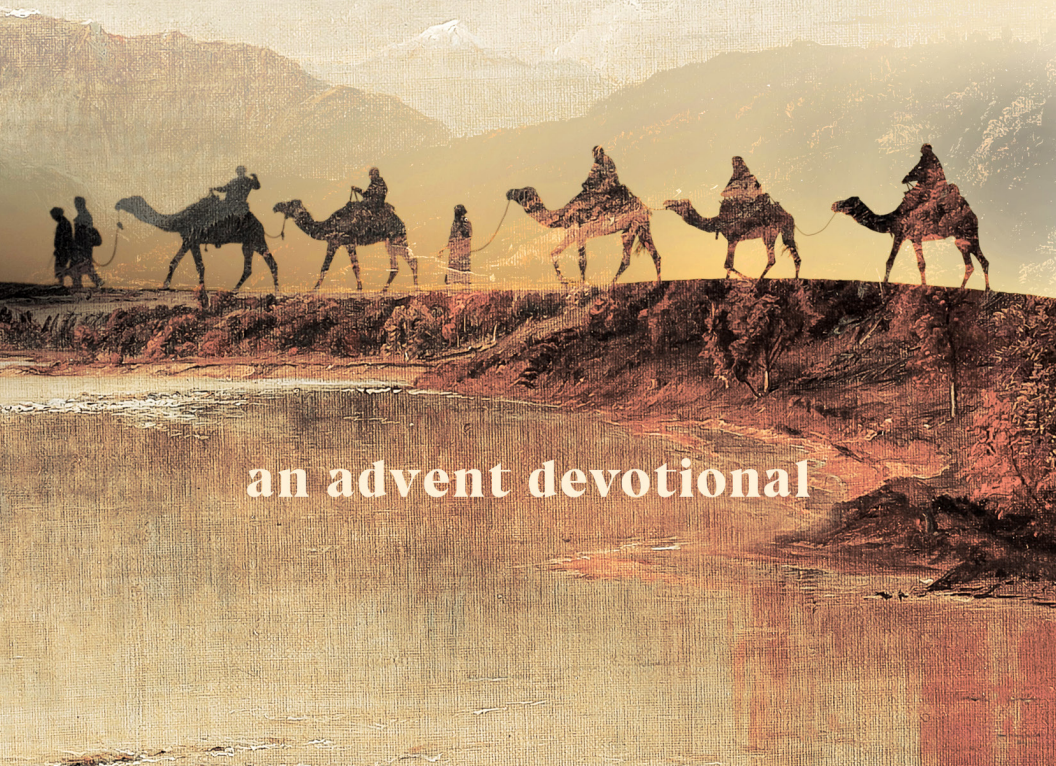




yearning for
Christ

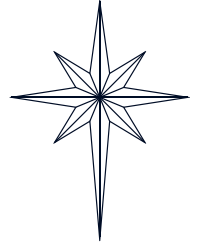


an advent devotional

yearning for
Christ

an advent devotional

advent has everything to do with anticipation.



the hope of the messiah to come...
the reality of God's plan of redemption being made clear...
the truth that God's love will seek and save his people...
o, there is so much to anticipate!

john 1:14 describes the entrance of Jesus into the world as a child this way:
*and the word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen
his glory, glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth.*

Jesus comes to reveal the image of the invisible God, full of grace and truth. what an incredible gift the Lord provides through his son!

if these things are true, then we must be intentional in how we anticipate Christ...for the *father of lies* (satan) is lurking, attempting with urgent desire to distort our expectancy.

the enemy would have us enamored with seasonal busyness, captured by merely surviving the holidays, and caught up in culture's depiction of christmas.

this journey is a battle plan—a war map—for us to celebrate
the truth of the CHRIST of CHRISTmas!

the coming days are designed to be simple enough for families, while also challenging followers of Christ in all stages of their faith.

you are invited by the one who took on flesh and blood and dwelt among us to anticipate **his first coming** all over again...as we await **his return**.

prayer

*God, thank you for sending your son Jesus!
forgive us for the days we have taken the coming of Christ for granted.
in the coming weeks, o God, please grow our anticipation for your glory!
please sober our minds from the chaos around us,
and soften our hearts to long for your word.*

*we ask you, Lord, to transform us from the inside out
as we prepare for CHRISTmas...
please convict us of sin, wash us with your grace,
and deepen our trust of you and you alone! amen.*

yearning for Christ: an advent devotional
second edition.

copyright © 2023 by matthias' lot church.
all rights reserved.

matthiaslot.com

scripture quotations are from the holy bible, English Standard Version® (ESV), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. all rights reserved.

truth:
God is love.

lie: life isn't going well...so God must not love us.

what other lies about God's love are we tempted to believe?

God's character

so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. —1 john 4:16

what are some recent ways you've seen or encountered God's love?

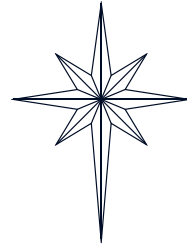
because of Christ, death doesn't win.

for God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. —john 3:16

prayer

*God, help us believe that you love us.
God, help us believe that nothing can separate us from your love!
God, help us believe that your love is greater than how we view
the challenges in our lives.*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*



**for unto you
is born this day in
the city of david
a savior, who is
Christ the Lord.**

luke 2:11

truth:
God is peace.

lie: this world, and our lives, are filled with chaos and confusion...
so there must be no God.

God's character

for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace. —isaiah 9:6

because of Christ, we can have a peaceful relationship with God.

therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. —romans 5:1

once we have a peaceful relationship with God through Christ, there are so many gifts that come with it. what are some of those gifts?
(for example: our sins are fully forgiven...past, present, and future)

what areas of your life need the peace of God right now?

prayer

*God, in each of these areas,
we ask for a peace that surpasses our understanding.
as we endure hardships, help us trust in you and not ourselves.
God, as the chaos in our culture grows, keep our eyes fixed on you!
guide us this season through the power of the Holy Spirit...
in our hearts and in our home.*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
God is merciful.

for God to be merciful means that he does not give us what we deserve.

lie: if God is so merciful, then these bad things shouldn't be happening...
especially to good people.

because of our sin, what do we deserve from God?

God's character

blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ! according to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead... —1 peter 1:3

because of Christ, we have received mercy from God.

*but when the goodness and loving kindness of God our savior appeared,
⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. —titus 3:4-7*

what are some specific truths from titus 3 that encourage you?

prayer

let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. —hebrews 4:16

God, give us courage to draw near to you—nearer now than ever before!

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
God is all-powerful.

lie: God's power must be limited, because i haven't received some of the things i've asked for.

what other lies about God's power are we tempted to believe?

God's character

yours, o LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. yours is the kingdom, o LORD, and you are exalted as head above all.

—1 chronicles 29:11

what evidence of the power of God have you seen recently?

because of Christ, we have been saved from sin and death by the power of God.

for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. —1 corinthians 1:18

prayer

*God, help us believe that your kingdom is not a matter of talk but of power!
God, help us walk by the power of your Spirit and not our own strength...
and stir our hearts to worship you as we see the evidence of your power
all around!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
God is righteous.

God is righteous in that he is just, true, good, and upright in all his ways.

lie: God is not the only "god" who is right...he is just one of the options.

God's character

the LORD is righteous in all his ways and kind in all his works. ¹⁸ the LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth. —psalm 145:17-18

if the Lord is righteous in all his ways, what does that mean for your daily life?

because of Christ, our sin has been dealt with.

my little children, i am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the father, Jesus Christ the righteous. —1 john 2:1

**five days into this advent journey, how has God been moving in you?
what are some of the victories you've experienced?**

prayer

*God, help us believe that you and you alone are righteous!
God, help us turn our eyes from looking at worthless things
and give us life in your ways!
o God, as you are righteous, help us take refuge in your word.*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
God is holy.

God is holy in that he is like no other...he is set apart from all else.

lie: God is just like every other prophet and teacher...he has a religious agenda with a list of rules and regulations to follow him.

God's character

in the song of moses:

who is like you, o LORD, among the gods? who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? —exodus 15:11

in hannah's prayer:

there is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God. —1 samuel 2:2

list as many ways as possible that God is like no one else:

because of Christ, the world gets to see God's holiness.

in response to mary's question:

and the angel answered 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 called holy—the son of God. —luke 1:35

prayer

*God, thank you for being holy!
God, help us worship you above everything else!
as the possible distractions continue to rise, Lord,
help us stay focused on you.*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
God is faithful.

lie: God does not keep his promises. he is like everyone else in your life that has a propensity to deceive. he will fail you.

God's character

know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations... —deuteronomy 7:9

if God is a promise keeper, how can you grow in knowing his promises?

because of Christ, we see evidence of God fulfilling his promises.

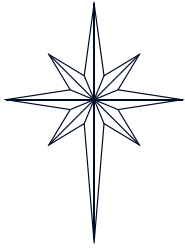
all we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ he was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. —isaiah 53:6-7

these first seven days have been about the Lord's character. what is one thing you've learned about him or needed to be reminded of?

prayer

*God, thank you for being faithful even when we are faithless!
thank you for always staying true to your word!
God, help us believe you more and more...increase our faith in you!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*



our anticipation for Christ grows the more we see the beauty of God's character.

in other words, we cannot love a God we do not know.

God is...

- love
- peace
- merciful
- all-powerful
- righteous
- holy
- faithful
- and so much more.

with this foundation laid, we will now see how God's character and the coming of Christ **impact the identity of his children.**

but to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God. —**john 1:12-13**

because **God is...we are.**

truth:

we are a new creation.

gospel identity:

therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. the old has passed away; behold, the new has come. —2 corinthians 5:17

identity celebrated:

the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus provides the pathway for those who believe in Christ to be born again! just as we had nothing to do with our first birth, so too we are born again only through Christ's work!

being born again means that God's children are no longer defined by their sin, their past, their failures, or their struggles...they are now purchased by the power of Christ, and given a brand new identity!

what are some of the joys of being a child of God and a new creation?

because of Christ, we are freed from our old self.

we know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. —romans 6:6

prayer

*God, thank you for sending Jesus to take care of my sin!
show me today how much i need you Lord.
God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, help me live today as a new creation!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
we are sealed.

gospel identity:

in him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory. —ephesians 1:13-14

identity celebrated:

the moment we see our problem of sin and trust in Christ as our savior, God ‘marks’ his possession with the Holy Spirit. the seal of the Holy Spirit is God’s guarantee to his children that they are his! once adopted by God into his family, we will never again be orphaned, alone, or lost!

it is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live like Jesus:

but the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. —galatians 5:22-23

list each fruit of the Spirit and its opposite. (e.g., love | hatred)

what stands out to you after looking at this list?

because of Christ, we now live through his strength.

i have been crucified with Christ. it is no longer i who live, but Christ who lives in me. and the life i now live in the flesh i live by faith in the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. —galatians 2:20

prayer

*God, thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit!
thank you for giving me assurance through your son Jesus.
God, as december continues, strengthen me to bear much fruit for your glory!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
we are hidden in Christ.

gospel identity:

i love you, o LORD, my strength. ² the LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom i take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. —psalm 18:1-2

identity celebrated:

as God’s children, we find our refuge in him!
he is our **shield** in the battle.
he is our **shelter** in the storm.
he is our **sustenance** in the famine.
he is our **stronghold** and savior!

how has God been a refuge for you in recent weeks?

because of Christ, we have an eternal protector.

if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. —colossians 3:1-4

in a moment of confession, in what ways are you seeking comfort or shelter in the things of this world?

prayer

*God, forgive me for not trusting that you are enough!
forgive me for the days i have run from you and not to you.
God, please comfort me in the joy of your presence,
and create a deeper yearning for more of you!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
we are citizens of heaven.

gospel identity:

once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. ¹¹ beloved, i urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. —1 peter 2:10-11

identity celebrated:

a sojourner is someone who is just passing through. sealed as God's children, our hope is no longer in the here and now...this is not our home! we have a forever home in the eternal presence of our father and king! Christ's coming has freed us from being tethered to temporary things! oh the gift of just passing through!

if we are sojourners, what are some things you've grown too fond of in the here and now?

because of Christ, this world is not our home.

but our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. —philippians 3:20-21

what do we have to look forward to in our new citizenship?

prayer

*God, thank you for the rescue plan
from the pain and agony of this present world!
forgive me for the ways i've gotten too comfortable
with the world around me.
Lord, please grow in me a yearning for what's to come in the not yet!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
we are forgiven.

gospel identity:

he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. —colossians 1:13-14

identity celebrated:

we are each born under the regime of the domain of darkness. in this evil reality, there is an endless cycle of chasing hopes that overpromise and underdeliver. the father of lies dominates the darkness by trapping millions in what seems like an inescapable death.

but God!

the son of God...the redeemer...our savior...comes to this earth in the form of a baby. this child, born of a virgin, and wrapped in swaddling clothes, conquers the domain of darkness! in Christ, our record of sin no longer stands against us! instead, we enjoy a new kingdom...one ruled by a loving and merciful God. so powerful to say it again: **we are forgiven!**

take some time to list specific sins you've been forgiven of in Christ:

now, looking at your list, take some time to thank him for washing you clean!

because of Christ, we are dead to sin.

we know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ for the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ so you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. —romans 6:9-11

prayer

*Jesus, as CHRISTmas nears,
make me mindful of what was accomplished in your coming!
forgive me for taking advantage of grace and choosing to disobey you.
father, please cause my heart to worship as one who has been set free!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
we are the light of the world.

gospel identity:

you are the light of the world. a city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ in the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your father who is in heaven. —matthew 5:14-16

why is light always more powerful than darkness?

identity celebrated:

having been transferred from the domain of darkness and sealed with the Holy Spirit, we hold within us the light of Christ. as we go into the world, the light of Christ goes before us and with us! darkness no longer rules us!

as romans 13:12 says:

the night is far gone; the day is at hand. so then let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light.

what does it mean to be the light of the world in your areas of influence?
(neighborhood, home, school, work, teams, etc.)

because of Christ, we can walk as children of the light.

this is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶ if we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷ but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin. —1 john 1:5-7

prayer

*God, thank you for calling me out of darkness into marvelous light!
forgive me for the days that i am ashamed of you and hide the light from the world.
Lord, please shine your light on the dark areas of my life!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
we are set apart for God's work.

gospel identity:

now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. ²¹ therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. —2 timothy 2:20-21

identity celebrated:

God has done a work *in us* to do a work *through us*! Jesus has cleansed us from the inside out so that we might be used for his work. we are no longer instruments in the hands of the domain of darkness, but clay in the artistic grip of the potter. this truth gives us daily purpose and brings great clarity to where we receive our value...from the Lord, and not from the things of this world!

how do you see your life being used for the master's work?

because of Christ, we are God's workmanship.

for by grace you have been saved through faith. and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. —ephesians 2:8-10

our works do not save us, but are merely the evidence of what God is doing in us!

prayer

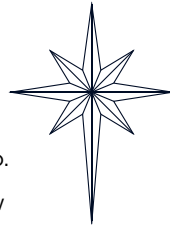
*God, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to be used for your glory!
forgive me for the moments that i grow weary in serving you.
Lord, please remind me this CHRISTmas season of how you want to use me to
show the world your grace and love!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

pause and reflect.

at this point in the journey, take a moment to reflect.
december generally goes by so quickly, but...it doesn't have to.

this year, the anticipation of Christ's birth can cause us to slow down...waiting on the Lord while we worship him and him alone.



during the first 14 days,
what have been some of
the greatest victories in
your relationship with
the Lord?

as previously stated, the
enemy wants us enamored
with seasonal busyness,
captured by merely
surviving the holidays,
and caught up in culture's
depiction of christmas.
where are you still struggling
with these temptations?

many prayers have been
written for you thus far. if
you had to write a prayer
that would summarize
what's on your heart and
mind right now, what
would you pray?

this advent battle plan has taken us through the riches of God's character and how our identity has been shaped by the power of Christ.

so, what's next? as our anticipation grows, we must now turn to what **Christ has called us to embrace.**

God is...we are...and now: **he has.**

truth:
he has called us to love him.

the direction:

and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ "teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" ³⁷ and he said to him, "you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ this is the great and first commandment. —matthew 22:35-38

the direction celebrated:

this command is beautiful. many have mistaken it as burdensome, but the heart of God calling us to love him is freeing. how? in one simple (yet not easy) statement, Jesus centers our entire life. Jesus is saying: don't get caught up in loving the world or the things of the world...your first love must be me. oh the freedom! especially in a month where culture is chaotic, we need to be centered by simple direction: love God above all else.

**what are some indicators that reveal people love him?
in other words, how can you tell if you actually love God?**

because of Christ, we can love.

and we have seen and testify that the father has sent his son to be the savior of the world. ¹⁵ whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ so we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him ... ¹⁹ we love because he first loved us. —1 john 4:14-16, 19

prayer

*God, thank you for loving us first...for showing us how to love.
forgive me for the recent times when i have chased other loves.
Lord, please grow my love for you...more than ever before...
enlarge my heart for you!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he has called us to love others.

the direction:

a new commandment i give to you, that you love one another: just as i have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ by this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. —john 13:34-35

to understand how to love others, Jesus points to how he has loved.
 what are some ways that Christ has loved you?

the direction celebrated:

Jesus doesn't stop with the command to love one another. the call to love gets even more specific when he says in **matthew 5:44**:

but i say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Jesus calls us to do something unbelievably difficult: love those who don't love us. before thinking through your list of enemies, please consider that you have benefited from Christ loving those who didn't love him.

because of Christ, we are shown how to love when it's hard.

but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. —romans 5:8-10

who in your life is difficult to love? pray for them—name by name!

prayer

*God, thank you for loving me when i am difficult to love.
 forgive me for moments i have not loved others well...the list is lengthy...forgive me!
 Lord, give me your heart that i may love others with a renewed passion!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
 as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he has called us to forgive.

the direction:

for if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your father forgive your trespasses. —matthew 6:14-15

the direction celebrated:

millions upon millions of dollars are spent each year making movies about vengeance. our flesh is drawn to a story where people get what they deserve... when revenge is a core motivator of the plot. the natural response of our flesh is to get angry when we are wronged and grow in bitterness against the one who hurt us. **yet again**, we see the beauty of what Christ has called us to! instead of living embittered, he commands his followers to be freed through forgiveness! we must not take this direction lightly as it comes with a great warning:
if we do not forgive, our father will not forgive us.

search your heart. do you see any areas of unforgiveness towards others?
pause...no need to move too fast past this. as names begin to come across your head and heart, ask the Lord for courage to forgive.

often, forgiveness is not a one-time event. for some of the greatest pains in our life, we will sometimes have to forgive the offender daily...asking the Lord to remove the desire for revenge from our hearts!

because of Christ, we are shown how to forgive when it's hard.

and when they came to the place that is called the skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ^{34a} and Jesus said, "father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." —luke 23:33-34a

how will you know that you've forgiven someone?

when you genuinely want what's best for them. when you want them to thrive. when your heart has released bitterness through the power of Christ, and you are able to lovingly pray for them.

prayer

*God, i need your forgiveness so much. thank you for forgiving my deepest sin.
 help me God...i feel so incapable of releasing some of my bitterness.
 Lord, make me a worshipper today
 as i consider the power of your forgiving heart!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
 as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he has called us to release worry.

the direction:

therefore i tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ and which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? —matthew 6:25-27

spend a moment listing some of your worries:

the direction celebrated:

what a critical time to take a day and consider worry! december is filled with family challenges, running around from event to event, and the temptation to get trapped in what our culture says is important. all of these things can easily add anxiety and worry to our tired minds.

Jesus provides another option. he gives us a way out. our king, who came as a baby in a lowly manger, holds the whole world in his hands. he is not surprised or caught off guard by our struggle! he has come, in part, to be our comfort through it. what a gift Jesus is! when the world around us seems to give way, he is sure and steady.

because of Christ, we can give our burdens to him.

come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. —matthew 11:28-29

how are you encouraged by these truths today?

prayer

*God, thank you for being faithful
 even when i forget that you hold all things together.
 forgive me for searching for comfort in the things of this world.
 Lord, bring a peace to my mind that surpasses all understanding...please God!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
 as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he has called us to pray in secret.

the direction:

and when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. truly, i say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ but when 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

the direction celebrated:

stop for a moment to see this command from a different perspective. instead of seeing God with a stern finger saying “pray more”...can you see the beauty of the creator of the universe saying, “i want to spend time with you! just with you! no one else needs to see. just get alone, my son or daughter, and let’s spend some time together.”

one of the most important questions to ask yourself...no matter what your age:
if all of the public displays of my faith were gone, what would be left?

our relationship with the Lord is growing the most when the public is driven by what’s happening privately! oh the gift of intimacy with the Lord!

what are some recent victories of time spent with the Lord?
(maybe even working through this advent journey!)

because of Christ, we can draw near to the Lord.

since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ for we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. —hebrews 4:14-16

prayer

*God, thank you for purchasing an intimate relationship with me through your son!
 God, let me say it again: thank you! i am so undeserving to be near you.
 Lord, give me a greater desire to seek you when no one is looking—
 give me a yearning!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
 as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he has called us to deny ourselves.

the direction:

then Jesus told his disciples, "if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵for whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶for what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? or what shall a man give in return for his soul? —matthew 16:24-26

the direction celebrated:

could something be more countercultural? *deny myself?*

we exist in such a self-driven era. self-esteem is sought after and protected. feeling sorry for oneself is encouraged...and generally we are taught to chase after *our* dreams and *our* desires with no consideration of anyone else. *our* world is driven by self.

and where has that gotten us? where has it gotten you? the self-driven life has roads that all lead back to our failures, our inadequacies, and our inconsistencies.

do you see? once again, Christ frees us from the prison shackles of self! he provides a way out of self and a way into a life driven by him and for him! oh the freedom!

in a moment of confession, what are some ways you've been caught up in yourself recently?

because of Christ, we are shown the model of selflessness.

do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. ⁴let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. ⁵have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus... —philippians 2:3-5

what is just one action step you can take today to embrace the selfless life?

prayer

*God, thank you for providing your son Jesus that we might see him serve!
 forgive me for the ways i have made my life about myself.
 Lord, please humble me...make me low...make me a servant!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
 as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he has called us to make disciples.

the direction:

and Jesus came and said to them, "all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that i have commanded you. and behold, i am with you always, to the end of the age." —matthew 28:18-20

the direction celebrated:

have you ever stopped to think about how you are reading this truth right now...11 disciples hear this commission from Jesus and they go! they share the gospel with great urgency, they show people the love of Jesus, and they help those around them follow Christ. sealed with the power of the Holy Spirit, they embrace this calling and the message spreads to us!

what a joy to be a part of God's mission! we have this same unique opportunity to invite those who are younger in the faith to come and follow us as together we follow Christ. the emphasis of discipleship is never on people...but, always on Jesus. from children who are following Christ to the oldest of the old...it is time we continue to embrace this calling so that those around us can grow in Christ.

take time to reflect on specific people who have invested into your life along the way. list them here and consider reaching out to them today to thank them!

because of Christ, we can bear the fruit of discipleship.

i am the vine; you are the branches. whoever abides in me and i in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. —john 15:5

what could be holding you back from embracing the call of disciple-making?

prayer

*God, thank you for using so many people in my life to deepen my faith!
 forgive me for being driven by fear
 instead of trusting you will empower me to follow.*

Lord, renew my understanding of what you have called me to embrace.

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
 as we await the celebration of his birth!*

God is...

love
peace
merciful
all-powerful
righteous
holy
faithful

and so much more.

we are...

a new creation.
sealed.
hidden in Christ.
citizens of heaven.
forgiven.
the light of the world.
set apart for God's work.

and so much more.

he has...

called us to love him.
called us to love others.
called us to forgive.
called us to release worry.
called us to pray in secret.
called us to deny ourself.
called us to make disciples.

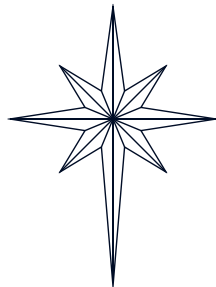
and so much more.

as you consider all that we've journeyed through, which of these truths has been the most impactful? why do you need that reminder or encouragement?

the anticipation is growing!

with only a few days before CHRISTmas, we must now look to: **he will.**
the coming of Christ to the earth in flesh and blood accomplished so much...
past, present, and future.
promises were fulfilled and promises were established.

he is not done moving...**he will!**



truth:
he will continue to save.

the promise:

for the scripture says, "everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."¹² for there is no distinction between jew and greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.¹³ for "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." —romans 10:11-13

the promise celebrated:

Jesus still has the power to save. he is not done! from the bloody cross, he spoke the words "it is finished." his conquering of sin and death is enough to redeem those who seem too far gone. this promise means that the power seen in Christ coming to the earth is still being revealed. the symbols of a manger, a cross, and a stone rolled away are still present-day symbols of love and salvation. CHRISTmas isn't merely a holiday...it is hope.

who in your life would you love to see turn to Jesus? list them and spend time praying for their salvation! only Christ can soften their hearts.

because of Christ, lives can still be saved.

this makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant.²³ the former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office,²⁴ but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.²⁵ consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.
—hebrews 7:22-25

as you consider your salvation, what brings you great joy?

prayer

*God, thank you for continuing to show your power by transforming lives!
forgive me for believing that some of the lost are too far gone.
Lord, use this CHRISTmas to deepen my desire to see you save!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he will arm us for battle.

the promise:

therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. ¹⁴ stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵ and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ in all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; ¹⁷ and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God...—ephesians 6:13-17

the promise celebrated:

the flaming darts are extinguished behind the shield of faith. remember: we are hidden in Christ! yes, we are in an intense battle, but the Lord equips us for it!

we started this advent by describing the journey as a battle plan. what are specific ways the Lord has used these truths to thwart the plan of the enemy to consume you with busyness, distraction, and temptation?

because of Christ, satan is and will be defeated.

the God of peace will soon crush satan under your feet. the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. —romans 16:20

and they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. —revelation 20:9-10

satan couldn't stop Jesus from dying and rising...
 and he won't stop the power of Christ now!

prayer

*God, thank you for victory in your son Jesus!
 forgive me for living in defeat so many days...forgive me Lord!
 God, remind me today how victorious you are. give me joy in your victory!*

*o God, grow our longing for the return of Jesus
 as we await the celebration of his birth!*

truth:
he will come again.

the promise:

*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. ² and i saw the holy city, new jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ and i heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. he will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." ^{5a} and he who was seated on the throne said, "behold, i am making all things new."
 —revelation 21:1-5a*

the promise celebrated:

we are in the life "in-between." we are between the ascension of Jesus seen in acts 1 and the return of Christ shown at the end of revelation. as we await his return there will continue to be cancer, heartache, divorce, disease, broken relationships, death, and an abundance of sin.

but...

there will be a day...oh there is a day coming...**when he will make all things new!**

in thinking about the return of Jesus, what excites you the most?

because of Christ, we can eagerly wait.

so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. —hebrews 9:28

prayer

*God, as we lay our heads on the pillows tonight,
 cause our hearts to quicken.
 as we think about the reality of CHRISTmas,
 grow our expectation of your final return.*

*thank you for the power of your word that has been so clear this month!
 give us the continued desire to pursue you and enjoy your presence.
 thank you for your faithfulness, God!*

luke 2

¹ in those days a decree went out from caesar augustus that all the world should be registered. ² this was the first registration when quirinius was governor of syria. ³ and all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ and joseph also went up from galilee, from the town of nazareth, to judea, to the city of david, which is called bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of david, ⁵ to be registered with mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶ and while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ and she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ and in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ and an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ and the angel said to them, “fear not, for behold, i bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ for unto you is born this day in the city of david a savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² and this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” ¹³ and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

¹⁴ “glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ when the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “let us go over to bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ and they went with haste and found mary and joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ and when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ and all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ but mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ and the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.



**and the word became flesh and dwelt among us,
and we have seen his glory,
glory as of the only son from the father,
full of grace and truth.**

john 1:14



loving him
& loving his.