

# Making Space

Daily Advent Devotionals to Help  
Clear the Clutter for Christ



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## Day 1

# *The Best List*

*Read Luke 1:11-17*



Lists. That's usually how I start Christmas prep. Gift lists, party guest lists, menu lists, baking lists. I love pen and paper and crossing off the to-do's (Any other prehistoric, pre-App folk with me on that one?).

But there's another kind of Christmas prep.

The heart kind. The hard kind. (Is there a difference, really?)

Backtrack from the Nativity and you'll read a birth announcement for a baby boy. Not Jesus, but his cousin John. Zechariah and Elizabeth's unexpected blessing. John, meaning "God is Gracious." John whose main calling was to "make ready a people prepared for the Lord." (Luke 1:17).

This Advent let's take a John moment. Let's be a people prepared for the coming of the Messiah.

Let's *clear the clutter for Christ*.

**Sure, we can still make those lists. But let's also take a moment to listen.**

Because when we listen intentionally and expectantly, we give Him an opportunity to change us.

I confess to being a Christmas-o-holic and love my Christmas cookies, carols and crafts. But I want Christmas to be more than that. *Much* more than that.

Will you join me as I share some Advent devotionals with you? Together, I pray that our focus on Christ makes Christmas all the sweeter, this year.

### ***Prayer***

*Father, this Advent season we come before you with open hearts. We long to hear from you. We long to behold Christ in all His beauty. Help us shut out the distractions so we can be fully devoted to You. Amen*

## Day 2

# *Making Space for Christ—Part 1*

**Read Luke 3:3-6**



"Let every heart prepare Him room."(Or, more precisely, roo-oo-oom). That's a familiar line from the Christmas hymn, Joy to the World. It's like Isaac Watts, who wrote the song way back in 1719 (thanks Wikipedia), knew that almost three centuries down the road we would face the Crisis of Christ-less Christmas. He probably had an inkling that in the midst our celebrating we would forget the Guest of Honor. Mr Watts had stumbled on one of our time's greatest ironies: **we get so wrapped up in our gifts that we forget to unwrap the Greatest Gift of all.**

But, Issac Watts reminds us that Advent is a time of *anticipating* the arrival of the King.

I liken it to preparing your guest room for the arrival of house guests. Hosting another family in your home requires a mega time commitment. It requires clearing your schedule to make sure they're comfortable, entertained and have clean towels.

In the midst of the Christmas frenzy, we need to carve out time for Christ. I recently heard a pastor mention the **antithesis to fearing God is forgetting God**. Not denying Him. Not offending Him. Just omitting Him.

To get back to the guest room analogy – ours is an 11 x 11 room that we have worked down to its bare bones. It's an office, it's a playroom, it's a guest room, it's the room where one parent crashes when the master bedroom is too full of little peeps who don't belong in there.

As a result, before house guests arrive, there's always a heap of stuff shuttled off to Goodwill.

This Advent focus on ridding your schedule of the unnecessary. Learn to say no to one more commitment. Learn to say yes where it counts. **De-cluttering Christmas may be just what your soul needs.**

### Prayer

*Father, This Christmas, I echo the words of the Psalmist David: "One thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple..." Amen*

## Day 3

# *Making Space for Christ – Part 2*

**Read Matthew 6:31-34**



To get back to the guest room analogy from yesterday, before visitors arrive, our spare room gets a mini-makeover. It's like HGTV crew came in - on a very, very low budget. Our sofa bed magically transforms into a queen bed, we re-arrange furniture, empty shelves of toys, display accent pieces that have nothing to do with Lego StarWars. Sometimes I even indulge in buying new curtains and flowers. Those little changes make our guests feel at home.

Sometimes we need those little tweaks to nudge us closer to Christ. **Rethink, re-arrange and refocus so Christ has room.** I love our family tradition of singing 'Happy Birthday Dear Jesus' on Christmas morning and having the kids cut a cake. It's a simple idea. It's not original and the kids will probably balk at it in a few years. But, for now, it puts the focus on Christ. And everyone gets cake.

No matter how perfectly arranged the room is, if we don't have a heart of love for our guests it will soon become obvious. I don't want to do what I'm doing because I *have* to. I do what I'm doing as a response to their love or our friendship.

In the same vein, we can't force ourselves to make room for Christ. We simply do it in response to **the Sovereign One who gave up His majesty for a manger, who traded in His Kingship for a Cross.**

Is there room for Him in our hearts this Christmas? Or will we turn him away because our lives are too full to accommodate the One who gave up everything?

### **Prayer**

*Father, help me re-prioritize so that I make room for Christ this Christmas. Enable me to do so as a response to Your amazing, unconditional love. Thank you for sending Jesus – the One who poured out His life for us. Amen*

## Day 4

# *Just Believe*

Read Luke 1: 35-38



“Just Believe.” We see that tagline plastered everywhere this time of the year. It’s often accompanied by delicate snowflakes, the tinkling of bells and a dash of glitter. It’s the feel-good message in Christmas movies and cards: Just Believe in the magic of the season.

When we look back to the very first Christmas, we find an example of someone who “just believed”: Mary, the mother of Jesus. She received God’s promise that *her* son – the son of an unwed teenager – would be the Savior of the world. She probably went through an array of emotions. But in the end, **Mary simply took God at His word**. She didn’t make back-up, “just in case” plans. She didn’t try to pray the situation away.

Instead, she pours out her heart in praise of God.

What an amazing example of trusting God when we haven’t got all our ducks in a row. Of praising Him through the unknown. And because she just believed, because she just obeyed, all of history was divided into AD and BC.

Her cousin Elizabeth recognized that belief when she said, “Blessed is she who believes what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.”

Can you and I simply take God at His Word? Can we challenge ourselves to bank our everything on Him?

### **Prayer**

*Father, Sometimes I fool myself into thinking I’m in control. But the only way I can come to you is in complete humility. I cannot do this thing called life in my own strength. I need you, oh I need you, every hour I need you. Thank you for the gift of grace you sent that first Christmas. Help me Just Believe. Amen.*

## Day 5

# *Freedom in Christ*

Read Titus 3:3-7



“At one time we too were foolish....enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures...But when the kindness and love of God our Father appeared, he saved us...”

Jesus saves. Bumper stickers proclaim it. Preachers preach it. Kids sing it. The Bible says it. When did He give us that gift? Today's passage says that it was when we were plain old foolish. When we didn't have our act together. When we brought nothing, absolutely nothing, to the table – except for our sin and guilt. That's when He chose to enter this world.

The Bible says that we were “enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures.” The world sees those passions and pleasures as “freedom”. But, eventually, **we are ensnared by that which can never fully satisfy**, pleasures that come up short and leave us empty.

This Christmas, let's refuse to be enslaved in the traps of the enemy. Instead, let's pray that **our hearts will be completely captivated by Christ's love**.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, help me recognize that the promises of the world are empty. Help me remember that the pleasures of the world are snares. This Advent help me to wait on You, so I am captured by Your Love. A Love that never fails. A Love that sent Your only Son into the world so I could have abundant life now and forever. Amen.*

## Day 6

# *When You Don't Have It In You*

*Read Psalm 34:17-20*



Maybe this Christmas you just don't have it in you to celebrate. Maybe this past year has been overshadowed by a heaviness that refuses to budge. Perhaps you feel like the joy has been sucked out of you.

Sure, you go through the motions: the tree is trimmed, the lights strung, the treats baked. But the joy of the season? That's been stolen by the year gone by.

But Scripture reminds us that Jesus didn't come down for those who have it all together. He came for those who are broken, hurt and disappointed. He came for the messy and the forgotten. He came to heal the brokenhearted. He came to restore that joy. He came to flood your heart with peace that just doesn't make sense in this situation.

Maybe circumstances won't change. Maybe those fissures from the past won't magically mend. But this Christmas know that He came for YOU. As broken and messed up as your year may have been, His love is infinitely greater. He is able. Able to restore joy, bring peace and truly bless your Christmas with the best gift of all – His presence.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, This Christmas, I can't seem to shake off the gloom. I'm sometimes in a dark place when I think of this past year. But despite the brokenness, help me remember that You bring life and healing and hope to the hopeless. Amen.*

## Day 7

# *The Start of Christmas*

**Read Genesis 3:14-15**



“Some people believe that Christmas officially begins when Santa arrives at the Macy’s Thanksgiving parade.”

That was the line my first grader had to deliver at her school assembly which has a Christmas theme.

I helped her practice the line, but I wasn’t entirely convinced of the veracity of the statement. Sure, some people believe that Christmas begins when Thanksgiving – marked in New York City by the Macy’s parade – wraps up.

But when did the Christmas officially begin? With Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem? Or with angel Gabriel’s announcement to Mary?

The more I think about it, I believe that Christmas “officially” began with the fall of man. When Adam and Eve chose to deliberately disobey God, it broke the relationship between man and his Creator. **That’s when God put His rescue plan into motion.**

**He didn’t wait for man to clean up his act.** Right then, God spoke of the birth of the second Adam – Christ – who would crush Satan’s head.

### **Prayer**

*Abba Father, thank you for being a loving, living God. Thank you for reaching out to us right in the midst of our brokenness and our sinfulness. You put into motion a rescue plan for us from the beginning! Amen*



## Day 8

# *Beneath the Fountain*

**Read Romans 5: 6-8**



Today, let's pause and ponder. Let the words we just read sink in. Let's pour out our hearts in humble adoration for the One who came to redeem us while we were utterly powerless.

### **Prayer**

*Thank You Father for the **grace droplets that drench our daily lives**. We could write them off as coincidence. We could put it down to good fortune. We could proclaim that it's the result of our hard work. But when I truly pay attention to my world, I see Your grace upon us, moment by moment! In the smile of a baby, the warmth of a hug, in an answer to prayer, in the glimpse of a glorious sunset, in the nourishment from Your word, in a really great homemade meal.*

*If I stop long enough, I see **a love so extravagant, so lavish that it broke into the darkness of the world that Christmas morn**. A love so unfailing, so divine that it continues to pour down on us. Soaking us in Your grace, plunging us beneath the fountain of Your love. Christmas is the love story of a God who loved us enough to send His one and only son to the earth. It's the story of a God who would humble himself and give up His throne for a trough in a stable.*

*Help us stop and ponder Grace unfathomable. Help us to still and remember Love unstoppable. We welcome You, Lord Jesus. Amen*

## Day 9

# *Ready For His Return*

**Read Matthew 25:1-3**



We get the word 'Advent' from the Latin 'adventus' or coming. The Israelites waited 400 years for the coming of the promised Messiah.

Today, we too are in a waiting room of sorts. Believers are anxiously awaiting Christ's return – when He will right all wrong, do away with hunger and wipe every tear.

But as we wait let's do so in anticipation and readiness like the five wise virgins in today's passage. They took with them jars of oil, not knowing when the bridegroom will arrive. As Christ our Bridegroom returns, let's be ready in the repentance He offers. Like the five foolish virgins let's not be found unprepared and preoccupied.

Like them, we can't buy or borrow spiritual preparedness. On the outside, they looked ready for the arrival of the bridegroom. But, clearly, they didn't care enough about his coming to prepare themselves.

We don't know when Christ will return. But **let's be ready in the redemption Christ offers.**

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, Christmas reminds us of when you first sent Your Son into a broken world. As the bride of Christ, the church, we look forward to His return. We anticipate the promise that He will wipe away every tear. But, we pray, that we will not live in any pretense. We will, instead, live in preparedness. Help us be found in Christ when He comes again. Amen*

## Day 10

# *Different Attitudes*

*Read Luke 1:11-18 and Luke 1: 30-34*



Today we reflect on two seemingly similar, yet vastly different, questions in the passages we read. The messenger – Gabriel – is the same. The message – an announcement of a baby boy’s birth – is similar. Yet, the attitude of the recipient made all the difference.

In verses 11-18, Zechariah receives the promise of a son. A long-awaited, much-prayed-for baby. Yet, he doubted and questioned God. He asks, “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.”(Vs 18).

Zechariah doubts God and His goodness and power. He believed more in his inability than God’s ability. His attitude brought admonition - Zechariah’s mouth was sealed.

In verses 30-31, Mary received the promise of a son. The long-awaited Messiah. But her attitude is markedly different. “How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” (Vs 34)

She didn’t doubt God’s ability to bring His plan to pass. She was merely asking God how He would accomplish what she believed He would do. **Her attitude brought blessing - more than she asked or imagined!**

As we go into the Christmas season, are we questioning God and doubting His power? Or, are we trusting that He works things out according to His plan and good pleasure?

### **Prayer**

*Father God, We come to you humbly, knowing that when You speak, You act; When You Promise You Fulfill. Help me never to doubt Your power or Your goodness. Thank You for fulfilling Your Word and being gracious even when we give in to fear. Amen*

## Day 11

# *He Is On The Throne*

**Read Luke 2: 1-4**



Caesar Augustus – the name itself inspires a certain awe and authority. For sure, the decrees of this first Roman emperor were not to be trifled with. Joseph probably had little choice but to follow the Caesar’s decree and head to Bethlehem for the census.

He had to take a long difficult trip with a young, pregnant wife. But, despite what it seemed like on the outside, God was orchestrating every details. Despite the seeming unknowns, God knew every step. He was in perfect control. In fact, Caesar was just being used to fulfill prophecy that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Yes, sometimes our lives may seem a meaningless series of mishaps and misfortunes. It may seem like the “powers that be” are twisting the very fabric of our lives to suit their purposes. But, it’s amazing how God works in the background to fulfill His plan. **He has put those powers and authorities in place and He is far above all. Yes, the government shall be upon His shoulders!**

### **Prayer**

*Father, As we read about the Christmas story and the marvelous unfolding of events prophesied hundreds of years before that, we are astounded by Your power. You are the Alpha and the Omega. Nothing and nobody can thwart Your plans, Lord. Help us be confident in Your Power! Amen*

## Day 12

# *Not Just A Regular Nice Guy*

**Read Matthew 1:18-21**



This is a familiar passage about a really good guy – Joseph, the man pledged to marry Mary. Things must have been going great for Joseph. Perhaps his carpentry business was doing well and he was ready for the next stage of his life – to marry the woman betrothed to him.

Then Joseph's plans fell apart. He found that his wife-to-be was already with child. The gospel account in Matthew records that since Joseph was a righteous man He planned to divorce Mary quietly. That was till God spoke to him in a dream.

That was when Joseph stopped being a regular nice guy. He became an obedient follower of God. He became a risk taker for God. **He didn't just do the good thing. He did the godly thing. He didn't just do the reasonable thing. He did the righteous thing.**

What is my response when God calls me to do the unexpected? Do I shrink from obedience because of fear? Or, like Joseph, do I follow the righteous way because I trust that God knows what He's doing?

### **Prayer**

*Father, thank you for the example of Joseph. Thank You that when You call, You also equip. Help me to remember that Your grace is sufficient for me, that Your power is made perfect in weakness. Help me to always choose the path that puts You first, no matter what the consequences. Amen*

## Day 13

# *No Longer a Slave to Fear*

*Listen to “No Longer Slaves”*

*(Click on the link above)*



As a mom, I tend to worry. A lot. But after nine years on the job, most of my worries pale in comparison to when I was a brand new mom with my newly minted firstborn. I was constantly on edge. Was he hungry? Were the bottles sterilized? Did he need a diaper change? Was he breathing?

Now, for a moment, imagine being in Mary’s shoes (or more likely dusty, worn-out sandals). A barn for a delivery room, a trough for a crib, an inexperienced young husband for a midwife – and the Saviour of the World for a son. Talk about a perfect recipe for concocting fear!

Ironically, this baby didn’t bring on fears typical of a first-time momma. He brought deep, unshakeable joy and peace to Mary – and brings the same to us today. He brings us into a relationship with the Father. He replaces fear with faith. Sometimes, the journey getting there is painful. But when you’re not bound by fear – fear of failure, fear of people and of circumstances, fear of rejection, fear of judgment, you name it – you become who you were created to be.

I’m no longer a slave to fear. I am a child of God.

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, Oh what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to You in prayer. Yes, Lord, I bring my fears before you. Take those fears and replace them with a forever joy. Amen*

## Day 14

# *How I Met Jesus At The Mall*

*Read Isaiah 53: 11-12*



It's less than two weeks before Christmas and I'm at where I'm usually at – *nowhere* on my mile-long to-do list. So, I do what every brave and slightly deranged woman does – venture to a mall packed with the hustle of Sunday evening shoppers.

I brace myself for the Battle for Elbow Room. I enter the fray of frenzy – this is going to make the Roman Colosseum look like a children's playground. But, as I step out of the elevator into the arena I am dumbstruck.

Standing tall in the throng of humanity was Rio de Janeiro's famous Christ the Redeemer statue. It was much smaller than the almost-100-foot-tall original. But it was still pretty impressive: here was Jesus with his arms stretched out over the chaos of Garuda Mall, Bangalore. I expected a few cheap gold bells and red ribbons gracing the mall. But Christ the Redeemer? That was not Christmasy!

Or, wait . . . just maybe it is.

Yes, at Christmas we celebrate the Christ child. But that's only a part of the story — a very small part. If our focus is entirely on Christ's birth, we miss the purpose for which He came. Jesus doesn't just want our adoration, He yearns for our salvation. He came to *redeem* us from our empty way of life.

Without the whole story of Christmas, we miss out on the whole joy. Christmas is the love story of a God who broke into the darkness of this world. It's the story of a God who would humble himself and give up His majesty for a manger. But it didn't end there. It's the scandalous story of a God who chose to die for us. It's the victorious story of a God who rose again and completely destroyed sin and death.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, This Christmas, help us stop and ponder Grace unfathomable. Help us to be still and remember Love unstoppable. We welcome You, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

## Day 15

# Wise Men Still Seek Jesus

Read Matthew 2: 9-11



It wasn't till a few years ago that I discovered there may have been more than three wise men in the Christmas narrative. Whhaa? And they weren't necessarily kings?! And they didn't get to Bethlehem in a day or two to see baby Jesus?! In fact, quite possibly it may have taken months! \*Audible gasp!

This was as surprising as the "apple" that Adam and Eve ate. Turns out, they didn't eat no apple. Just a no-name fruit that morphed into an apple at Sunday school classes. Like the "three" kings who followed the star, that too was a little bit of an assumption.

But, that's not the point. If I focused on numbers, the syntax, the classification of fruit and vegetables, I miss out on the fact that the wise men saw the star. The star was in the sky for many to see, and for many to follow. But in that dark sky, only a small group of them (three, four, I dunno) beheld the star and left everything behind to follow Jesus.

This Christmas season, are we willing to look at the dark sky to see the Light? Are we willing to give up everything like the wise men and *follow* the Light?

Yes, it may be dark, but it's when it's the darkest that the light shines brightest.

### Prayer

*Heavenly Father, I thank You that even in the darkest of nights, You sent Jesus to be our Light. It's so easy to focus on the dark. It's easy to give in to discouragement and let disappointment feed our souls. Help me open my eyes to see the Light and give me the heart to follow You always. Amen.*



## Day 16

# *Our Incognito God*

*Read James 1: 16-18*



I don't know about you, but I've been to many a party where I'd like to hide behind a curtain or melt into the sofa. Everyone seems to know everyone. The place is buzzing with conversation and laughter. The louder it gets, the more I'd like to vamoose.

It seems like some people make an entrance and love the spotlight at parties. Others, not so much.

Turns out, if you're in the latter camp, you're in *pretty* good company. Our God slipped into the world quietly. Scripture records that when the times had reached their fulfillment, God became man. But there were no trumpet calls, there were no grand announcements (except to a bedraggled group of sleepy shepherds), there was no clicking cameras and no red carpet.

Just a quiet manger. Just Mary, Joseph and a few farm animals the only witnesses to a world-changing event.

Even today it's easy to miss God in the moments that pass us by. We tend to put blessings down to sheer luck or coincidence. We think we've earned our way through hard work or our talent.

We have a gentleman God who doesn't force His way into our lives. He longs for us to acknowledge Him. But He never barges in. He doesn't seek the spotlight – but our very purpose on earth is to reflect His grace and glorify His name.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, Thank you for revealing to me that every good and perfect gift is from above. From the fullness of your grace we have received one blessing after another. Father, let my first instinct be praise. Help me acknowledge that You are the very Author of life and our Provider. Amen*

## Day 17

# *The First Evangelists*

**Read Luke 2: 8-18**



Grand announcements are made via media outlets every single day. Breaking News! You heard it from us first! We are there when it happens! Those are just some of the claims of newspapers and TV channels these days.

But the biggest announcement of all time came first to a group of unassuming folk in a remote village more than 2000 years ago. The group of shepherds that we read about in Luke 2 became privy to the grandest declaration of all time – that God became man and was now among them. These guys who were just minding their own business, tending to their flock of sheep, were witness to a marvelous concert of what my 7-year-old calls a “multiplication of angels.” They were the audience for the grandest ever light and sound show in history.

It didn’t end there. They ran to where the Christ child lay and they worshipped. Then in sheet excitement, they shared the marvelous news. The very first evangelists weren’t glitzy or glamorous. They didn’t have the right packaging. What they did have was the right heart!

God honors the humble. He doesn’t wait for the world’s accolades before He chooses someone. He only wants a humble heart willing to be used by Him.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, thank you turn the world’s standards upside down. You don’t care about the power and position. You don’t concern yourself with status. Man looks at the outside, but You look at the heart. So help me Lord to come before You humbly and offer myself as a living sacrifice for Your glory. Amen*

## Day 18

# *How Many Kings?*

***Listen to “How many Kings?”***

*(Click on the link above)*



What is the phrase in the song that draws you in? For me it was this: **How many fathers gave up their sons for me?**

As a mom, I cannot imagine ever giving up my kids. However noble a cause may be, for me that seems an impossible commission.

But our Father didn't flinch from carrying out His will, His rescue plan. He knew the entire world, past, present and future, was writhing in pain. And He knew that sending His Son, His one and only Son, was the *only* way out.

*For God so loved the world.*

No one else is capable of that love. Only God.

*That He sent his only Son.*

No one else is capable of that sacrifice. Only God.

That's Christmas.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, so often in the midst of the nativity story, I forget that You sent your Son. You, Heavenly Father, gave up Your one and only Son. What an indescribable gift. What an indescribable sacrifice. I stand in awe. Amen.*

## Day 19

# Empty Boxes

Read John 4:13-14



I remember Christmas as a child. My sister and I ended up with a grand total of one gift each. Or less. Surprisingly enough, not even for a moment did we consider it a human rights violation! Because Christmas was so much more than gifts. It was about carol singing and platefuls of biriyani, homemade plum cake heavy with dried fruit and “Christmas trees” made of green tinsel and decorated with balloons and cotton wool “snow.”

As part of our Christmas decorating, I remember covering empty cardboard cartons with gift wrapping paper to place under the tree. *Empty* cardboard cartons. I had seen Christmas trees choked with presents in Hollywood movies. But in my mind those were props. *All* of them couldn’t possibly be real presents. So we made our own “props.”

No, we weren’t poor or miserly. Having a bunch of gifts under the tree just didn’t map on our radar.

But maybe, just maybe, those empty boxes are significant.

So often, our lives are too full of stuff, too choked with activity, too “satisfied” with the temporary, too preoccupied with the gifts that we forget the Giver.

But **it’s only when we offer up our empty boxes that He has a chance to fill them.** He is ready to give us an identity as His child, a significance that we are known and loved by Him, a purpose that we are created for His glory and for the good works that He has prepared. But first we have to give Him the chance.

I’ve seen my children’s eyes light up with the thrill of Christmas gifts. But after the wrapping paper wreckage has been cleared, and the gloss of new gifts has faded, there’s always more that they want. What a picture of us grownups! Let’s recognize that we can never be deeply and fully satisfied apart from Christ.

Sure, gifts are great and the joy of giving greater, but let’s not cling to our gifts so much that we forget the Giver.

### Prayer

*Father, help me come with open arms. To receive from You, to drink from the streams of Living Water and eat of the Bread of Life. Help me let go of the temporary fixes and the gifts that delight for today, and let me look to You, the Giver of all good things that captivate me forever. Amen*

## Day 20

# *The Mystery Of The Mismatched Candles*

*Read Hebrews 10: 21-23*



I grew up attending a traditional church. It was a beautiful building, with a domed ceiling of the ink blue night dotted with gold stars and a tall steeple that elegantly pierced the sky. We rose to sing hymns and were told to “please be seated” when we were done singing.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas, a “member of the congregation” would be called upon to light the Advent candles. I don’t know if the pastor explained the significance of the same. I was young - and distracted by the fact that the pink Advent candle looked so out of place. Surely, the church could have taken some money out of the satin offertory bags to make sure that the candles matched! Three purple candles and one somewhat abruptly pink one threw my aesthetic sense off kilter.

Imagine my surprise when I later discovered that churches across the globe seemed to have severely limited candle budgets and a defunct aesthetic sense. (Ahem). Yeah, the pink candle was intentional.

The pink candle. After some research, I discovered that it represented the joy of the Season.

But what comes before it are purple candles symbolizing hope and preparation. Yes, Advent is a time of rejoicing. But it’s also about **preparing our hearts through repentance. Without repentance, our joy is muffled, a washed out version of what it could be.**

This Advent let’s come before Him with repentant hearts, preparing the groundwork for the joy that will flood our souls at His coming!

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, so often I tend to ignore my sin and sweep it under the carpet. But this Season of preparation, help me to offer my heart up to You in repentance, knowing that Your grace is sufficient. Thank you for the joy of the season and for the incredible privilege of sharing in that joy! Amen*

## Day 21

# *Sound of Silence*

*Read Psalm 46:10-11*



"I don't want a Christmas you can buy.  
I don't want a Christmas you can make.  
What I want is a Christmas you can hold.  
A Christmas that holds me,  
remakes me, revives me.  
**I want a Christmas that whispers, Jesus.**"  
--Ann Voskamp

Who doesn't love Ann Voskamp? In the last few years she has changed the way we process our thoughts, altered the way Christian authors write and allowed us to cry and laugh with her as she shares her heart with her readers.

Like Ann, I want Christmas that holds me. Not the activity of Christmas. But the person of Christmas. In the midst of the frenzy, **I pray for moments of stillness where I can hear Jesus whisper.**

We all know that often we most need a vacation when we've just had one! We seem hard wired to pack it in, do as much as possible, expend, expend, expend. But Scripture tells us to be still; In Isaiah 30: 15 we're reminded that in repentance and rest is our salvation, in quietness and trust our strength.

This Christmas season, carve out those "be still" moments. Without them you and I will be running on fumes. Give yourself permission to rest – allow Him to lead you beside quiet waters. Allow Him to restore your soul.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, we live in a world of non-stop doing. We've forgotten how to be still. Help us not to think of busyness as a measure of our worth, but to rest in who You created us to be. This Christmas, help me hear Jesus in the quiet moments. Amen*

## Day 22

# *Giving From A Place Of Gratitude*

*Read Ephesians 2: 8-10*



“Bah Humbug.” The phrase rang out from the tape recorder. I was about 11 years old, listening to an audio book I’d received as my Christmas present. The book on tape was about a mean old guy called Ebenezer Scrooge who didn’t like Christmas one bit. You may recall it was written by a somewhat well-known author by the name Charles Dickens.

I followed along in my Ladybird book, images of the hook-nosed Scrooge in his nightshirt indelibly etched in my mind. In my 11-year-old mind he seemed beyond hope. How could *anyone* hate Christmas?

But then came the heartwarming turnaround. The guy who bah-humbuged Christmas woke up a redeemed man, full of love and goodwill. He secretly sent a turkey to the poor-but-joyful Cratchit family. Christmas became about compassion.

Maybe you and I are not grouchy old Scrooges. But if we stop long enough, we can see areas in our lives where we could use transformation. A transformation that comes from God working to change us from the inside out.

So often, our Christmas good works are on the outside. We write a check, we fill a shoebox to ship to needy kids, sponsor a meal at an orphanage. All of those are wonderful things. But without a transformation from its-all-about-me to I-want-to-give-God-glory, those good works become measured and meaningless.

This Christmas, let’s look at the intention behind our giving. Is it just another activity? Or is it a response to how much God has done for us that we can’t help but bless others? **When we ponder on the One who gave it ALL, we give from a place of gratitude.**

### **Prayer**

*Father, if I pause long enough to truly examine myself, I realize that my acts of giving are sometimes meaningless. It’s just another blip on my Christmas calendar. But, Lord, I pray for a heart transformation. I pray that my giving is a response of gratitude to ALL that I’ve received from you. Amen*

## Day 23

# *A Long Hard Journey*

*Read Luke 2: 4-7*



A few months ago, I hiked up a mountain with a group of friends. And then I hobbled down. After two hours of climbing uphill, the journey down was exhausting for my untrained, most-comfy-in-PJs-watching-Netflix body. My toenails (a tad too long) pushed against my Nike sneakers (a tad too small), making me dream of a bathtub and a very expensive massage at every step.

The account in Luke 2 tells a story of a different kind of journey – the one that Mary and Joseph made from Nazareth to Bethlehem. From historical accounts of the time period and the terrain, we know that the journey was grueling. It spanned 90 miles and crossed over the rugged hills surrounding Jerusalem. Did they carry enough food and water for the journey that probably took days? Did they wear heavy clothes to protect them from the inclement weather in the harsh Judean winter? We don't know too many details of the journey, but when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem, probably overwhelmed and bone tired, there was no warm welcome awaiting them.

Maybe you may feel like your journey last year has been grueling. You weren't ready for the onslaught of disappointment, broken relationship or shattered dreams. Yet, you plodded on ahead, you had little choice. Maybe you were alone and overwhelmed and people shut you out.

But remember what happened in the Luke account the next morning? With the cry of a newborn baby, Mary and Joseph's lives were forever changed. Yes, the journey was incredibly hard – till the Prince of Peace quietly invaded their world.

He can do the same for you. Give Him the broken pieces. Weeping may remain for a night, says the Scripture. But joy comes in the morning.

### **Prayer**

*Father God, You know the journey I've been on. You're the God of the universe, but you also know my thoughts from afar. I pray that this Christmas will be a time of healing for me. I pray that You will invade my thoughts and my heart with a peace that is not based on my circumstances. I pray for a bubbling-over joy to fill my heart this Christmas. Amen*



## Day 24

# *Oh Holy Night*

*Listen to "Oh Holy Night"*

*(Click on the link above)*



This is one of those songs where goosebumps are guaranteed. I don't know much about music, but the range of notes in that song lend themselves to creating an emotional outpour. Add Celine Dion's incredible voice to that and you've got yourself a classic.

But more than the notes, more than the singer or even the lyrics, when we ponder on that Holy Night, our hearts are bound to skip a beat.

God chose to become man. He chose to do that knowing what lay ahead. It would not be pleasant – there would be rejection, betrayal and finally a cruel death. Yet, he chose. Because the world lay pining. It yearned for a Savior. And at the perfect time, a Savior was born.

There's only one reaction we can have to all of this.

**"Fall on your knees," the song goes. And that's all we can do.** Fall before Him in complete humility, bow before Him in absolute awe and complete surrender. There's simply nothing we can do but respond in worship.

### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, when I think about the night of the Savior's birth, I stand amazed. What a glorious night, a holy night, a divine night. Long lay the world in sin and error pining – till You appeared. I marvel at that grace, at that unconditional love. Amen*

## Day 25 – Christmas Day!

### *The Breakthrough*

*Read Isaiah 9:6-7*



Today is the day. The countdown has led to this moment. The Breakthrough.

The Israelites waited 400 years for the coming of a Savior. You and I probably counted down from 25. Maybe some of us were in slight panic, wondering how we'd get it all done.

But as we walk this journey of Advent, stopping to marvel at the mystery of God becoming man, we remember that we don't have to get it all done.

Because He did.

He came. He lived. He died. He rose again.

**"It is finished," He declared. He got it all done. Because He knew we couldn't.** Despite our best efforts, we would come up short. We couldn't make ourselves perfect and holy, hundred percent of the time. Only His grace makes it possible. *Only* His grace. So, He broke through. He broke through the darkness. He broke through the hopelessness. He broke through the bondages.

He brought light, He brought hope, He gave us the best gift of all – Himself.

#### **Prayer**

*Heavenly Father, because You longed to have a relationship with us, You sent Jesus to be our Rescuer and Redeemer. He paid the price for us. He became our ransom. Father, we can't begin to fathom the depth of Your Love. Thank you for Christmas. Thank you for Jesus. Amen*

*Merry  
Christmas*