

The Wonders of God

2025 Advent Devotional

I love the song, "Chain Breaker" by Zach Williams. Here are the lyrics of the chorus:

If you've got pain, He's a pain taker
If you feel lost, He's a way maker
If you need freedom or saving
He's a prison shaking Savior
If you got chains
He's a chain breaker

Now read Psalm 36:5-8, (NIV):

*"Your love, LORD, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,
your justice like the great deep.
O LORD, you preserve both man and beast.
How priceless is your unfailing love!
Both high and low among men
find refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights."*

We humans have only so many thoughts and so many words. God is so much more than we can understand or articulate. Here are just a few of His qualities:

God is Love. God is Faithfulness. God is Patience.
God is Righteousness. God is Justice. God is Forgiveness. God is Refuge.
God is Abundance. God is ...

Action for Today: List words that describe who God is to you. I have a list of 288 and it just keeps growing! ~Nancy

Notes:

It's Advent!

This year the season of Advent begins on Sunday, November 30, 2025.

The word Advent comes from the Latin word **adventus** means “a coming” or “an arrival.” Advent is a time when we prepare ourselves spiritually to celebrate the birth of Jesus. During this four-week period, we not only prepare to commemorate Christ’s first advent, His birth in Bethlehem, we also prepare for the day when Christ will return, in glory, to usher in a new heaven and a new earth.

This Advent devotional, **The Wonders of God**, focuses on just a few of the numberless attributes that describe our God. We just don’t have enough words to describe Him fully.

Each day begins with Scripture passages which will be taken from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE) unless otherwise noted. If you do not have a Bible, contact the church office and they will be happy to give you one.

God reveals Biblical truths to us as we grow closer to Him. My prayer is that this devotional will reveal new truths to you to help you better understand God’s Word, strengthen your faith, and increase your love for God, all to help you become a stronger Christian.

God's blessings on your journey!

The Wonders of God is written by Nancy Mahowald who is a member of Coon Rapids United Methodist Church in Coon Rapids, MN. Anyone who would like to use this devotional, in whole or in part, has permission if it is used to advance the Kingdom of God. Please share the credit of the author.

November 30 – The Wonder of the Creation

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.” (Genesis 1:1-2, NIV)

“The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world.” (Psalm 19:1-4)

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” ... “And the one who was seated on the throne said, ‘See, I am making all things new.’ Also he said, ‘Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.’” (Revelation 21:1, 5)

I know that some people don’t believe the Creation story told in the Bible. Some believe in the Big Bang Theory and still others in evolution. Since I was a young child, I’ve always wondered - why can’t all these theories be true? I believe religion and science work together.

The Big Bang Theory

- It explains the origin and expansion of the universe from an extremely hot, dense, and small point.
- It’s a theory that describes how the universe developed over billions of years.
- Its focus is the universe as a whole, including the formation of matter and energy.

Evolution

- Scientific evolutionary theory, as advanced by figures like Charles Darwin, describes a natural process of change and diversification in living organisms through mechanisms like natural selection.
- Evolution focuses on the scientific "how" and "why" of life's diversity—how different organisms came to exist and their relationship to one another.

- The scientific process of evolution, in practice, operates without the concept of supernatural intervention, meaning God was not necessary.

The Creation Story as told in the Bible in Genesis 1 and 2

- It describes God creating the universe, the earth, and all living things over six days, with humans made last in His image.
- The first day He creates light, the second the sky, the third land and plants, the fourth the sun, moon, and stars, the fifth birds and fish, and the sixth land animals and humans.
- On the seventh day, God rested, blessing and setting the day apart as holy.

Of course, this is just a very small snapshot I pulled up using AI to explain the Big Bang Theory, Evolution, and The Creation Story. Authors have written volumes on each!

However the universe and earth began, I trust that God was behind it all. And when He returns, He will set everything right again; He will create a new heaven and a new earth just as He has promised.

Action for Today: Go outside to appreciate and give thanks to God who created all this for you and me to enjoy **and** to take care of.

December 1 – The Wonder of His Divine Power

“I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD; I will remember your wonders of old. I will meditate on all your work and muse on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is so great as our God? You are the God who works wonders; you have displayed your might among the peoples.” (Psalm 77:11-14)

“The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD, over mighty waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.” ... “The LORD sits enthroned over the flood; the LORD sits enthroned as king forever. May the LORD give strength to his people! May the LORD bless his people with peace!” (Psalm 29:3-4, 10-11)

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may perceive what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places.” (Ephesians 1:17-20)

We see God’s divine power all around us in the world He created; fields of waving wheat, a newborn baby, meadows with beautiful native flowers and butterflies, sandy beaches lined with palm trees, majestic mountains covered with snow, the beauty of stalactites and stalagmites in a dark, dank cave, and all animals and sea creatures.

We see His power in the seasons and the weather, too. Blizzards, wind, lightening, hail, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes or an erupting volcano; the autumn leaves, a beautiful snowfall, ice coating the trees, a blue sky with fluffy white clouds, and magnificent Northern Lights.

Memories of God’s miracles recorded in the Bible and those we have heard about from other people give us the faith and sustenance to go through hard times in life. When troubles come your way, remember how good God has been to you. Remember His faithfulness to you.

“As for me, I would seek God, and to God I would commit my cause. He does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number.” (Job 5:8-9)

Action for Today: Recognize God’s great power. Go to Him in prayer and thank Him for at least three impactful things He has done for you in your life.

December 2 – The Wonder of the Creation of Man and Woman

“Then God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over the cattle and over all the wild animals of the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:26-27)

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet.” (Psalm 8:3-6)

I’ve wondered the very question posed in Psalm 8:4 – *“what are humans that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”* Why does God care for the human race or care for us as individuals? He cares because He created us and when we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we become a child of God, an adopted part of His family.

These are Scripture passages that I have used to help others understand how much God cares for them as an individual:

- *“But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:7)*
- *“I have upheld you since you were conceived, and have carried you since your birth. To your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you.” (Isaiah 46: 3-4)*
- *“I will never leave you nor forsake you.” (Joshua 1:5, NIV)*
- *“Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you; I will help you.” (Isaiah 41:10)*
- *“Nothing can separate us from the love of God.” (Romans 8:39)*

God created us and knows the very number of hairs on our head. He will help us and strengthen us, and He is always by our side. God created us in His image and crowned us with glory and honor. He put us in charge of the beautiful creation He made for us. Let’s do everything we can to keep it as beautiful as when He created it. (I know ... we have a LOT of work to do!)

Action for Today: Name something you can begin to do today that will have a positive impact on our planet. Continue to do it and encourage others to do the same. We must all do our part!

December 3 - The Wonder of God's Unfailing Love for Us

"And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
(Ephesians 3:17b-19, NIV)

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life."
(John 3:16, MSG)

"But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's!" ... "God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us—an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!" (Romans 8:9-11, 16-17, MSG)

God has declared Himself to be the Lord our God. He has promised to be by our side and help us in times of trouble. He will guide us and strengthen us from the day we're born until we are old and grey. God will never leave us, and nothing can separate us from His love. God's love is so big that we cannot imagine it or contain it; it is too much for mere humans to understand. What I do understand is that God is faithful with His promises and with His love.

When you become a Christian, you are adopted into God's family and you inherit all the responsibilities that that new family expects. But you also inherit the privileges the new family affords! When you became God's child, you became an heir of an incredible inheritance. God loves us so much that He sacrificed His own Son to extend to us the privilege of eternal life. **That's how important we are to God! That's how much He loves us!**

Action for Today: Study yourself closely in the mirror. Now say to your image, "I am loved because I am a child of God". Then repeat it again until you truly believe it.

December 4 – The Wonder of His Divine Guidance

“The word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.’ ‘Ah, Sovereign Lord,’ I said, ‘I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.’ But the Lord said to me, ‘Do not say, “I am only a child.” You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,’ declares the Lord. Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘Now, I have put my words in your mouth.’” (Jeremiah 1:4-9, NIV)

“This God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even to the end.” (Psalm 48:14, NIV)

“In my distress I prayed to the LORD, and the LORD answered me and set me free. The LORD is for me, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me? Yes, the LORD is for me; he will help me.” (Psalm 118:5-7a, NLT)

“Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths; guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” (Psalm 25:4-5, NIV)

I know that God has guided my life all along. I grew up in a Christian home, so I had a strong foundation. As a young adult I turned my back on the church, but not on God. It took years before God literally pulled me back into a church. In the meantime, He was guiding my life and teaching me lessons and skills I would need when I returned.

God took me from a shy young lady who couldn't share her name in front of a group to become part of the leadership team at our church. It truly wasn't me; I fought God most of the way. I was way outside my comfort zone doing the things that He was putting in front of me to learn. But I slowly learned to recognize and trust what God was doing. And, like Jeremiah in the first Scripture passage, I learned that God supplies me with everything that I need when He asks me to go on a mission for Him. Look at what He did for Jeremiah! *“Then the Lord reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, ‘Now I have put my words in your mouth.’”*

It's not always easy to follow God's leading, but it is so worth it! You don't know what you are capable of accomplishing until you attain a goal for the glory of God.

Action for Today: Is God trying to get your attention? If He is, trust in His plan. Even if He is leading you outside of your comfort zone, lean into His guidance and you will be forever blessed, trust me!

December 5 – The Wonder of The Exodus

“Now the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.’” (Genesis 12:1-2)

“On the day the tabernacle, the Tent of the Testimony, was set up, the cloud covered it. From evening till morning the cloud above the tabernacle looked like fire. That is how it continued to be; the cloud covered it, and at night it looked like fire. Whenever the cloud lifted from above the Tent, the Israelites set out; wherever the cloud settled, the Israelites encamped. At the LORD’s command the Israelites set out, and at his command they encamped.” (Numbers 9:15-18a, NIV)

“But they, our ancestors acted presumptuously and stiffened their necks and did not obey your commandments; they refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them. ... But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” ... “you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness; the pillar of cloud that led them in the way did not leave them by day nor the pillar of fire by night that gave them light on the way by which they should go. You gave your good spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouths and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness so that they lacked nothing; their clothes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell.” (Nehemiah 9:16-17, 19-21)

Because of God’s love for His people, He delivered Moses and the Israelites out of Egyptian slavery. The Israelites continued to let God down with their whining and complaining, so they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. But still God took care of them daily. He guided them with cloud and fire; He supplied manna from heaven for them to eat; He supplied water from a rock to quench their thirst. Their clothes never wore out and their feet did not swell!

God had a covenant with Abraham and He promised him that He would guide them to a new land - the Promised Land; a land of milk and honey. Even when the Israelites were not faithful to their God, He was faithful to them. A generation of Israelites wandered in the desert for 40 years ... a trip that should have taken only weeks. God supplied everything they needed to survive, and in God’s timing, He led them to freedom.

Action for Today: Take time to recognize how God provides for you, perhaps in ways that you don't even recognize. Thank Him for all the times that He protected you when you were unaware.

December 6 – The Wonder of The Parting of the Red Sea

“Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.” ... “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.’ So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.” (Exodus 14:21-22, 26-29)

“Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21, NIV)

The parting of the Red Sea is a part of the Exodus story. As the Israelites were fleeing, Pharaoh's army was chasing them, their chariots and horses no match for them. The Israelites were trapped between the mountains and the sea, and they began whining and complaining, seeing no way out. Moses called upon God to help them. He stretched his hand out over the sea and through him, God parted the waters to create dry land for the Israelites to cross over. After the Israelites were safe on the other side, Moses held his hand out over the sea again causing the water to return to normal and all of Pharaoh's army were drowned. It is recorded that none of them survived.

The Israelites saw no way out! Their faith in God was nowhere in sight. At that point, they were ready to go back to being slaves in Egypt. How shocked they must have been when Moses held his hand out and God caused the waters to part! This teaches us that God can and will find a way out for us, too. We need to remember to call on God in our times of trouble, even if we don't see how it can be turned around.

Think about the complexity of the human body. After all these years, we humans still do not have it completely figured out. God parting the Red Sea was nothing compared to Him creating us! Our God is a God of miracles, but we shouldn't have to experience a miracle to believe in the power of God!

Action for Today: God worked through Moses and He works through us today. Say a prayer asking God where He wants you to be, then listen and be open to hear where He is calling you.

December 7 – The Wonder of His Provision

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you. I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.” ... “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.” (John 14:15-19, 25-26)

“When he looked up and saw a large crowd coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, ‘Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?’ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he was going to do. Philip answered him, ‘Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.’ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, said to him, ‘There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish. But what are they among so many people?’ Jesus said, ‘Make the people sit down.’ Now there was a great deal of grass in the place, so they sat down, about five thousand in all. Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ So they gathered them up, and from the fragments of the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten, they filled twelve baskets.” (John 6:5-13)

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.” (Psalm 46:1-3)

I am so happy that God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit to be with us, guide us, and teach us. This Spirit of Truth lives in all who believe that Jesus is the Christ and lives life according to God’s commandments.

I'm amazed at the story of Jesus feeding 5,000 with just 5 barley loaves and two fish with leftovers, no less! Isn't that just like Jesus? He gave thanks for what He had, and His Father provided what was needed. And He will do the same for us when we ask.

God is with us through the storms of life. Even when we experience an earthquake, a divorce, a tornado, the loss of a loved one, a flood, or a hurricane, God is our refuge and our strength and will provide us the hope we need to face tomorrow.

He provided for our family when we had just purchased our new home in 1970. We went from paying \$60 a month for our apartment to a \$225 a month mortgage payment. My husband, Monte, was still an apprentice as a Sheet Metal Worker installing heating and air conditioning, and he got laid off about 6 months after we moved in. I went to the Anoka County courthouse to apply for food stamps and they said we didn't qualify. How could that be? We had no money coming in and very little savings! I went home and started crying. We had an infant and a toddler at home to feed and provide for. When I told Monte what happened, he called the courthouse. When he found the right person to help, they checked on our paperwork and reported back that an error had been made in the math. (Things weren't calculated with computers back then ... all of it was done by old fashioned math by hand.) We received the food stamps and they provided all we needed to keep us fed. We gave thanks to God for His provision.

Action for Today: Think of an occasion when God helped you through a devastating time, a scary time, or a traumatic time. Perhaps talk it over with someone you love and trust. Go to God in prayer and thank Him again for His provision.

December 8 – The Wonder of Prayer

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. This is right and acceptable before God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:5-6)

“Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV)

Prayer is placing yourself in God’s presence. Think of it as a conversation between you and God. And just like talking with a friend, the conversation is a two-way street, speaking and listening. Many of us go to God in prayer, but ask yourself truthfully, how much time do you spend listening to God? It takes practice and repetition.

You can use the acronym A.C.T.S. to guide your prayers. A.C.T.S. stands for **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication. Our prayers can praise God, confess our sins to God, thank God, and request something for ourselves or someone else. We can exclaim our sorrow to God, show our faith to God, or release our anger to God. We can go to God with whatever is on our minds. He’s always available.

In 1 Timothy above we are reminded to pray, not only for our loved ones, but for our country’s leaders. Whether or not we agree with them, keep praying for them. God even tells us to pray for our enemies, not for retribution, but for their salvation. Prayer can work wonders!

God hears every prayer and He answers them, too. It may not be how you are expecting, and it may not be in your timing, but God loves you and knows what's best for you. Keep listening.

Action for Today: After you pray today, set a timer for at least 5 minutes. Sit in silence to hear what God might be saying to you. Do this every day until it becomes routine. If your attention drifts, concentrate on bringing it back to your conversation with God. Don't give up! You'll be blessed!

December 9 - **The Wonder of His Faithfulness**

“Know, therefore, that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who maintains covenant loyalty with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.” (Deuteronomy 7:9)

“May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

“Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful.” (Hebrews 10:23)

Our God is always faithful. We can learn to be more faithful to Him by spending more time with Him. Do you set aside special time to be with your Lord and Savior? If not, try it! Morning, afternoon, or evening, it doesn't matter. Go to Him and tell Him about your day. Give Him your worries, your fears, your hopes and your dreams. Then, don't forget the listening part!

You can also honor Him by attending worship, in giving monetarily, in volunteering your time and your talents in the church, the Early Learning Center, or with the Spirit of Matthew 25 food distributions, or other charities. You learn faithfulness by reading your Bible, and it's even more fun when you're reading with a group. By studying together, you get a lot of your questions answered and I think it is much more meaningful. We've met new people in our Bible Study groups and we share our prayers and concerns, a lot of laughter, and sometimes even treats!

There are other Spiritual disciplines or intentional practices to spend time with God and grow in your relationship with Him. Some include confession, Communion, fasting, solitude, faith, witness, and fellowship.

Action for Today: Look at the list of Spiritual disciplines in today's reading. Find one that you never or seldom practice. Try practicing it this week and see what happens! (I'll keep you in my prayers.)

December 10 – The Wonder of the Walls of Jericho

“The sons of Aaron, the priests, shall blow the trumpets; this shall be a perpetual institution for you throughout your generations. When you go to war in your land against the adversary who oppresses you, you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, so that you may be remembered before the LORD your God and be saved from your enemies.” (Numbers 10:8-9)

“Now Jericho was shut up inside and out because of the Israelites; no one came out, and no one went in. The Lord said to Joshua, ‘See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers. You shall march around the city, all the warriors circling the city once. Thus you shall do for six days, with seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams’ horns before the ark. On the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, the priests blowing the trumpets. When they make a long blast with the ram’s horn, as soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then all the people shall shout with a great shout, and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people shall charge straight ahead.’” (Joshua 6:1-5)

A trumpet blast could mean multiple things in Biblical days. The blasts were used as a communication tool as the Israelites set out from Mount Sinai into the Desert of Paran on their way toward the promised land. They were used to call people together to celebrate and to call soldiers together during war. The blasts also reminded Israel of God’s protection over them.

In the Joshua passage, God told Joshua that He had already handed Jericho over to him; the war had already been won! God gave instructions for Joshua to lead the Israelites to victory. The marching, the trumpet blasts and the people shouting taught the Israelites that the Lord would win their battles, not their military prowess. The walls fell down without anything touching them. It was a test of their faith and their willingness to trust God completely and they did!

We also fight a battle that has already been won. Satan has been defeated by Christ’s power. Hopefully, we can learn a great lesson from this illustration. Yes, we need to follow and obey God’s commandments. Yes, we need to be out in our community doing good works in service to others. Yes, we need to work to fix injustices in our world. However, our works don’t get us into the Kingdom of God. Only God’s grace can do that.

Action for Today: Find one thing that you can do to help someone in need. Need an idea? You can write or call a legislator to help right a wrong. Volunteer for the Spirit of Matthew 25 or another organization in your community. Donate to a reputable non-profit or help a neighbor who just lost their job.

December 11 – The Wonder of His Justice vs. His Mercy

“Then the Lord said, ‘How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin! I must go down and see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry that has come to me, and if not, I will know.’ So the men turned from there and went toward Sodom, while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Then Abraham came near and said, ‘Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?’ And the Lord said, ‘If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.’” ... “Then he said, ‘Oh, do not let my lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.’ He answered, ‘For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.’” (Genesis 18:20-26, 32)

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22-23)

The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were filled with sinful people. The Lord was going there to see if what He was hearing about them was true. But Abraham asked the Lord if He would destroy the cities if there were righteous people living there, too. He knew that God was a just God, but was He also merciful? The Lord assured Abraham that He would spare the cities if there were ten righteous people living there.

The Lamentation verse is one of my favorites. The love that the Lord has for us never ends. When we sin and go to Him to ask for forgiveness, the Lord is merciful and ready to forgive us for our sin.

When we believe and trust in God’s faithfulness day by day, we can also believe in His promises for our future. God is just and needs to correct sinfulness, but He is also merciful and will forgive us and help us when we call on Him. I’m grateful that His mercies are new every morning. Thank you, Lord.

Action for Today: Go to God in prayer. Ask forgiveness for a specific sin and thank Him for His great mercy.

December 12 – The Wonder of His Divine Sovereignty

“Now no one can look at the sun, bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean. Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress.” (Job 37:21-23)

“I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’”
(Revelation 19:11-16)

In the Job passage, Job’s friend, Elihu, is trying to help Job understand why he is going through so many troubles. He reminds him that faith in God is far more important than Job’s longing for an explanation for his suffering. Elihu emphasized God’s sovereignty over all of nature as a reminder of His sovereignty over our lives, too. Although we can’t see behind the scenes, **God is in control.**

In Revelation, John sees heaven open up and Jesus appears on a white horse (white symbolizes victory). In my Life Application Bible it explains verses 12 and 16 this way, “Although Jesus is called ‘Faithful and True’ (19:11), ‘Word of God’ (19:13), and ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS’ (19:16), this verse implies that no name can do Him justice. He is greater than any description or expression the human mind can devise. ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS’ indicates our God’s sovereignty. Most of the world is worshiping the beast, the antichrist, whom they believe has all power and authority. Then suddenly out of heaven rides Christ and His army of angels – the ‘KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’ His entrance signals the end of the false powers.” Is anyone else praying for this day to come?

Action for Today: Have you had trouble giving all your life over to God? Give God authority over that one area that you haven’t been able to release to Him. Thank Him for His Sovereignty over your life.

December 13 – The Wonder of His Righteousness

“For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” (2 Corinthians 5:21)

“You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified! The only thing I want to learn from you is this: Did you receive the Spirit by doing the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so much for nothing?—if it really was for nothing. Well then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the law or by your believing what you heard? Just as Abraham ‘believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,’ so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would reckon as righteous the gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the gentiles shall be blessed in you.’ For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.” (Galatians 3:1-9)

What is righteousness anyway? Some synonyms are integrity, decency, ethical, moral, honest, justice, innocence, sinlessness, and worthiness. Who do those words describe? Jesus. *“Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’”* When we believe like Abraham, we are blessed by his faith.

The average person makes more than 35 decisions before lunchtime alone, whether it’s picking out what to wear or deciding how to respond to an email. But what about more important decisions? We always have that pull between what we want and what is right. Do I choose this or do I choose that? Do I take this path or the other one? Do I respond or do I stay quiet?

I ran across a quote that says it all – **“You are only one decision away from a totally different life.”** Who will you choose to marry? Do you want to have children? Where will we decide to live? Do I decide to leave this marriage or stay? How long will I put up with this abusive relationship? These are major life decisions.

Roy E. Disney, who is Walt Disney’s nephew, once said, “It’s not hard to make decisions when you know what your values are.” How profound! When we as Christians define our personal ethics as being honest, just, moral, decent, and living with integrity, we are becoming more like Jesus. And when we make our decisions based on our Christian values, we are imitating Jesus to others around us. Then, we, too, *“become the righteousness of God.”*

Action for Today: Think before you decide. Make a conscious effort to make your decisions according to your Christian values. Practice it today.

December 14 – The Wonder of the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ

“Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to divorce her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: ‘Look, the virgin shall become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel,’ which means, ‘God is with us.’” (Matthew 1:18-23)

“In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, ‘Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.’ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.’ Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.’” (Luke 1:26-35)

I’ve always marveled at Joseph and Mary’s responses to this incredible, unbelievable, wondrous news. Both believed the angel that came to them. Joseph’s angel came in a dream. How do you trust what you hear in a dream? Especially when what was told to him was inconceivable! But Joseph had enough faith to take Mary as his wife and name their son Jesus.

And the angel Gabriel came to Mary. Just a few verses later she responds, *“Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.”* (Luke 1:38) What a faith-filled young woman! To hear something so incredible and believe that it is true and have that kind of response is amazing. She was okay with and had faith in the plan! I’m not certain I would have had the same reaction!

Action for Today: Imagine yourself receiving the messages that Joseph and Mary received. Think about it and answer yourself truthfully, how would you have responded?

December 15 – The Wonder of His Joy

“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.” (Galatians 5:22-23)

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 15:13)

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:9-11)

To find God’s joy, we need to maintain a close intimate relationship with Him. When we are close to God, the Holy Spirit works in us to produce the same traits that we find in Jesus; traits that we are encouraged to imitate – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control – the fruit of the Spirit.

When we live a Spirit-filled life, our lives align with the intent of God’s law. Someone who lives by the fruit of the Spirit fulfills the law far better than a person who obeys rituals but has little love in his or her heart for others.

In the John 15 passage Jesus Himself tells us to remain in His love and to obey Him. If we do, Jesus’ joy will be in us and our joy will become complete. True joy doesn’t come through things of this world and our joy can’t be taken from us because God is our true joy!

Action for Today: Look again at the fruit of the Spirit. Which fruit do you find to be the most difficult for you to live out in your life? Pray to the Holy Spirit to help you produce that quality. Admit that you cannot do it on your own, you need the help of the Spirit.

December 16 – The Wonder of Jesus, God’s Son

“And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival. When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents were unaware of this. Assuming that he was in the group of travelers, they went a day’s journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him they were astonished, and his mother said to him, ‘Child, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously looking for you.’ He said to them, ‘Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’” (Luke 2:42-49)

“... He (Jesus) took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. Two men, Moses and Elijah, appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, ‘Master, it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.’ (He did not know what he was saying.) While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. A voice came from the cloud, saying, ‘This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.’ When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves and told no one at that time what they had seen.” (Luke 9:28-36, NIV)

“In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. And a voice came from the heavens, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.’” (Mark 1:9-11)

Each of these three Scripture passages help us understand that Jesus is God’s Son. Luke 2 describes Jesus as a boy explaining that He needed to be “in His Father's house.” It was the

Passover festival, and the greatest rabbis would come together to teach and discern great truths. They were amazed by the wisdom shown by the boy named Jesus. He was drawn to the temple to learn from the elders there.

In Luke 9:28-36, the disciples witness Jesus' transfiguration. Jesus took them to the mountaintop so that He could show them who He really was – God's Son. The appearance of Moses and Elijah represent God's law and the prophets. When God spoke, He identified Jesus as His Son, the Messiah. Jesus fulfilled both the Law and the Prophets. *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."* (Matthew 5:17, NIV)

In the Mark Scripture God proclaimed Jesus as His divine Son when the Holy Spirit descended on Him. Did you notice that in this passage we see all three members of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus was baptized? In my Life Application Study Bible, it notes, "He (Jesus) was baptized for the following reasons: (1) to begin his mission to bring the message of salvation to all people; (2) to show support for John's ministry; (3) to identify with our humanness and sin; (4) to give us an example to follow." I couldn't have explained it any better myself!

Action for Today: Thank God in prayer for Jesus' wisdom, even as a child. Thank Jesus, God's Son, for fulfilling the Law and the Prophets and completing His mission. Thank the Holy Spirit for His daily guidance.

December 17 – The Wonder of Jesus' Ministry

“From that time Jesus began to proclaim, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.’” ... “Jesus went throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, people possessed by demons or having epilepsy or afflicted with paralysis, and he cured them.” (Matthew 4:17, 23-24)

“They were astounded beyond measure, saying, ‘He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.’” (Mark 7:37)

“They came to Jericho. As he and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho, Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was sitting by the roadside. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout out and say, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Many sternly ordered him to be quiet, but he cried out even more loudly, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’ So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus. Then Jesus said to him, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ The blind man said to him, ‘My teacher, let me see again.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately he regained his sight and followed him on the way.” (Mark 10:46-52)

Jesus' ministry included healing people, rebuking demons, bringing people back to life, and feeding thousands of people with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He blessed the little children and taught using parables.

He called His disciples and taught them His ways. He traveled with them, prayed with them and washed their feet. He walked on water, shared the Last Supper with them, and foretold His death and resurrection.

He preached proclaiming the Good News of God, telling people to repent and believe. He confronted religious leaders, and He taught about the future and the end times. He was betrayed, arrested, crucified, buried, and resurrected.

Although Jesus's ministry on earth lasted only about three years, He changed everything—not only in His time, but throughout the centuries and continuing until the day of His return. The world was changed forever.

Action for Today: We are called to advance the Good News of Jesus Christ in our day. Which of Jesus' ministries will you imitate today?

December 18 – The Wonder of His Salvation

“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:14-17)

“Although you have not seen him, you love him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” (1 Peter 1:8-9)

“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

Some other words for salvation are deliverance or being saved. That’s exactly what Jesus did for us. Jesus was crucified on a cross at Calvary. He took on all the sin of mankind and died a humiliating and excruciatingly painful death on our behalf. He was buried and rose from the dead (was resurrected) on the third day.

There were people there who witnessed the empty tomb with His death clothes neatly folded inside. There were others who saw Him after He rose from the dead and ran to tell the other disciples. There were some who doubted and some who thought this talk of coming back to life after being crucified was crazy!

I grew up in a Christian family, so I always knew Jesus. I learned about Him at home and at Sunday School. When I was 10 years old I went to a Billy Graham crusade with my mom and my aunt. I was so moved by his preaching that I went forward when he called those who wanted to accept Jesus that day. There were thousands of people there and hundreds went forward. My mom let me go by myself! Billy Graham asked us if we were sorry for our sins and if we believed that Jesus died to save us. He asked if we believed in everlasting life and he prayed a prayer that we repeated. I felt something! Was it Jesus? I opened my heart and knew I was saved!

I know that some of you have similar stories, but I know also that many of you did not and that some of you haven’t accepted Jesus at all. You are all in my prayers every day. I thank God for everyone who has accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. I also pray for those who don’t know Him well enough to accept Him and for those who reject Him altogether. I pray that this devotional will touch the life of at least one person and cause him or her to pray for salvation and allow Jesus into their life.

Action for Today: Share your story with others. Share the Good News of Jesus Christ with someone who doesn’t know Him well enough to accept Him.

December 19 – The Wonder of Love

“Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable; it keeps no record of wrongs; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.” ... “For now we see only a reflection, as in a mirror, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love remain, these three, and the greatest of these is love.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8a, 12-13)

“Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one’s house, it would be utterly scorned.” (Song of Songs 8:6-7)

There is a reason that 1 Corinthians 13 is read during many marriage ceremonies. If you read each descriptor of love in these verses and think about how you show love to your loved ones, you will surely find at least one or two (or more) ways that you can improve your love language! The kind of love that is spoken about in these passages is God’s kind of love; it looks outward and is totally unselfish. We give this kind of love expecting nothing in return.

In verses 12-13, Paul is giving us a glimpse into the future. Right now we have many questions for God. One day we will see God face to face and on that day, we will get all our questions answered and we will be complete.

The Song of Songs is a love poem between a simple Jewish maiden (the Shulammite woman) and King Solomon. In the verses above, the girl includes some of love’s significant characteristics, which happen to be in 1 Corinthians 13 also. Love is as strong as death, it cannot be killed by time or disaster, and it cannot be bought for any price because it is freely given. Love is priceless, and even the richest king cannot buy it. Love must be accepted as a gift from God. Accept the love of your spouse as God’s gift and strive to make your love a reflection of the perfect love that comes from God himself.

Action for Today: Sometimes we have walls up and we don’t feel worthy of love. Intentionally think about **and then accept** the love that others offer – whether it is your spouse, child, friend, neighbor, parent, sibling, or stranger.

December 20 – The Wonder of His Forgiveness

“While he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his ancestors. He prayed to him, and God received his entreaty, heard his plea, and restored him again to Jerusalem and to his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD indeed was God.” (2 Chronicles 33:12-13)

“Peter said to them, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’” (Acts 2:38-39)

“The blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” ... “and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.” (1 John 1:7b-9, 2:2)

“Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32)

The reason that Jesus came to earth was to make possible a way for us to be forgiven of our sin and to teach us how to live the best life possible. As Jesus hung on the cross, all our sin was put upon Him. He willingly did this for you and for me. God loves us that much.

It’s all well and good that we are forgiven, but Jesus goes farther than that. We are called to forgive others, just as God forgives us. So easy to say and so very hard to do in some cases. We are called to forgive those who have harmed us, those who have excluded us, those who have abused us, those who make our lives miserable, and even our enemies. Jesus tells us to pray for them, so that they may accept Him and refrain from harm to others.

Action for Today: Do you believe your prayers can change another person’s life? Try it. Pray for the person who you’ve had the hardest time forgiving. Pray for their heart to soften and for their soul to recognize the hurt they are causing or have caused. Pray for them to believe in the Jesus who is knocking on the door of his/her heart. Keep praying and see what happens.

December 21 – The Wonder of His Peace

“The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him and delivers them. O taste and see that the LORD is good; happy are those who take refuge in him”. ... “Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD. Which of you desires life and covets many days to enjoy good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.” (Psalms 34:7-8, 11-14)

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7, NIV)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

In the scripture passages above, we can see that God has promised us His peace. If we cling to the Lord, we will discover God’s peace. If you focus on reading scripture, praying, and practicing meditation, you will find yourself surrendering yourself to God. They also remind us that we should not be troubled or afraid. It feels good to give your worries to Him!

One way to connect with the peace of God is to spend time in nature, and if you cannot get outside, go on your computer and bring up images of the northern lights, sunsets, landscapes, flowers, animals or whatever else you enjoy. Or you can turn on the radio, spin the vinyl, or bring up Spotify to listen to your favorite music. My choices would be Christian or classical music.

The world around us may be in complete chaos; war, government shutdowns, gun violence, weather catastrophes, worker strikes, weapons of mass destruction, and the list goes on and on. Ground yourself. Take deep breaths and quiet your thoughts. Sit silently for a time and take in the presence of God. He is right there next to you. His voice in your soul will calm your body and your spirit. Sit in God’s presence for a while and enjoy.

Action for Today: After you have found your peace, find one way to give peace to someone else. Visit or phone a shut-in, run an errand for a neighbor, send out a card, babysit for someone who needs a break. Be creative. You are an agent of peace.

December 22– The Wonder of His Hope

“For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.” (Psalm 62:5-6)

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31, NIV)

“But as for me, I watch in hope for the Lord, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me.” (Micah 7:7, NIV)

“We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered.” (Hebrews 6:19-20a)

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you.” (1 Peter 1:3-4, NIV)

These passages show us that our hope is in God alone. God doesn't promise us that we will not have troubles and trials in this life, but He does promise us that He will give us the strength and stamina to face whatever storms we'll encounter. We know that when we face challenges, we can turn to the Lord in prayer, and He will hear us.

The Hebrews scripture tells us that this hope that we have in God is a *“steadfast anchor of the soul.”* This anchor is strong enough to hold us steady in a world filled with uncertainty.

God's hope is rooted in His unchanging promises and His presence in our lives. That hope entered the Holy of Holies behind the curtain in the Temple, the same place Jesus entered on our behalf when He was crucified. Because of Jesus, our hope is eternal. Hallelujah!

Action for Today: If you believe in Jesus, say a prayer right now, thanking God for His work in your life. Let Him know how grateful you are that He is your hope and the anchor that steadies you.

If you have not yet accepted Jesus as your Messiah, write down in whom or what you put your hope. Who or what gives you strength in your being to allow you to keep going when life gets difficult? Ask a Christian you know why they believe in Jesus.

December 23 – The Wonder of Jesus' Second Coming

“But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” ... “Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:36, 42-44)

“Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.’” (John 3:5-6)

“On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: ‘Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.’ So when they met together, they asked him, ‘Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?’ He said to them: ‘It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’ After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. ‘Men of Galilee,’ they said, ‘why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.’” (Acts 1:4-11, NIV)

I remember when I was in elementary school, probably about 3rd grade. Everyone was talking about how the end of the world was going to happen that day at 3:05 in the afternoon. Sometime between 2 and 2:30 the principal made an announcement for all students to come to the gym. She had everyone sit on the floor and we all just watched the clock expecting that we wouldn't be going home to our family that day. Little ones started crying and older kids were trying to soothe them. Finally, at 3:15, the principal told us to never again believe a rumor about the end of the world and dismissed all of us to go home. I'll never forget that day. There always will be people who claim to know when Jesus will

return, but you can't believe them. No one knows the day or the hour, not even Jesus Himself!

According to the Bible there will be signs, however. *“As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’ Jesus answered: ‘Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, “I am the Christ,” and will deceive many. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.”* (Matthew 24:3-8, NIV)

And Matthew 24:29-31 (NIV) says, *“Immediately after the distress of those days ‘the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.’ At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn, they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”*

All these scripture passages clearly let us know that no one is privy to when Christ will return. So it's important to keep your faith alive until He comes; participate in worship, get into your Bible to study scripture, keep your communication with the Lord open in prayer, and be generous with your gifts of money, time, and talents. Serve others, enjoy fellowship, and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others!

Action for Today: Stay alert! Don't believe it if you hear a new prediction for the end of the world. Instead of worrying about a day in the future that is most certainly incorrect, concentrate on keeping your faith alive! Share the love, peace, joy, and hope of Jesus Christ with someone who needs encouragement.

December 24 – The Wonder of God Working Through Us

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:20-21)

“When they came to the crowd, a man came to him, knelt before him, and said, ‘Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has epilepsy and suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples, but they could not cure him.’ Jesus answered, ... ‘Bring him here to me.’ And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was cured from that moment. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ He said to them, ‘Because of your little faith. For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, “Move from here to there,” and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.’” (Matthew 17:14-16, 17b-20)

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’” (Matthew 25:31-36)

There are hundreds of opportunities for us to help people in our own community. You can volunteer with Feed My Starving Children, Emma Norton Services, Family Promise, Hope 4 Youth, Reading Bridge, Salvation Army, Impact Services, Second Harvest Heartland, and Recycling ambassadors. There are many options through Anoka County, too: ACBC Food Shelf, Medical Reserve Corp., Parks and Recreation, Community Action Program, RSVP, Tax Aide, and Fix-it Clinics. They even have opportunities to volunteer from home! Why not try something new?

God is working through you every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you with your decisions. With Him on your team, you'll be unstoppable! Ask the Lord to increase your faith. Then, rejoice and give thanks to God for every opportunity He puts in front of us to help others!

Action for Today: Do one act of kindness today with only Jesus in mind. Donate clothing or other items people need. Donate food or volunteer for Matthew 25. Welcome someone new to your community or church. Take care of someone who needs help. Visit someone who is a shut-in or a prisoner. Not only will you make someone else happy, but you will also be blessed and make God smile as well!

December 25 – The Wonder of Our Individual Commitment to Him

“Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.” ... “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.” (James 4:7-8, 10)

“With what shall I come before the LORD and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?’ He has told you, O mortal, what is good, and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:6-8)

“Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22)

Jesus came to this earth, not only to save us, but to show us how to live. He accomplished His part of the covenant and now we need to do our part to honor our commitment to Him. He has asked us to seek His Kingdom, draw near to Him, purify our hearts, and humble ourselves before Him. He requires that we do justice, love kindness, and provide for those around us who are having a hard time providing for themselves. How are you doing?

Coon Rapids UMC does a great job feeding people. Our Spirit of Matthew 25 food distributions keep getting larger and feeding more people. God has surely blessed this ministry right from its beginning! Let’s continue to thank Him for His guidance and His provision.

Where do you shine? Are you a great organizer? Are you a whiz with numbers? Do you have true empathy in your heart? Are you a sweet caregiver? Do you find joy in cleaning? Are you gifted with an angelic voice? Do you enjoy teaching? Have you ever considered using these talents in the church? When we do what we love and it gives us joy, it isn’t a chore, it’s a blessing. Have you felt that when you have volunteered? Jesus wants us to experience true joy in our lives. **There’s no better gift to give Jesus on His birthday than to offer yourself to Him by serving others.**

Action for Today: Wish Jesus a Happy Birthday today! Sing Happy Birthday to Him around the dinner table.

If you would like to begin to follow Jesus, please pray this prayer with reverence, humility, and sincerity:

Jesus, I ask you to come into my heart. I know I am a sinner and I'm asking you to forgive me. I believe you are the Son of God and I believe you died on the cross to take away my sins. Thank you for your sacrifice for me. I want to follow you as my Lord and Savior. Fill me with your Holy Spirit to guide my life. Amen.

Don't forget to wish Jesus a Happy Birthday!

You may want to consider finding someone to talk to about Jesus – contact a pastor or a knowledgeable Christian friend. They will be able to guide you from there.

*“Ask, and it will be given to you;
search, and you will find;
knock, and the door will be opened for you.
For everyone who asks receives,
and everyone who searches finds,
and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”
(Matthew 7:7-8)*

I will keep you in my prayers!

*May God richly bless you
and your loved ones
this beautiful Christmas
Season
and throughout 2026!*