishment by people who saw events for themselves. These "*servants of the word*" were concerned not with themselves but with serving God and handing down personal narratives of what they had seen.

Luke carefully investigated the accounts of these men and women, meticulously reporting what they had seen. He learned for himself what was true. In the process, he also became an eyewitness.

Our journey of faith begins with eyewitnesses and servants of the Word – parents, family members, friends, and others who have had a personal encounter with God, and who share personal accounts of what they know to be true.

Each of us in turn has the opportunity to take this journey for ourselves. We can carefully investigate every account, listen, and study to learn the truth for ourselves. You are called to be an eyewitness to your generation, sharing what you know to be true. Give a personal account of how Jesus has changed your life and how grateful you are that He came into this world.

*Just as they were handed down to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word.*

Luke 1:2 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for what You have done. Open doors for me to share this Good News. Help me be a faithful eyewitness. In Jesus' name, amen.



# Joy for All People

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: LUKE 2

*Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

Luke 2:10-11 NASB

## PRAYER:

Dear Lord Jesus, thank You for coming to earth as a baby. You are my King. I worship You and serve You. In Your name, amen.

It was Christmas Eve in 1944. World War II raged all around the German military hospital in Attornborn. Private First Class Bernard Macay of B Company in the American Army was in a POW ward with multiple shrapnel wounds.

When darkness fell, Macay and other prisoners heard festivities elsewhere in the hospital. At first, the sounds of Christmas made them homesick. Their mood changed when, to their surprise, a nurse walked into their ward and invited them to join in the celebration.

These Americans were asked to sing "Silent Night" in English. The Germans answered by singing "Stille Nacht" in the original German. Then together, they sang other carols in German and English. Macay recalled how "the war seemed to have vanished if only for a moment."

As this anecdote illustrates, the Christmas story can soften even the most hardened heart. It can unite enemies and remind us of something (and Someone) more important than all the military and economic power of this world with its rewards and pleasures.

Joseph Mohr, the composer of "Silent Night," concluded his simple chorus with these words: "With the angels let us sing, alleluia to our King; Christ the Savior is born!" Today, pause to think about the Savior whom we celebrate during this Christmas season. He is the King of all nations. Men and women everywhere, sing alleluia to our King!





# Joy to the World!

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 98

As he reflected on the lives of Christians in his native England, Isaac Watts felt that something was missing. They may have known about Jesus, but their worship lacked joy. Everything seemed dry and formal. In 1719 hoping to inspire believers, he wrote a hymn that he called "Joy to the World."

Watts began with a simple declaration: "Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King." Many viewed Christmas only as a traditional, worldly holiday. Their lives were not *transformed*. If Jesus truly had saved them, they needed to shout for joy and share the message with everyone. "Let every heart prepare Him room, and heaven and nature sing."

Christmas is a time to declare the life-changing message that Jesus came to free us from sin and experience more of God's blessings: "No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found."

We can depend on God for "He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness." And the "wonders of His love" show how much He cares about us.

This Christmas, don't give in to worry or doubt. God sent Jesus so you can have joy! The Lord has come! Everything has changed! Don't bottle up that joy! Share the Good News with others! Sing praises to His name!

*Shout joyfully to the LORD, all the earth; break forth and sing for joy and sing praises.*

Psalm 98:4 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, I am so grateful that You sent Jesus into this world! Fill me with joy. Help me to share this joy with others. In Jesus' name, amen.



# Feeling Blue

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 32

*Be glad in the LORD, and  
rejoice, O righteous, and  
shout for joy, all you  
upright in heart!*

Psalm 32:11 ESV

For many people, the weeks before Christmas are a season of frantic activity – shopping, planning, parties, special events, concerts, rehearsals, dinners, services, visits from friends and family both near and far. Then, with the passing of Christmas, many are hit with the aftermath of an adrenaline-sustained schedule. And a typical reaction for many is what some might call the blues that feels empty. As defined by the dictionary, it's “a feeling of sadness or depression.”

After surviving Christmas festivities, some people come face to face with financial deficits, which can be a depressing realization. Some simply feel tired and letdown after weeks of stress. For many, it is a time to recover. With no special activities planned, it can seem that there is nothing to look forward to.

Others grapple with a feeling of loneliness. Having been around people so often during the Christmas season, they find themselves without the company of friends and family.

If you feel the blues, what can you do? Turn to the Lord and rekindle that relationship. Sing, worship, and linger in His presence in order to be renewed and refreshed. Study and meditate on His Word to seek His direction and insights.

Remember, the world may be filled with the constant change of ups and downs, but God always is with us. He can fill us with joy, meaning, and purpose at any time of year.

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for giving my life purpose and meaning. Help me draw closer to You. Fill me with Your joy. In Jesus' name, amen.



TODAY'S BIBLE READING: DEUTERONOMY 29

The Bible tells us that God does not reveal everything about situations we face, other people, ourselves, or world events. Yes, He keeps some things “*secret*.” Sometimes He reveals things a little bit at a time.

In contrast, some things are “*revealed*” to us. In his translation, James Moffatt calls these “the unfolded issues of the day.” This is how life often comes at us as issues *unfold* day by day and moment by moment.

We react to the events of life in so many different ways – worry, fear, concern, or confidence. But the Bible reminds us that God is sovereign and that events *unfold* according to His plan. He can give us understanding at just the *right* time.

However, He only *expects* us to know what has been revealed to us. These revealed things have been given so we may observe and obey.

At the end of a year, we have an opportunity to look back and review what we have done – mistakes made, regrets, events that unfolded, things we wish we had known. Looking forward, we go through the same process, wondering what lies ahead.

As you think about the past year and the blank slate of the year ahead, remember to base your life on God’s revealed will, His Word. Remember that some things will be hidden from you. Your task is to stay faithful to what has been revealed. Let Him guide you as events unfold.

*The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law.*

Deuteronomy 29:29 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, help me stay faithful to Your call. I seek Your wisdom and direction. I commit my time, talents, and treasures to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.



# Commit Your Heart

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JEREMIAH 44

*Since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven...we have lacked everything and have been consumed by the sword and by famine.*

Jeremiah 44:18 NKJV

## PRAYER :

Father, I commit these problems to You: \_\_\_\_\_ . I trust You for the answers. Thank You that Your timing is perfect. In Jesus' name, amen.

Some people think that turning to God is a kind of magic formula. They think there are no consequences for their actions and that everything will work out the way they want, when they want. Jeremiah was confronted with people who felt this way. They expected *immediate* results. Instead, problems continued. Then, when things did not change according to *their* timetable, they turned away from God and returned to their sinful ways.

Their reactions revealed that they *really* weren't interested in serving God. They weren't interested in meeting the *qualifications*; they really just wanted the benefits.

But God has a *different* perspective. He knows how often people make promises only to change their minds. He hears their words but is more concerned about the true condition of their hearts and their *real* attitudes. He's interested in their eternal destiny, not in quick fixes.

The Bible makes clear that God wants our hearts. We are to "*seek first His kingdom*," confident that He will provide everything we need (Matthew 6:25-33). We need to understand the eternal consequences of our actions and to serve Him regardless of the circumstances.

Today, make sure to turn to God for solutions to the problems you face. But remember to make an *unconditional* commitment. Don't waver if you don't see immediate results. Remain resolute. He has not forgotten you. He is the God of all eternity. You can trust Him.



# Seeking God's Will

SUNDAY  
December  
29

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: MATTHEW 6

William Gladstone had many political opponents. Yet he became one of the most powerful leaders in Great Britain during the 19th century, serving as prime minister for four separate terms.

Born on this day in 1809, Gladstone also was a devout Christian. He was a lay leader of the Church of England and wrote several books on religion. Even while engaging in partisan politics, he sought to follow his Christian convictions.

One theme he often emphasized was the importance of submitting our lives to God and seeking His will. As he told his wife, they needed “to cherish, exercise, and expand this new and heavenly power of acting according to the will of God.”

Gladstone realized that this might seem unnatural at first, but as they continued to obey God, it would become *second nature*. They would experience the “full triumph” as they *gladly* followed God’s leading. They simply would want to do what He desired all the time.

Every day as we make decisions, our natural inclination often is to do the things that make sense to us and seem most beneficial to further our careers and interests.

But becoming a mature believer means recognizing that God sees our lives more clearly than we see ourselves. It means knowing that His will always is best. Right now, surrender your life to Him. Seek His will for every decision you make. Make that your prayer and your commitment.

*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.*

Matthew 6:10 KJV

## PRAYER:

Father, I seek to do Your will. I surrender to You. Guide me. May Your will be done in my life. In Jesus’ name, amen.



# Open My Eyes

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: PSALM 119

*Open my eyes, that I  
may behold Wonderful  
things from Your law.*

Psalm 119:18 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, give me discernment and wisdom. Open my eyes that I may behold wonderful things from Your law. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.

Franz Liszt took nineteenth-century Europe by storm with his magnetic personality and galvanizing technique as a pianist. In 1855, he was the soloist for the debut of his *Piano Concerto No. 1* in Vienna, Austria, amazing audiences with his playing and compositional skills.

But Eduard Hanslick, the powerful critic who ruled the city's musical life, was shocked, *banning* the concerto from Vienna's concert halls. Why was he so upset? Because Liszt dared to incorporate a triangle in this concerto.

It seems that prior to Liszt, no one had thought of using "so trivial an instrument" in a "serious" work like this. Yet, a few years later, Sophie Mentor played the concerto – including the triangle – in Vienna with great success. Hanslick's objections were soon forgotten.

To us, Hanslick's attitude seems laughable. But his words demonstrate how quickly fashions can change. What seems offensive one day can seem normal the next. We can be *blinded* by our own stubborn resistance to change.

In our spiritual lives, each of us can become so blinded by our preconceived ideas that we are resistant to things God wants to teach us. As you think about the new year, remember that God knows your future. Lay your plans and thoughts before Him. Seek His wisdom. Allow Him to give you discernment and teach you His truths. Don't trust in your own understanding, but *lean* on Him. He will direct your path.





# The Old Year

TUESDAY  
December  
**31**

TODAY'S BIBLE READING: JOHN 15

Born in London in 1827, Catherine Winkworth lived most of her life in England. The notable exception was a year she spent in Dresden, Germany, where she lived with her father.

During that time, she mastered German and became familiar with many German-language hymns and traditions. As a by-product, she helped bring the German choral tradition to the English-speaking world more than any other person did. In addition, she translated many German hymns into English.

One of those hymns was originally written in 1588 by Johann Steuerlein. In Winkworth's English translation, it is "The Old Year Now hath Passed Away."

This hymn encourages us to remember that God is faithful through the years. He has kept us "when danger and distress were near." Many Old Testament passages also remind us of how much the Lord has helped His people. Looking back, we see how easily we can fall into sin and need to depend upon God.

Winkworth prayed, "Abide with us and keep us free from errors, following only Thee." We must remember that we need Him every day. "Oh, help us to forsake all sin, a new and holier course begin! Mark not what once was done amiss; a happier, better year be this."

Today, pause to consider all that God has done for you. Thank Him for all He has done for you. Remember, you can trust Him for the coming year. Worship Him! Praise Him!

*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.*

John 15:4 NASB

## PRAYER:

Father, thank You for all you have done for me this past year. I praise You for knowing the future. I trust in You. In Jesus' name, amen.





# Your Heart Matters

**Sometimes we all feel overlooked;  
God wants you to know, He sees and cares.**

I am the grandmother to two little girls who, at four months apart, are parentheses around the age of two. One is blonde. One is brunette. One has straight hair, the other curls. They both have eyes and smiles that light up the sky and set off fireworks in my heart. I am in love with them.

And I am learning how to be a grandmother.

On this learning curve, I really blew it last month.

I am so careful and attentive to what I give them. If I spend a certain amount on one, then I spend the same amount on the other. Not perhaps at the same time nor on the

same thing, but the running tally is in my head. My innate sense of justice is vigilant against favoritism.

So when one little one needed a new pair of quality shoes, which was out of reach for her parents, I knew that I had spent the same on a couple of dresses for my other granddaughter, and I happily sprang for the shimmering pair of pink Mary Janes.

My mistake is coming.

The new shoes were at my house the same time as both granddaughters were there, and I gave them to the one without giving anything to the other. I know they will have to learn that sometimes that happens,



but may I remind you that they are TWO. Their little hearts and minds do not/cannot fathom that yet. It is as foreign a concept to them as “sharing.”

So my older granddaughter (by four months, remember) opened her shoes, loved them, and put them on. Hooray! My younger granddaughter saw them and wanted to put them on as well. Telling her they belonged to her cousin set off her grief. When she finally understood, she walked to the corner of the room, disappeared behind a chair, and in hiding tried to comfort herself by repeating her name.

Cue sword piercing my heart.

The next day, I ran to Target as soon as I could and found an inexpensive pair of gold shimmering shoes in her size. Later that afternoon, my husband brought them to her house and had her open them. At first, she thought these shoes, too, belonged to her cousin. When she was made to understand that they were HER shoes, she immediately begged to put them “On! On! On!” She has barely taken them off since.

After putting on her new shimmering, “sparkly” shoes, my husband got down on his knees and spoke to her in love, “Your heart matters. YOUR heart.”

My husband and I get to join my granddaughters’ parents

in conveying the truth they so constantly do. These little girls are going to grow up knowing that they are seen. They are delighted in. And that their hearts matter.

Let this story have its way with you. Let it prick your heart in the remembrance of times when your heart was overlooked. When you didn’t get the new shoes, the new dress, the new notebook, the loving glance, the TIME. When the message you received was not “your heart matters.”

And now, let me remind you of your Father. The One who is fierce on your behalf. Who is not keeping a tally of any kind because His love for you is immeasurable and His gifts of love and provision to you are boundless. He sees you. He delights in you. He wants you to know it so badly that He came in person to deliver the message, and He is coming still in this moment.

Hear His voice. He holds your face in His hands. He speaks.

***“Your heart matters.”***



**Stasi Eldredge** is the Director of Women’s Ministries for Ransomed Heart. She loves writing and speaking to women about the goodness of God. Excerpted from an article on the Ransomed Heart website.





GOD'S  
One-Eighty

On a Caribbean island one day, an Inspiration Ministries broadcast brought God into the lives of Serena and Ardilles, a couple whose lives had been shattered by family violence, homelessness, divorce, physical trauma, and unemployment.

“It was horrible walking around in a void. I just stared into space. That is such an alone feeling.” Then God showed up through an Inspiration Ministries Campmeeting and did a one-eighty transformation in their lives!

An unemployed new mother, Serena was caring for elderly relatives when God rocked her world. “The show was just playing in the background. But I knew it was the truth! It was the answer to a longing in me. I was stunned and speechless to find out I could know Jesus!”

Hungry to know more, Serena responded to the salvation message, prayed the Prayer of Faith and began a journey that continues to thrill her today. “I no longer worry and cry because now I know God actually cares for me. My family told me the opposite – that God did not love my baby or me. I have a Someone filling an empty space that nothing else could fill!”

Serena took the message of joy to her fiancé Ardilles who felt the fears, pain, and failure of the past melt for him as well. “He believes we are going to win. We have a Savior we want to love and follow!”

Together, they began to listen to Inspiration Ministries and pray for change, gaining real strength from the presence of God. Serena explains, “Because of the prayers (on the programming), I felt the presence of God fill the room with His love and peace. He gave me understanding that He is everything I need and the truth I have been seeking.”

As truth and light penetrated their hearts more deeply, life continued getting better. The old, familiar feelings of anxiety and failure fled. And obstacles that had blocked their path crumbled in the face of God’s goodness and love. “God has been meeting our needs in amazing ways! I know now He wants me to be healed and whole,” shares Serena.

“The light, love, peace, and comfort we’ve received are unexplainable. It’s a feeling from another realm! I am just so thrilled you brought the life-changing gospel of Jesus to us. Thank you for being there for us; we weep for joy.”

## What Christmas Miracle Do YOU Need?

Just as God blessed Serena and Ardilles, He wants to bless *you* this Christmas! Whatever breakthrough you need, we are here for you!

Visit [inspiration.org/souls](http://inspiration.org/souls) and sow a seed to help *others* hear the Good News of Jesus Christ this Christmas season.





# Believe

## A SEASON OF MIRACLES

Join Inspiration TV this month for a heavenly host of God-inspired Christmas programs – all designed to lift your spirits and deepen your trust in the God of miracles!



### **Miracle Maker**

This Christmas is hardly a season of joy. Money is tight and spirits are down. The town awaits the Miracle Maker's arrival, but when a ragged traveler appears, he isn't who the town expected.

◆ Saturday, Dec. 7 @ 9:00 p.m. ET, 21:00 UK



### **My Broken Horse Christmas**

Of all the horses to choose from, John's father brings home the meanest, wildest mare he's ever seen. Despite all its imperfections, the horse teaches John the perfect lesson.

◆ Sunday, Dec. 8 @ 7:00 p.m. ET, 19:00 UK



### **Christmas Child**

As Jack delves into the mysteries surrounding a life-sized nativity, he uncovers secrets from his past, reunites with lost family, and returns to the love Who never left him.

◆ Saturday, Dec. 14 @ 9:00 p.m. ET, 21:00 UK







## **Charting Christmas**

Charting Christmas provides background to questions many have regarding the origin of Santa Claus, Christmas trees, and much more. Join us as we explore the history of Christmas.

◆ Saturday, Dec. 21 @ 2:00 p.m. ET, 14:00 UK



## **The Least of These**

A homeless, single mother and her young daughter experience a life-changing miracle when they meet a storefront Santa. This Christmas story is anchored in faith and forgiveness.

◆ Saturday, Dec. 21 @ 9:00 p.m. ET, 21:00 UK



## **Christmas Dress**

The Jeppsons fear Christmas will be impossible. In a heartwarming act of bravery, a half-blind postman and his son battle a blizzard to deliver the ultimate Christmas miracle.

◆ Sunday, Dec. 22 @ 7:00 p.m. ET, 19:00 UK



## **So, Who Is This Jesus?**

Have you ever wondered who Jesus really is? If so, then be sure to join Russell Boulter as he seeks to answer this question in a down-to-earth, no-nonsense style.

◆ Sunday, Dec. 29 @ 2:00 p.m. ET, 14:00 UK

Visit [ini.tv/believe](http://ini.tv/believe) for additional airtimes

**Don't miss these great Christmas programs and more!** You can watch Inspiration TV 24/7 on Roku, Apple TV, Amazon Fire, Chromecast, via livestream at [ini.tv/livestream](http://ini.tv/livestream), or on the free Inspiration TV mobile app.

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# Casting Off Your Holiday Blues



Ben Cerullo

**Whatever reason you feel depressed today, know that the Lord of Glory cares about you and wants to powerfully bless your life.**

There's no question, depression impacts a lot of people, especially at Christmas. I probably could write an entire book on what the Bible says about depression because there's not enough space here to share everything that needs to be said on the subject.

Many of the Bible's greatest heroes encountered times when they were blue or depressed. Even Jesus Himself said shortly before going to the cross, *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death"* (Matthew 26:38). The apostle Paul also spoke of a very gloomy time in his life: *"We were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life."* Paul eventually concluded there was a *purpose* in the trials he encountered: *"That we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead"* (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).



Sometimes people in the Scriptures expressed bewilderment about WHY they were experiencing what they were feeling. For example, The Message paraphrases Psalm 42: “*Why are you down in the dumps, dear soul? Why are you crying the blues?*” (v. 5) The psalmist is struggling to figure out why he’s feeling down when things were great just a short time before:

*I was always at the head of the worshiping crowd, right out in front, leading them all, eager to arrive and worship, shouting praises, singing thanksgiving – celebrating, all of us, God’s feast!* (v. 4).

Maybe you can relate to what the psalmist is describing here. I sure can. Sometimes I’ve been on the mountaintop after preaching a powerful word from God, and only minutes later I’m down in the valley.

So what’s the solution when this happens? The psalmist gives us some tips:

*Fix my eyes on God – soon I’ll be praising again. He puts a smile on my face. He’s my God. When my soul is in the dumps, I rehearse everything I know of you... Then God promises to love me all day, sing songs all through the night! My life is God’s prayer* (vs. 5-8).

It’s not always easy to break loose from depression, but the

psalmist is on the right track here. Instead of focusing on his melancholy state of mind, he turns his attention to the Lord and begins to rehearse his blessings.

He also makes a very important observation: His depression won’t last forever because God would soon put a smile on his face again. Nothing ousts depression faster than HOPE. When we recognize that a better day is ahead, depression loses its power over us.

Like the psalmist, Paul understood the need to focus on our blessings instead of on our negative circumstances:

*Brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy – meditate on these things...and the God of peace will be with you* (Philippians 4:8-9).

What an important reminder for all of us. Yes, we may face depressing circumstances at times. Paul was in *prison* when he wrote these words! But regardless of what may be happening around us, “*the God of peace*” will be with us when our eyes are on Him, and we put our attention on His blessings in our life.



One other lesson I've learned about depression is that it can have a variety of causes. If we incorrectly diagnose the source of our depression, we'll be ineffective in treating it. Here are just a few of the causes of depression found in the Bible:

- **Sin, disobedience, and rebellion**

We see this in the case of Cain, who was downcast after killing his brother Abel (Genesis 4:6-7).

- **Physical causes, such as hunger, fatigue, or unbalanced hormones**

This happened to Elijah after he defeated the false prophets of Baal and was threatened by Jezebel (1 Kings 19:2-14). His depression improved after he got extra sleep, ate some food, and heard God's voice again.

- **Demonic attacks**

Isaiah 61:3 says God wants to give us a "garment of praise" to replace the "spirit of despair" (NIV). Satan has his demonic hordes working overtime to depress the people of God, especially during the time when we are celebrating the birth of our Savior.

Whatever the cause of our depression may be, the Lord wants to bring us healing, refreshing, and joy. We need to surround ourselves with friends who can encourage us

in the Lord (1 Samuel 23:16). We also must learn how to encourage *ourselves* in the Lord (1 Samuel 30:6) by coming into His presence and meditating on His Word.

Friend, I don't know what kinds of difficult, depressing situations you may be facing this Christmas season. But I DO know that God cares about you and can set you free from your depression when you cry out to Him.

One day King David found himself surrounded by problems:

*LORD, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, "There is no help for him in God" (Psalm 3:1-2).*

Perhaps you're facing a similar experience, questioning whether God will come to your aid. David's conclusion should be an encouragement for you to keep trusting God, even when You don't see His answers right away:

*But You, O LORD, are a shield for me, my glory and the One who lifts up my head (v. 3).*

When the difficult circumstances of life weigh you down, God offers to come and lift up your head. In Jesus' mighty name, your depression will have to leave!



# A Merry Heart...

A merry heart does good, like medicine. – Proverbs 17:22



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The INSPIRATION devotional magazine is looking for examples of humor in the church or the Christian life. If you have humorous stories, jokes, or photos you would like to share, please send them to [MerryHeart@inspiration.org](mailto:MerryHeart@inspiration.org).

## DO YOU KNOW YOUR HYMNS?

### Dentist's Hymn:

Crown Him with Many Crowns

### Weatherman's Hymn:

There Shall Be Showers of Blessings

### Contractor's Hymn:

The Church's One Foundation

### Tailor's Hymn:

Holy, Holy, Holy

### Golfer's Hymn:

There's a Green Hill Far Away

### Politicians Hymn:

Standing on the Promises!

### Optometrist's Hymn:

Open My Eyes that I might See

### IRS Agent's Hymn:

I Surrender All

### Realtor's Hymn:

I've Got a Mansion, Just Over the Hilltop

## BULLETIN BLOOPERS



**WED., 6:00 P.M.**  
The church will host an evening of fine dining, superb entertainment, and gracious hostility.

*For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery down stairs.*

**ATTN: SINGLES**  
All singles are invited to join us Friday at 7 p.m. for the annual Christmas Sing-alone.





# READY TO DISCOVER THE MYSTERY?

Go on a journey that untangles ancient mysteries  
and sheds new light on the events of today.



*(See page 32 for more information.)*

To receive these tremendous resources as our **THANK YOU GIFTS** for your Seed to win Souls this month, use the enclosed response form, call our special resource line, or visit [inspiration.org/DEC2019](http://inspiration.org/DEC2019) TODAY:

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