



EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT

**FINDING JOY
IN OUR TRIALS**



Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you. —1 Peter 5:7 NLT

At WorldVenture, we understand suffering. And, like Jesus, we do a lot to try to relieve it. We help churches send global workers around the world with the message of the Gospel — that there is eternal life through faith in Jesus and salvation from eternal suffering.

But we also support global workers with the know-how to help alleviate suffering in this life. We send medical workers. We send counselors and teachers. We send a lot of different people with different expertise who share the same heart that Jesus had to bring hope and healing to those in need.

In that same spirit, our colleagues throughout the world have shared some of their insights on facing the trials of life, how to ***consider it pure joy*** when facing these trials, and how to receive the ***good and perfect gifts*** from our ***Father of Heavenly Lights (James 1:2-3, 17)***. May these words encourage you this Christmas and throughout the year.

Engaging the world for gospel impact,

Jeff Denlinger
President, WorldVenture

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Consider journaling during your devotions

Post your thoughts on social media using #FindingJoy2021



About the Artwork in this Book

Faith Hampton is a mixed media artist. Faith writes, “*The mystery of art is a part of its charm. If we could grasp it all in one sentence, what would be the point of painting it? I love the fantastical and the extreme, the abstract and the representational. I value work with meaning in addition to beauty, yet in art I still appreciate an aesthetic experience rather than one that is solely conceptual.*” You can view more at her website.

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REPLACE THEM WITH GRATITUDE

Do you ever wonder how Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem? We are quick to picture a donkey, but that is not mentioned in Scripture. Did they walk? Or use a cart? The sacrifice they offered at Jesus' dedication in the Temple indicates they were poor. Maybe someone was kind enough to loan them an animal for the journey. I sure hope so.

In my years of full-time global ministry, by far the most challenging aspect of my periodic returns to the US to get training, greet partners, and visit family (we call it "Home Assignment") is finding reliable transportation. There is no way around the logistical need for a temporary vehicle at an affordable cost, whether you are single or a big family, staying in one city or traveling cross-country. So it was a delight to my heart and peace to my mind this past Home Assignment when a generous, supportive family provided a car for me to use. What a gift!

Halfway through my Home Assignment, in the middle of a 6,000-mile trip no less, I started hearing rumors that this kind of car was a common target for catalytic converter theft. With trepidation, I wound my way around the country back to my home base, where I thought I could relax. Sadly, that is precisely when the thieves struck, stealing the catalytic converter, as well as my independence.

Clearly the loss of an automobile part pales greatly in comparison to what Joseph and Mary faced when a distant king made them travel the length of the country while pregnant, or to the madman trying to kill their son a bit later. It certainly pales to the colleague who lost a beloved aunt to COVID, or to my friend battling Stage 4 cancer.

However, sometimes it is the small trials that cause us to complain more quickly. As I sat on the porch looking at my broken-into-now-non-functioning car, I had Psalm 55:22 (NIV) on my mind, which reads, *"Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous be shaken."*

I pointed down the driveway and said, *"But God, I was shaken last night! I lost my car!"* The words "my car" stuck in my throat a little bit as the Lord gently reminded me that it was never mine to begin with.

In my work with teenagers, whenever I pray out loud, I regularly try to thank God for being the giver of all good gifts (James 1:17). All the resources in the world are his to dispense as he sees fit. Reminding myself - and teenagers - that he is a kind-hearted Father who works for the good of his children can help all of us fight entitlement, drive out complaints, replace them with gratitude. After all, he is the God who generously gave his own Son all those years ago in Bethlehem.

As I stared at the gift of that car, God turned its loss into a list of all that I had received this Home Assignment: the generosity of friends, the kind concern of neighbors, colleagues who care deeply about their relatives as well as mine, a friend whose trust in the Lord despite cancer ministers to me daily, not to mention a ministry with teenagers that I love more than I thought possible.

The truth is that the psalmist was right: I cannot be shaken *if* I recognize how the Lord sustains me and is generous toward me. His faithfulness in the small trials will be my boon when the big ones come. How about you? Do the minor hiccups also compel you toward complaint more quickly than the big ones? How will you replace them with gratitude?

Katrina Custer serves in Germany. She teaches K-12 students coming from 50 different countries. Learn more about how to support her at worldventure.com/kcuster2021



The Nature of Light

Tony fashioned the Christmas lights on the side of the house into a giant cross. Like the Griswalds in *Christmas Vacation*, we were always trying to make our home the brightest in our rural area. This is not hard to do when you live in a place with no street lamps.

We held Christmas parties every year, and our 1000 square foot home teemed with friends and family. Chairs were side-by-side in our tiny living room. The pork loin roasting in the oven was about to come out, and the potatoes were boiling on the stove when a car drove up our driveway. Chino Valley is a mix of lower, middle, and upper-class communities. Many homes are manufactured or mobile homes on well water or hooked up to the city. Nice neighborhoods are often side-by-side with troubled ones.

"I'm not expecting anyone else," I said to my Aunt as I peered out the front door. Everyone looked curiously at the occupant in the car. I walked outside, and my other family members were talking to the driver already.

The woman in the car acted as if she had one too many drinks as she said, *"Is this a church?"* It would later turn out, after calling 911, that she was low on insulin. Her family members came and retrieved her while one of the emergency respondents drove her car home. This became a memorable event in the years to come, but I will never forget her question, *"Is this a church?"* The lighted cross on our home was seen by this woman for miles. Light can travel for miles unless it is blocked by another object.

Matthew 5:14-16 NIV says, *"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."*

What if Jesus Was Serious by Skye Jethani says about these verses, *"We must recognize the importance of intent."* When you turn on a light in your home, it illuminates your room but also escapes out the window, contrasting the darkness of night. A campfire is kindled to warm the people at the camp. Both sources of light were intended for the people in the room or the people by the campfire.

Because of the nature of light, others can see these lights shining from miles away. The fruit or application of your acts as a Christian is being observed by people still in the dark. If an action is for God's glory, we should not hide it. If it is for self, it should remain hidden.

We were a newly married couple trying to find our own traditions, and like Clark Griswald, we wanted to create a place where everyone felt welcome. The lighted cross drew in a woman that needed medical attention. While our intent was showy, a declaration in the dark, God used it for His glory. That's the nature of light.

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." – John 8:12 ESV

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Christmas Perseverance & Determination

The Church of England has a family of volumes that contains their official liturgy, and their Common Worship volume includes a Christmas blessing that writes, *“May the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds, the perseverance of the wise men, the obedience of Joseph and Mary, and the peace of the Christ-child be yours this Christmas.”*

We often acknowledge the joy of the angels, the eagerness of the shepherds along with the obedience of Mary and Joseph, but have you reflected upon the perseverance and determination of the Magi?

The Magi came from the east, from what was believed to be Babylon. If they came from ancient Babylon, it would have been approximately 700 miles of travel for them to see the Christ child who lay in Bethlehem. Before seeing the Christ child, they spoke with King Herod who was in Jerusalem (Matthew 2). King Herod laid plans to get rid of the Christ child as he heard from the Magi. Before their conversation with Herod, they traveled approximately 4 months to arrive in Jerusalem. We know this from Ezra 7:9, as Ezra’s entourage (which probably included children and elderly people) took four months to travel from Babylon to Jerusalem.

Have you taken a four-month journey to arrive at a long awaited destination? The length of time for travel in 2021 is much shorter than in the time period of the ancient near east. Regardless of our expectations for how long travel should take, a four-month journey to worship a child is not a common practice in our day nor the time period of the Magi. The Magi did not know the exact location of the Christ child they sought to worship and they were trusting a prophecy and a star to lead the way. The wise men were determined to reach the location of where the child was born. They had a hope of the Messiah and this gave them great endurance and determination.

The Magi traveled over four months to reach the promised Messiah, which took

grit, determination, and a little perseverance along the way. They may have felt suspicious and threatened by King Herod’s request, but they continued with their intended destination. This detour did not distract them from the original goal. We would never have known of the Magi if they turned around at month three of their journey.

“I am a slow walker, but I never walk back.”
— Abraham Lincoln

In life, we can adhere to Lincoln’s words as he reminds us to stay the course. May we stay the course, even if it involves a long arduous journey with no end in sight. May we remember that while our journey often is slow, we must not lose hope and turn around and give up.



Questions to Journal:

- 1. What part of your journey in life requires more determination, grit, and perseverance?
- 2. What part of your journey in life can be given fortitude as we are reminded of the continued hope of the Messiah in 2021?

Brian Larson serves in missionary member care as a pastoral counselor. Learn how to support him at worldventure.com/bclarson2021.

A Gift of Hope

As my maternal grandfather lay dying, he requested that Romans 8 be read to him repeatedly. For several years, he had known that his death was imminent. The nerves that controlled his diaphragm were slowly dying, and with them, his ability to breathe.

My grandfather's hope did not lie in anything good he had done - although he had done a lot. Instead, he put his hope in the promises held in the book of Romans: *"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.... For I am convinced that neither death nor life... nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 8:1, 38-39 ESV). For some reason, although this truth lies at the core of the gospel, we find it incredibly hard to remember. We attempt to work out our salvation with fear and trembling as it says in Philippians 2:12 ESV, and we forget, verse 13:

"For it is God who works in you..."

"There is now no condemnation..." (Romans 8:1 ESV)

That is the purpose of the incarnation, and that is the purpose of the cross. No matter what you have done, from terrorism to adultery to stealing cookies from the cookie jar, God still loves you. If you are in Christ Jesus, you cannot be condemned.

When I am given a gift for Christmas, I do not worry about paying back the person who gave it. And when I give a gift, I don't expect to get anything in return. God gave us a gift, and we are free to reject it. For those who have accepted it, all sins, past, present, and future, are wiped clean. We don't have to worry anymore about "getting it right," because Jesus got it right for us.

This is what gave my grandfather hope as he died. He didn't have to go back through his life and make sure his good outweighed his bad - as if it ever could. He knew that nothing could separate him from God's love, because he could not be condemned. While the carbon dioxide in his lungs sank him first into sleep, then death, he heard over and over again the promise: *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."*

Philip Kendall serves in West Africa.

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**Therefore, there is
now no condemnation
for those who are in
Christ Jesus
— Romans 8:1**

Questions to Journal:

*If you are sure of your
salvation, how did you
come to that certainty?*

*When did you realize that
your sins really can be
forgiven?*



Inexpressible Joy

There is a beautiful connection between James' challenge to consider our troubles and trials as an "opportunity for joy" in James 1:2 and Peter's hope-instilling truth about joy in 1 Peter 1:6-9.

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls.

Our joy comes from our faith that Jesus will be revealed to the whole world. That faith and hope for salvation for the whole world is built up through trials, troubles, and challenges. Without the reality of a need for rescue, people won't see a need for a Rescuer. We trust God to use those trials, troubles, and needs to bring people to the understanding of every person's desperate need for Jesus.

Has someone you've been called to serve lost a loved one? It's an opportunity for faith and trust that can lead to inexpressible joy from a place of sorrow. Is someone you love fighting against addiction? It's an opportunity to endure with them to show your faith is genuine, purified like gold. Your endurance will bring attention to God through His mighty work in your life and, if that person is willing, his/her life, as well. When you have endured, you can rejoice no matter the outcome because God is faithful.

No matter the temporary enduring, no matter the temporary outcome, the finale is joy... like celebratory fireworks and elation. Joy.... Not temporary happiness... inexpressible joy.

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice!

- Philippians 4:4 NLT



Trust Him to use whatever you are enduring. In the midst of it, rejoice. When it's done, rejoice. Before you can see the light at the end of the tunnel, rejoice.

Beth Meverden is the author of *Training Your Child* (bethmeverden.com).

Broken Promises:

The Christmas That Could Have Been

Most of us expect that Christmas will be a happy and joyful time. For many it is a difficult and sad time. Some people are drawn to remember their past and the broken promises that still have current consequences. Thoughts wander with regrets about what could have been, or should have been, if only ‘they’ had not broken their promise. For some, broken promises have brought about divorce, debt, disease, depression, drugs and maybe even death.

While it may seem reasonable to think that God does not care about your situation, this Christmas could be the time when you begin to see in a new way the One who has never broken a promise and never will. God does care about your miseries and the sufferings of humankind and has lovingly proven it by keeping His promises. Christmas can remind us afresh that God has kept and is keeping His promises even in the messes we have made.

From the beginning when Adam and Eve first rebelled and became alienated from God, God promised Jesus the Messiah, the Savior/Deliverer, who would come to deal with the consequences of a messed-up world by defeating death and destroying Satan.

Christmas’ Emmanuel, God with us, can give us joy even in the midst of our sorrow, sadness, sin, suffering and selfishness. While others have promised you something but then failed to follow through, Jesus came to be born so he could die to pay the price of death for our sins, for our failures. That first promise came when Adam and Eve sinned and God said He would send One who would crush Satan. Then God promised Abraham that from Him “all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” In fact, there are over 200 promises /predictions in the Old Testament part of the Bible that speak of Jesus’ first coming. Along with those promises, there are over 300 promises and prophecies speaking of His coming again!

God will not lie. He promised us a Savior who died and then rose from the dead and who is now in Heaven preparing a place for all who have trusted in Him--to those who have said yes to Jesus to take their life and transform it for God’s glory.

This Christmas remember 2 Corinthians 1:20; “For all the promises of God find their Yes in Him [Jesus]. That is why it is through Him [Jesus] that we utter our Amen to God for His glory.”

He promises to never leave us or forsake us. He promises to be with us through the fire and the floods. He promises us forgiveness, friendship, family, faith, freedom, to be fishers of men, a fulfilling life now and a future in Heaven with Him forever! With the angels we can say; “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased”, Luke 2:14. He is pleased with those who will turn from evil and turn to Him in faith—to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,” John 1:12. He is pleased with you when you put your trust in Him.

As we remember the Christmas promises, which all came true, let’s remember all God in Christ has promised to us who are His children. Christmas is Emmanuel—God with us! As you reflect on the Christmas season, on Christ’s first coming and His coming again, remember He has come for you. Rejoice and may the joy of the Lord be your strength today, Nehemiah 8:10.



Questions to Journal:

1. Can you think of another promise God has given you that has encouraged you in the past? If you can’t think of one, is there someone you could call or text and ask them to share with you some promises from God?
2. Can you think of a situation or circumstance in the past where Jesus brought joy?

No matter your circumstances trust Christ, for “*all the promises of God find their YES*” in Jesus Christ - 2 Corinthians 1:20 ESV

Tom and Barbara Ward minister to Sindhis in Pakistan and around the world.
Learn more at worldventure.com/AsianFriendship2021

I Know Not Where I Go

I know not where I go, but know with whom
I brave these bleak and beauty-broken lands
And know that though he leads me through the tomb
Yet even there my life is in his hands;

Like Christ I cannot see around the bend
Of death except believe the Father's call
And pour my life out, trusting him to mend
This tattered soul so ravaged by the Fall—

For all the paths of God will end in pure
Unmingled good to every heir of grace
And though the world would with its fires lure
Its warmth cannot compare to his embrace.

So lead me through the valleys when you must,
My Father—only this: help me to trust.

Questions to Journal:

1. Psalm 23:4 NIV declares, *“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”* Yet Psalm 13:1a ESV achingly asks, *“How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?”* The psalms remind us that God invites both our faith-filled hope and our raw, honest questions. In the trials that you (or those close to you) are facing, which of these two psalmists do you most identify with right now? Pray to God in a way that is honest to how you feel. Trust Him to lead you from that place in His way and His timing.
2. For further reading, read the devotional on which this sonnet is based: *“September 18, Evening”* from **Charles Spurgeon’s Morning and Evening**.

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”

- John 10:27 NIV

Michael Stalcup works among the Central Thai people, one of the largest unreached people groups in the world. Learn more at worldventure.com/stalcup2021



Christmas Kings – Facing Abuse

Some of my favorite Christmas memories involve singing Handel’s Messiah with my friends, as part of a large community choir, accompanied by a live orchestra, and performed at the exquisite Academy of Music in Philadelphia. The entire oratorio is composed of scripture verses about Jesus, the prophecies about him as well as their fulfillment. The first half covers the Christmas story, the second half encompasses the Easter story, and the music captures the supernatural grandiosity as well as the human suffering that were part of Jesus’ earthly sojourn.

One thread that runs through the Messiah, as well as through the Scriptures, is the Kingship of Jesus. If you enjoy classical music, I suggest you listen to an online version of “Lift Up Your Heads,” a choral number rejoicing in the King of Glory of Psalm 24:7-8, where Jesus is foretold to be strong and mighty in battle. You can also find references to Jesus as King in Zechariah 9:9-10, the throne room scene of Revelation 20-21, and many other places.

Another king is mentioned in the Christmas story of Matthew 2: King Herod. At first glance, he seems to be doing all the right kingly things: asking for advice from his religious advisers, meeting with visiting dignitaries, and promising to accept the new king. However, God is not fooled. He warns the wise men and Joseph to escape just before Herod flies into a rage and kills all the young boys in Bethlehem, hoping to destroy this new King, baby Jesus.

As kings, both Jesus and Herod had enormous power (Yes, Jesus was a newborn, but he was also still God with limitless power). Not only did they both have an enormous quantity of power, but they had many forms of power at their disposal: physical strength, political pull, social status, money, education, allies, etc. (Jesus intentionally did not tap into those sources of power while he was on earth, but he **did** have them in the spiritual realm and could have used them in the physical realm if he had chosen to do so.) Jesus and Herod used their power very differently, not just in what they did, but how they did it and why.

Herod used his power to achieve his own selfish desires at the expense of others, and in so doing, used his power to further weaken, control, or destroy people who were weaker than himself. A tragic example of his abuse of power was the mass murder of young boys in order to keep his throne.

Those of us who have experienced any form of abuse (physical, emotional, financial, spiritual, sexual, or another form) may not be surprised to learn that ALL abuse stems from an abuse of power. Every abusive act involves a power imbalance that is misused for selfish gain: the weaker/poorer/less-connected/less-educated person is taken advantage of, by force or coercion.

Abuse damage goes far beyond the event itself. Afterwards we feel like less of a person and more like a thing to be manipulated for someone else's gain, we feel weaker and so less able to protect ourselves and others from abusers, and we feel more cynical or suspicious, making it harder to trust (even trust our own instincts). God knows this, and I suspect that is part of the reason He is adamant about the proper use of power.

God's Word is clear that we should use our power to help those who are vulnerable and weak, lift them up, make them stronger, give them the tools to protect themselves, and teach them that it is right to protect themselves from abusers. In Proverbs 31:8-9 NLT, another king, Lemuel, received clear instructions from his mother as to how he should use his power. She told him to *"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, ensure justice for those being crushed... speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice."* Jesus, our King, was a perfect example of using one's power for good. He used his power to obey the Father for our benefit. It is breathtaking to understand Jesus' birth through the lens of Philippians 2:6-8 – Jesus used his power to divest himself of his divine privileges, so that he could become a helpless human baby!

Think about this: since he was able to do all those miracles, he could have earned enough money to live luxuriously, he could have bought his way into high society, he could have gone into politics (that's what his disciples thought he would do!), and he could have had all the trappings of human power. Instead, he chose to live in poverty, he eschewed fame and politics, which made him look weak. In doing so, he put himself in a position to become abused. The leaders made fun of him (emotional abuse), tried to use religion to control him (spiritual abuse), stripped him naked (shaming and sexual abuse), and tortured and killed him (physical abuse). Why did he live as though he were weak, even though he was strong? In order to become the sacrifice for our sin – it was all because of love, to complete the Father's plan to rescue us. Jesus used his power for our good, even when it was the ultimate sacrifice to do so. What amazing love!

Handel's Messiah provides an awesome rendition of the end of the story, when God exalts Jesus as a reward for using his own power for the good of the most helpless of all: helpless sinners. The familiar "Hallelujah Chorus" put to music Paul's sentiments in Philippians 2:9-11 NLT: *"God elevated him [Jesus] to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all names."*

Let's think about how this helps us live and work in a way that pleases God. First, everyone has some level of power over someone else. You and I may have authority over an employee, or more money than a neighbor may, or a better support system than someone in our small group, or we are physically larger than our children, or we are more knowledgeable about "the way things work around here" than a recent immigrant family. Do we take advantage of those weaker people for our own benefit? Or do we utilize our power to help them? Do we actively look out for those who are weaker in some way, protecting them from the abuse of others?

Second, everyone has some level of vulnerability in comparison with others around them. You and I should do what it takes to protect ourselves from the abuse of others, look for help from safe people around us, and find ways to build up our weak areas. That too pleases God.

Finally, we can help people who have recently been abused. A person who has been abused needs to be and feel safe. If he/she does not have a place to live away from abusers, it is important to help them find a safe place to live with adequate food, clothing, medicine, and education. We can be the biggest help by being a safe companion in the healing journey: never blaming a victim of abuse, listening well, reminding them that the abuse was not their fault, showing them compassion, offering real help with the circumstances of life, and constantly reminding them that they are important to you and to God. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NLT applies here beautifully! *"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed."* While this passage gives practical examples of two people working together, it is just as applicable in the emotional realm. Healthy companionship is the best way to keep a problem from developing into a crisis, or a crisis from developing into long-term trauma. Of course, if someone is experiencing long-term trauma, it is important to also help him or her find competent professional help.

We must understand how an imbalance of power sets the stage for abuse of power. Selfishness motivates it, and that drives abusive behavior. When someone has experienced abuse, it is helpful to look back at the situation and analyze the power imbalance: in what way was the survivor vulnerable? In what way was the abuser more powerful? What did the abuser do to trap, manipulate, or overpower the survivor? This is especially valuable as a way to help a survivor comprehend that the abuse was not their fault. Unfortunately, abuse survivors usually believe

that the abuse was their fault, and it takes loving persistence to help them realize that that is not true.

If you would like more ways to help survivors of abuse, I can recommend two books by Diane Langberg: *On the Threshold of Hope*, and *Counseling Survivors of Sexual Abuse*.

May the birth of Jesus remind us that he used his limitless power to make himself weak and to redeem us for an eternal loving relationship with himself. Handel's Messiah ends where that eternity begins, with the words from Revelation 5:12-13. Let's join the eternal choir, singing "*Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, and hath redeemed us to God by His blood, to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing. Blessing and honor, glory and power be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen.*"

Karen Shogren serves in Costa Rica in theological education. Learn how to support her at worldventure.com/shogren2021





The Perfect Gift of a White Christmas?

“...and may all your Christmases be white.” This famous Christmas song, *I’m Dreaming of a White Christmas*, is perhaps the most recorded song in history. Irving Berlin, a Jewish Russian immigrant who did not even celebrate Christmas, wrote this song. His infant son had died on Christmas day in 1928 and he and his wife visited the grave every Christmas afterward. Something prompted him to compose a song that people connected with Christmas since it first became popular. However, he may actually have written the song in a hotel in sunny Southern California in the summer.

Many people dream of waking up on Christmas day to a white blanket of snow covering everything in sight. That was never the case in Northeast Brazil where we lived and worked for 18 years. Brazil is south of the equator and therefore Christmas comes during the summer months when it is very hot (as compared to the Brazilian “winter” when it is just hot). Brazilian winters never see snow, and in North Brazil, the temperature seldom dropped below 80...ever. The only white Christmas we experienced in Northeast Brazil was if we went to the beach and imagined the white sand was snow—never could quite get to that place in my imagination.

Many of the Christmas traditions in Europe and North America center on cold weather: icicles, snowmen, sleighs, sleigh bells, snowflakes, hot chocolate, chestnuts roasting on an open fire, Jack Frost nipping at your nose (who or what is Jack Frost?), etc.

How easy it is to enjoy the holiday traditions and forget the true meaning of the celebration. For those who understand the true meaning of this celebration, it is not dependent on the weather. However, there is something in the symbolism of snow that point to the true meaning of Christmas. The holy child born of a virgin was the sinless Son of God who made it possible for us to be cleansed from our sins and to be seen in God’s eyes as white as snow.

Isaiah, who prophesied about the coming of the Messiah, wrote this verse at the beginning of his book:

Come now, let us reason together (settle the matter), says the LORD. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. (Is 1:18).

Later, Paul tells the young pastor Titus that Jesus, the Messiah came to earth and “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14). Fresh, clean, super white snow is a good symbol of purity and represents well our cleansed souls. This cleansing came about through the work of Jesus on earth.

May all your Christmases be white because of the cleansing blood of Jesus’ sacrifice to purify us from our sins—that is why he came.



Questions to Journal:

- Why do you think Isaiah used snow as an example of a life cleansed of sin by God?
- What are other symbols of Christmas that point to the true meaning of Christ’s coming to this earth to redeem and purify us?

Jim Thorp is the Global Director of the Americas. Learn how to support him at worldventure.com/thorp2021

THE PRACTICE OF LAMENTING

We have all had times in our lives where everything is as we think it should be. We are calm, happy, and content. We are in control. We are getting what we want. Life is good. Then, something happens, and the snow globe of our hearts is shaken vigorously beyond our control. We are left to wait on the snow to settle or to continue in the blizzard without knowing when it will end. In such a state, loneliness can become more pronounced because it seems like the snow only billows around us and in our spheres—no one else notices, and if they do, their perception of what is happening differs from our felt reality.

In times such as this we can lean on the examples set forth in the Psalms—specifically the psalms of lament.

In his book interpreting the Psalms, Mark Futato describes the lament psalms as songs of disorientation. **A lament psalm typically has various parts: address to God, review of God's faithfulness in the past, complaint, confession of sin or claim of innocence, request for help, God's response, and a vow to praise or a statement of trust in God.** Out of these, the only essential part is the complaint to God. Most, but not all, lament psalms end with a statement of trust in God or praise of Him. *"The Psalms as a whole invite us to call out to the One who is at the same time the Almighty God of the universe and the ever-so-close personal LORD,"* writes Futato. We are given permission to honestly express all that we are thinking and feeling. The process of lament becomes a journey from disorientation caused by an event to orientation to the Almighty Triune God.

Lamenting also provides an opportunity for us to orient ourselves to others, to connect outside of the encased snow globe. The Psalms were meant to be sung in worship, specifically community worship. It was an act to be done together whether singing songs of thanksgiving (Psalms 30, 34) or singing songs of lament (Psalms 13, 26, 88). Scholars estimate that 40-70% of the Psalms could

be classified as lament psalms. In comparison, less than 5% of modern worship songs are songs of lament. We have lost the ability as the community of God to grieve well together, and therefore, we are losing the ability to reorient ourselves as a community to the only One who is and can be what we need in times of disorientation. Community is important to grieving and healing.

In this Advent season, I invite you to sit and lament.

- What is it that has shaken the snow globe of your heart?
- What do you need to lament?
- What in your heart is preventing you from partaking in joy?

Be honest—honest with yourself and honest before God. Cry out to Him and complain. He wants to hear from you and connect with you. Write out your grief in a psalm of lament. As you do, stay open to how God is leading you and reorienting you back to Him. Do not rush the process. When you are ready, find a trusted person with whom you can share your lament. Lamenting does not resolve our complaint, but it does aid us in reorienting our focus on the One who is steadfast and unchanging.

A Lament of Goodbyes

O LORD, God of all comfort,

This hurts.

My heart aches—physically and emotionally aches—

And I long to see their faces again.

May I see their faces again.

Let me see their faces again.

Let me hold them in my arms again.

Let me hear their voices and laughter again.

Let us have what we once had again.

I beg You.

“This is just goodbye for now, but not forever.”

Tomorrow is not guaranteed.

“It’s good if it’s sad because then you have loved.”

But that doesn’t take away the pain, the longing, the emptiness.

“Until then!”

Until when?!

“Parting is such sweet sorrow.”

Such sentiments often ring hollow.

Why, O LORD, must we live in a world of goodbyes?

They seem constant and at times never-ending.

But that is not the whole truth.
You are constant, Lord.
Faithful and compassionate
Abiding and comforting
Sustaining and the giver of solace
Waiting with open arms to soothe the pain of goodbye.
For all time, in all times.

O LORD, God of all comfort,
This goodbye still hurts.
But You are here, You see my pain.
I am not alone.
You are here holding me, comforting me, crying with me.
I am not alone.
No matter which goodbyes I must endure,
I will turn to You.
I will come to You in honesty, not withholding myself.
I will draw near to You.
You are here.

Selah

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze... So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

~ Isaiah 43:2 and 41:10 NIV



Beth Horn serves in Austria. You can learn how to support her by going to worldventure.com/bhorn2021

Write A Lament

1. Address to God
2. Review of God's faithfulness in the past
3. Complaint
4. Confession of sin or claim of innocence
5. Request for help
6. God's response
7. A vow to praise or a statement of trust in God



I Spy God

DAY 11

My grandkids love to play, “*I spy with my little eyes*”, especially in the car.

I spy with my little eyes something red and white.

I spy with my little eyes something blue and gold.

However, what if I say, I spy with my little eyes God’s presence?

When Jesus was eight days old, Joseph and Mary took him to the temple to be consecrated to the Lord per the Law’s requirement. While there, a righteous and devout man, Simeon, recognized Jesus as the Messiah whom he was awaiting. Going up to the couple, he took Jesus in his arms and praised God for the salvation that would come to both Jews and Gentiles through this baby. At that very moment Anna, a faithful widow serving in the temple, also came up to them. Like Simeon, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem. (Luke 2: 22-38)

Anna was going about what she had been doing for probably sixty years – worshipping and serving God. Simeon wasn’t present at the temple courts, but he was so sensitive to God’s leading that he “heard” the Holy Spirit sending him there at just the right time. Simeon and Anna both lived with the expectancy of seeing the Messiah – of seeing God!

How easy it is to go about our daily tasks as well as service for God with a pre-occupied mind, taking note of circumstances and people, but not really looking for what God is doing or where he is present. This Advent let’s purpose to spy with our little eyes God around us - his grace, his work, his gifts, his blessings, his kindnesses, his peace - in the midst of our preparations for and while celebrating our Savior’s birth.

When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God . . . Luke 2:27b-28 NIV

Jake Custer is in Mobilization. Learn how to support them at worldventure.com/dcuster2021.



Where's the Joy?

It has been almost two years since whispers of a new and dangerous disease started to swirl, first in Asia, then exploding across the world. Like a flash flood, COVID turned from tiny raindrops to waves of angry water raging across countries and our hearts leaving destruction and fear in its wake. That's just the headlines.

Personally, we've watched helplessly as the lives of friends or loved ones slipped away. We've been lonely, socially distanced, cut off from the people we love, and the activities we enjoy.

Then comes Christmas, and we read words that may be familiar...

*"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause **great joy for all the people.**'"* Luke 2:8-10 NIV (Emphasis added.)

In the midst of pandemic, war, religious persecution, racial tension, political unrest, and isolation, where's the joy?

For 77 consecutive days over the past year, a group of us gathered via Zoom to pray for a dear friend, Laura, who was also my Bible study leader. She spent 11 weeks (6.5 weeks in ICU) hospitalized and battling COVID. I can tell you that in the first days and weeks, we struggled to find the joy.

For that matter, where was the joy "advertised" at Jesus' birth? The Jewish nation was enslaved by a cruel dictatorship. Jesus' family had neither prestige nor wealth. His ministry aroused hatred from religious leaders and scorn even from family members. Seemingly, His life ended in a horrific death. On the face of it, it is hard to see the joy.

Yet, in all of these situations, we are assured that there is joy:

*"fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. **For the joy** set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."* - Hebrews 12:2-3 NIV.

So where's the joy?

It's the same place it's always been; in fixing our eyes on the God and Savior who stands with us in our tears and despair, doubt and anger, fear and isolation, who loves us so much that He didn't spare His only Son, who gives strength when we grow weary, and who provides brothers and sisters to stand beside us (albeit via Zoom) in the midst of our darkest days.

I asked Laura where joy has come from since her miraculous recovery. She replied, *"In learning that my Bible study kept going. In hearing from people I don't even know, 'I prayed for you.' In seeing my family draw closer."*

My additions to her list are:

- Seeing people commit to prayer.
- Grow in their faith.
- Live like God is at work even in a pandemic.

The less that I think it is all about me, and the more that I realize it is all about **Him**, the more joy infiltrates my heart and life.

Where are you looking for joy?

Grace Sandeno leads public health initiatives. Learn how you can support her at worldventure.com/sandeno2021



Peace to Those on Whom His Favor Rests – YOU!

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."

- Luke 2:13-14 NIV

Happy Christmastide, Dear Reader. I hope your holiday season is kicking off well and has been a time of loved ones and slowing down to truly celebrate Christmas. Yet those things, especially slowing down, can be difficult this time of year, as the marketed holiday ramps us into materialistic overdrive. Throw in a dash of pandemic and a sprinkle of regular concerns of life, perhaps even a pinch of unforeseen issues, and angelic tidings of peace seem foreign and foregone.

Yes, glory to God that Jesus is born! And peace to shepherds two thousand years ago who don't have to worry about a mortgage, a domineering boss, thinning hair, and a little more weight around our midsection than there was last year. God's peace to them and theirs... even though, *hoo boy*, do I want that peace! I am just not feeling it, especially now that the dishwasher has started to leak again.

While I struggle with similar types of distractions and understand how fair they can be, I challenge you to hear the call to peace again and see if you hear what I just did: *"On earth peace to those on whom His favor rests."* **Is it not the truth that, when we don't feel peace, we then often don't feel His favor?** If in a crisis, we can think God has not answered a prayer, has ignored us, or, worse, just doesn't care.

Yet, the Prince of Peace has overcome the world and has encouraged us so that we may have His peace (John 16:33). He has given us His Helper so that we may be gifted peace (Galatians 5:22). That is peace in the here and now. We can be at

peace now. Why? Because we, all who choose to accept Christ's grace, are those on whom His favor rests.

God has chosen you, Reader who decided to be a Christian years ago and you, Reader who recently came to Jesus, and even you, Reader who is not a believer, because God would celebrate if you accepted His grace – for He has given it freely to all of us who worry away on earth when lasting peace is ours to grasp.

This glorious peace is the dawn and light of heaven, shooing away the darkness of death (Luke 1:78-79). Peace from our adopted brother the Prince of Peace heralding in a new era of life abundant to us so that we may, with good purpose and clear conscious, live out the more important part of the angelic herald – glory to God. We glorify God by living in peace – the knowledge that He is come and that He has chosen you and me to be saved!

So, when things in life start to encroach and overwhelm us, let's try practicing P.E.A.C.E.:

Pause,
Evaluate feelings,
Ask God for grounding,
Choose to follow His leading
Embrace God's given peace, glorifying Him.



Questions to Journal:

1. What has you stressed right now?
2. With whom can you share this stress, other than God?
3. What part of P.E.A.C.E. is hardest to practice for you?
4. Do you believe God has chosen you and desires peace for you? Why or why not?

Samuel Knutson serves in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Learn how to support him at worldventure.com/knutson2021

Secret Things

The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

- Deuteronomy 29:29

Secret Things

Loss of home and earthly treasures,
Loss of friends, one cannot measure.
Loss of parents in Covid's wake,
But our God we'll not forsake.

Closing doors and sad good-byes.
Pandemic lock-downs made us cry.
"Why these changes, Lord?" We sigh.
These secret things belong on high.

Loss of home and reputation,
Loss of wedding celebration.
But Mary had no hesitation.
The secret things belong on high.

In a stable born a stranger,
King of glory in a manger.
"Why these hardships, Lord?" We cry.
The secret things belong on high.

He had no home or earthly treasure.
He gave His life, gift beyond measure.
These secret things, He knows alone
To give us hope, our sins atone.

So, through the darkness let us rest
In You, our Savior who knows best,
That secret things belong to You
But things revealed we still must do.

Lord, give us courage in these days
To not lose heart or be dismayed
By secret things we cannot know,
But learn your Word and in it grow

And teach our children these truths too,
That secret things belong to You.
But in this life, we give our all
Until you come with trumpet call.

To take us home where we will see
More clearly there than now can be,
For we shall see You face to face
This journey done, a finished race.

Are you struggling with the secret things you do not understand? Can you give them over to the only One who does, and focus on the wonderful truths He has revealed in His Word?

Susan Griffith served in Singapore with her husband, Rick for 30 years, recently transitioning to Jordan. Learn how you can support them at worldventure.com/griffith2021.



Sure and Steadfast Anchor

We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. - Hebrews 6:19-20 ESV

The reality of being an ICU nurse can be cold and brutal, and reflecting back over the past 15 years of healthcare, the number of senseless deaths and suffering witnessed is too numerous to recount. A few reflections follow through the decades of life:

- 16-year-old car surfer. Failed. Ventilator dependent. Went to nursing home.
- 25-year-old accidental overdose at a party. 1 month in ICU. Unsuccessful. Died.
- 32-year-old youth pastor with fractured c-spine from bike accident. 4 kids. Paralyzed.
- 42-year-old pedestrian vs vehicle. Husband out of town on business. 17-year-old son makes decision to withdraw care since Dad is on the airplane to come home. Died.
- 58-year-old physician seeing patients on the 5th floor. Heart attack. Gone.
- 62-year-old otherwise healthy. Swine flu. Now oxygen dependent. Went home.
- 79-year-old shot in back by disgruntled neighbor over placement of trash can on front curb. 9 weeks in ICU. Countless weeks in rehab. Went home. 2 weeks later back with pneumonia. Died.
- 88-year-old stage 4 lung cancer. 5-pack per/day smoker for 50+ years. Fell off lawn mower and fractured femur. Died.
- 95-year-old died from old age.
- 100-year-old heart stopped momentarily. Pacemaker. *"I think I have another 15 left in me. That's what they tell me the life of the battery is on this thing"* Went home.

The wretched reality of life under the sun is this is only an iota of the suffering experienced in the world around us. How do we even begin to understand the “why” behind the above or any other tragic loss of life or suffering, for that matter? Still, in each of these instances there was an element that was either very clearly present or very clearly absent - the anchor! Those whose hope in the Lord was clear held fast to the anchor that is sure and steadfast.

The sweetness of Jesus is that He identifies with us in these sufferings having experienced all the brutal physical pain and suffering on the cross. It is at the cross that He determined to set His anchor knowing full well that it was at this place that He would become the rejected, despised, afflicted, and broken one. The image of an anchor bears within it the picture of the cross, and in this sense, I see the beauty of this message in Hebrews. Despite what the cross represents, the sure and steadfast anchor of our soul is more true and certain than any overwhelming wave of suffering and pain we might endure in this life. It is the anchor of our life that we can depend upon. It is sure and true!

We often think of Jesus’ life of suffering beginning and ending with the cross, but the reality is that Jesus entered into the world already in suffering, after all the manger was no 5-star hotel. He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, as the passage in Isaiah says, but there is beauty in the beatitude which says, “*Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*” (Matthew 5:4 NIV) Who better to find comfort in than the sure and steadfast anchor of our soul!



Questions to Journal:

- What do you hold fast to in the midst of life’s trials and circumstances, and what passages of Scripture do you hold in your mind as a reminder of His steadfastness?
- How might you be able to encourage someone else (or stir up someone else as Hebrews says) through your prior trials and seeing the steadfast anchor of your soul?

Nick Sullivan serves in Myanmar teaching CHE, a mission strategy, to Bible College students. Learn how to support him at worldventure.com/sullivan2021.

We'll Walk in the Light

We will walk in the light, beautiful light, come where the dewdrops of mercy shine bright. Shine all around us by day and by night. Jesus the light of the world! - We'll Walk In The Light (George Elder, Charles Wesley)

Walking was my favorite pastime as a child. I don't mean exercise. What I mean is walking in the beauty of both nature and people. My reputation as a girl was looking for the best and most beautiful everywhere I walked. The unknown didn't scare me to my parent's amazement. The only thing that slowed me down was darkness because, in Texas, there was usually a cockroach—a big, flying cockroach. I needed a little light to see where to put my feet.

I always kept my eyes open for the light—truth, beauty, joy, and happiness. I expected nothing less, but then came adulthood.

Being mistreated blew my mind! Being misunderstood broke my heart. Dealing with the doubts of many people confused me. Considered to be less than was shocking. In my first moment of severe hurt, I expected someone around me to come in and see the beauty, hope, promise, and joy that I could not find. As they walked in darkness, they surely couldn't see or understand my needs. BUT God!

The most wonderful gift I had were Christian parents and a Spirit-filled church family. I took a deep breath and had the good sense to breathe in The Light. I remembered that Jesus said if I just walked in complete conformity to what I know He is, my fellowship with other people would be true, and I'd stay completely clean from sin in any way that it might try to approach me (1 John 1:7). I remembered that I had to walk while I had light, because that light would guide me directly, would fill me. I just had to trust the light (John 12:35-36). The most wonderful thing of all was that, as I remembered to walk in Him, darkness was no more!

Believers today are facing much darkness in the world. That darkness is

overtaking many of us, making us believe that there is a 'them' and an 'us' right here in the body of Christ. The darkness is leading us to believe that people are our leaders and making us forget that there is no one person among us right now that is The Light, causing us to forget that we truly have The Light within us; the Light that brought us out of darkness into marvelous light and knows everything that surrounds us! This Light blinds darkness, the darkness that is sometimes right there inside of us.

My fear of darkness went away. It disappeared the moment I accepted the call into global missions. It has never been able to return (Now the cockroach issue did not flee - but the darkness did).

We sang this song last Christmas at my home church. The words speak to my heart even now and I hope they speak to yours!

Hark the Herald Angels Sing! Jesus the light of the world! Glory to the newborn king! Jesus the light of the world!

Questions to Journal:

- As you see darkness around you, do you remember to ask Him to fill you with The Light so that darkness on the inside will be driven away?
- Do you remember to listen and submit so that The Light will have full control?

Jan Chinn leads international workers toward strategic Gospel engagements across Africa. Learn how to support Jan Chinn at worldventure.com/chinn2021



He is Enough For Today

The sitting room in the large hospital in Taiwan felt like it swallowed my newborn. My daughter, Layla, was hooked up to numerous beeping machines that were monitoring her health - her breaths were labored, her face pale, and skin bruised from so many IV sticks. I couldn't wake up from this nightmare! In a sleepy stupor at all hours of the night, I was trying to communicate in Chinese and understand what was going on with Layla. As I sat there, and spent endless hours counting my daughter's shallow inhales and exhales day after day, I wondered and questioned what God was doing in my life.

Our family was going through the darkest season we had ever seen thus far—some of our greatest fears in life were becoming daily realities. My husband and I had just made the decision that, in the coming months, we needed to move back to the states in order to care for our family, and we were crumbling out of devastation. All our hopes and dreams of serving our beloved country of Taiwan were shattered. We were angry, confused and beyond exhausted. Within a month, our dreams were slipping through our fingers and being packed in boxes with all our belongings. We had walked through a family death, had given birth to our daughter, and now I was watching that same precious life struggle to breathe! ***Why had God called us across the world for us to now be walking through so much pain and suffering?***

As I sat awake during many sleepless nights in that hospital room, I looked God in the face and asked the hard questions. ***Where was He? How could this happen to us? How is a sovereign God good in this situation? How would we ever survive this? What did our future hold? Did God even care?*** I had shaken my fists at him for a long time in anger at what was going on in our life. I felt that we had stepped out in faith to follow Him and then He had abandoned us.

What have you walked through in your life that has brought you to a place of crumbling? How has that made you feel? My friend, let us just sit with those feelings for a moment.

Your pain, however you view and hold it, is very real and valid. There are no words to fix what has happened. When you try to explain what's going on or the devastation you've walked through, the feeble words that are uttered don't even encompass the smallest piece of the brokenness you feel. Where have you turned to in the rawness of your pain? When you sit in the pain or recall the memory of that time, where do you see Jesus, or do you see him at all? What are we to do when all aspects of our faith are being stripped away and it feels like we're left with nothing?

Grief is a devastating thing to sit with. As my family and I have walked through immense pain in our lives, I have come to realize everyone has a story that holds grief whether recognized or not. Sometimes we can anticipate grief, and other times it knocks us out unexpectedly at the knees. Whether a death, loss of a dream, transition to a new home, a new diagnosis or maybe a child moving out, no grief is too little to recognize and grieve. Let these words sink in a little more - no grief is too small to recognize and grieve. Our culture puts pressure on us to process through our grief, put on a smile and "move on." ***But what happens when the brokenness of our situation is staring us in the face day after day? Life is not the same, and never will be again, but how do we hold that tension? How do we trust God through it all? Is God even worth trusting?***

Months after being in that hospital room, I was up again in the early morning hours rocking my healthy, precious daughter in my arms. This time, not in that same hospital room, but my new home in the states where I didn't want to be living. I faced endless questions, fears and transitions while also trying to figure out what to make for dinner and navigating kids' homework. I looked out the window and sighed as the morning lights danced in colors of pink, purple and blue across the sky. My sleeping, peaceful baby was in my arms and the promise of a new day in beautiful evidence outside my window. ***I took a deep breath and knew that God's presence was blossoming a tiny bud of hope in my heart. He was bringing new mercies into the day and that was enough.***

Today, can we just sit with the presence of what the day holds? I don't know what your pain looks like with Jesus right now, and whatever that looks like is okay. Can we give ourselves permission to sit with just today, and let the daunting reality of tomorrow come then? Our Heavenly Father is strong enough and welcomes our questions of doubt and pain. On the other hand, if you can't engage Him, He's willing to just sit and give you His presence. I

imagine His caring eyes looking into yours, and He's saying, "I'm right here and I'm sad with you."

With grief, if we project what the coming months and years down the road will hold, the unknown and the fears can crush us. If we sit with something more manageable—just today—that is enough.

I have wrestled with and clung to many verses in this season, but one that has anchored me is Matthew 6:34. The Message summary version put this in such a beautiful way,

"Give your entire attention to what God is doing right now, and don't get worked up about what may or may not happen tomorrow. God will help you deal with whatever hard things come up when the time comes."

Let's sit with what God may be inviting us into today. I pray you feel Him holding you today - His strong arms wrapped tightly around you, holding and storing each tear that falls.

Let us experience His gifts for today:

- A kind word
- The vastness of the stars
- A smile
- Grace amidst the hard
- The eyelashes of a child
- The warm aroma of bread in the oven

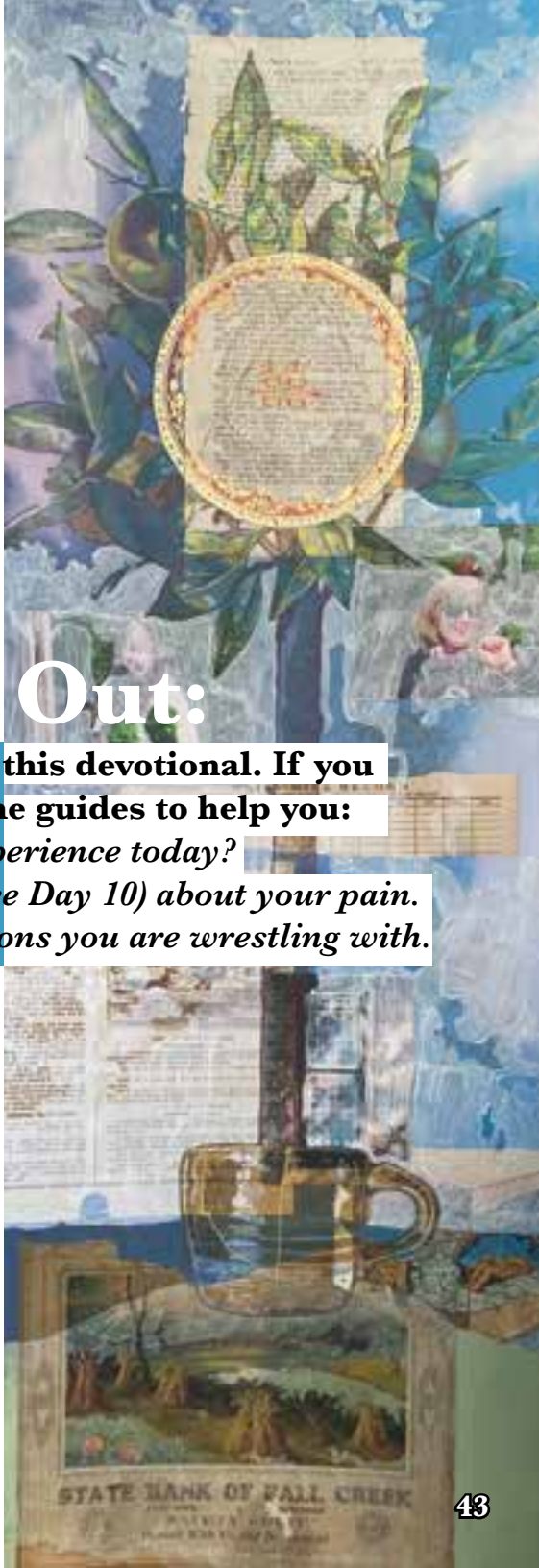
Experience Him in His goodness whatever that looks and feels like to you. My friend, He will make the sun rise tomorrow morning, and He will be faithful to do it all over again day after day. He is enough for us today and will be enough tomorrow. He may never give us the answers to the painful questions we wrestle with this side of Heaven, but He is there holding us in the wrestling and will continue to hold us and be with us each day as we wake up and face our reality again. He is enough for today.

Brianna Brown and her family serve in Diaspora ministry. Learn how to support the Browns at worldventure.com/thebrowns2021.

Write It Out:

Write out a response to this devotional. If you need help, here are some guides to help you:

- *What gifts did you experience today?*
- *Write out a lament (see Day 10) about your pain.*
- *Write out what questions you are wrestling with.*



Kurt

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said, “do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.” - Matthew 1:18-20 NLT

Kurt is a brilliant master craftsman. He belongs to a small and shrinking class of people so skilled in working with wood that he can build a massive and ornate desk with many drawers and never use one single screw or nail. He knows the quality and the usefulness of wood by sight or touch. Kurt lives in Austria where timber is abundant but precious little of it meets his high standards for the caliber of product he produces.

One cold December day in his workshop he explained to me that trees in the same small forest will vary widely in the quality of their wood. He doesn't want anything to do with a tree that spent its entire existence in the middle of the forest where it was protected by all the other trees around from powerful winds and the battering of storms. Those trees that grew on the exposed edges, and stood up to all the trials that came their way, developed a firmness of fiber and grain character, thus making them fit for the master's most important uses. Wood from those trees could be trusted to maintain their integrity no matter what purpose the master craftsman selected for them.

Joseph and Mary were those kinds of people, entrusted by God to the vital task of being the earthly parents of our Savior. They endured the misunderstanding and challenges to their character, faithfully obeying whatever their Master asked them to do, including this arduous journey to Bethlehem.

Are you and I that reliable? Can we be counted on no matter what storm is raging? Or are we hiding in the middle of the forest protecting ourselves from the growth opportunities God has for us?

Live life on the edge.

Doug Custer is in Mobilization. Learn how to support them at worldventure.com/dcuster2021



Blooming in an Old, Broken Bathtub

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” - Colossians 2:6-7 ESV

Living in a climate where flowers bloom year-round has been a gift for my soul. Amidst the heaviness of ministry with broken marriages, caring for flowers has become a special way to step away and process the burdens I help others carry. After several years of love and tending, it felt like the colorful blooms were finally how I wanted them even as I moved several flowers around, uprooting plants gently to spread them to new places.

We like it when life feels settled and in place. Uprooting—now that’s a scary word. We hope the uprooting we experience will be gentle like moving flowers carefully around in a garden, but more often, it is painful, rough, and unexpected, and instead of feeling carefully transplanted, we can feel like we’ve been ripped out and left to wither and die. A grave illness, a job loss, the death of a loved one, a broken relationship, or a changing world are big changes that leave us feeling ripped from familiar ground, unsure of what comes next.

During the month of March, our city went through many days of heavy rain and flooding. The ground was so heavy that a fault line opened, the retaining wall toppled, and a chunk of our property slid away.

In the midst of a season of stress and fatigue, this was a discouraging blow. I had lost my garden—the special place where my heart found comfort and growth as I weeded, watered, and prayed during quiet times of reflection.

In order to repair the property, we had to excavate, and I had to uproot all the plants that had survived. Having to un-plant my sweet garden was painful. I tried to transfer as much as I could to small pots and buckets, and even the trees were transferred to an old, cracked bathtub.

Now, some months later, the retaining wall is rebuilt, and I am working on replanting. Once again, He is using this time to inspire reflection.

What a gift to see a single rose blooming even as it waited in a bucket ‘until things got better.’ As God’s people, we were created resilient. We go through seasons of change, of painful uprooting, of being temporarily planted in an old, cracked bathtub, waiting anxiously to be back ‘where we belong’, and yet, like that sweet rose in its temporary home, many of us learn to bloom even in uncertainty and despair.

The soil where we are planted makes all the difference. When we stay planted in good soil, reminding our scared and hurting hearts that He cares unceasingly for us, we remain strong, healthy, and resilient. With ‘sonshine’ and nourishment from the life-giving Word, being planted in an old, cracked bathtub no longer is ‘where we’re stuck waiting until things get better,’ but a safe and fertile ground where we can even learn to bloom again as He lovingly tends us through difficult transitions.

Uprootings are hard. Some we choose, but often the most painful ones are thrust on us. This last year, we all faced many unexpected and painful transitions, having to change and adapt over and over again. It wore us down in many ways. Yet our God painstakingly plants us in good and fertile soil, never abandoning us. His plan for our lives is unchanging even when we feel like we’ve been painfully uprooted in unexpected ways. This world will never be a perfect garden, and yet we can always trust the gardener of our soul who has lovingly prepared for us an eternal garden where we will never cease blooming in beautiful thankfulness and worship.



Questions to Journal:

1. What does it take for us to remember that even in the most painful uprooting that the Lord is preparing something new and better for us?
2. Does life have to stop while we are in an old, cracked bathtub? How can we find ways to continue to grow and flourish?

Kristy Messick serves in Ecuador. Learn how to support her and Matt at worldventure.com/messick2021.

Walking Through Deserts

Interstate 10 is a black line of highway that stretches across the Arizona desert between Phoenix and Tucson. Most of that desert is undeveloped. When my sea-faring grandfather saw the desert for the first time, he said it was “ugly and brown.” He didn’t notice the beauty of the desert, yet now I realize that it is all in perception.

In the *Soul of the Camera* by David DuChemin, he wrote, “*Spend a day driving and you’ll see a lot of red cars, but it’s not likely you’ll really pay attention to them. In short, you don’t recognize them. Your eyes work fine, but your brain learns to dismiss information that seems irrelevant. This is pattern recognition, and it’s the same phenomenon that’s responsible for us not noticing the obvious tree or lamppost sticking out of someone’s head until after the photograph is made. The brain sees the tree and identifies it as both distant and unimportant.*” (pg. 47).

We need to retrain our brains.

Immediately, I saw things in the desert such as the tall Saguaro’s that dot the landscape. With their outstretched branches, the Palo Verde trees, all green and sharp, offered relief from the sun. The desert has Jumping Cholla (every hiker’s least favorite cacti) with its almost soft-looking balls of thorns waiting for the wind to push them off to the ground like Fall leaves (or right through your hiking pants). The mountains are jagged and almost cut the blue sky with its peaks. It’s not just brown, shimmering in the summer heat, but alive with different species of animals and plants. How we perceive our surroundings will influence our attitude. Not everything can be ocean, beach, and mild temperatures.

2 Corinthians 1:8-10 says, “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about the troubles we experienced in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us again. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us.”

David Guzik’s commentary suggests five reasons for the trouble that came to Paul: “wild beasts” in Ephesus, suffering 39 stripes, a riot in Ephesus, persecution, or a physically painful issue.

Jeremy Bouma, in his review on Zondervan Academic of a Bible Commentary, quoted Ralph P. Martin’s commentary on Corinth as, “Like most seaports throughout history, Corinth took on an international reputation... Corinth’s chief shrine was the temple of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love and life. In Corinth her cult appeared in a debased form, because of the admixture of certain oriental influences. This meant a low moral tone and sexual perversion in a possibly attested cult of sacred prostitution...” Yet, a church was planted in that environment.

COVID shutdowns touched other countries in ways we in America haven’t experienced. In America, we have places to get food boxes and financial help. We have excellent hospitals and doctors. Communities tried to help each other process what just happened in the past year and a half. What became plain globally was how God still gave His people something to do to reach and help someone in their community using the online world. A Global Worker recently started using social media to help her cope with the shutdowns in her country of service. She chose to change her perception and find a new focus as she walked through her own piece of desert. As we walk through our deserts during Advent, Christmas becomes the intersection where we meet the complexities of family conflict, trauma, and loneliness.

Christmas is a difficult time of year for many people. You might be walking through your own desert right now and find it joyless. You may only see “brown and ugly” in your desert.



May I encourage you today to retrain your brain to look for what God is doing in and around you? Even now, when I go through a desert moment in my life, I know of *“whom we have set our hope”* and I trust that *“... He will yet deliver us”* and bring us through the desert to an oasis where we can find refreshment in the pools of living water (John 4:14).

We will never be thirsty again.



Questions to Journal:

- Read 2 Corinthians 1. Journal your thoughts on this chapter.
- Take a walk through your mind of past traumatic events and disappointments. Journal places where you saw God working in and around you.
- If Christmas is difficult for you, how can you change your perception? What do you need to change in your heart if you can't change your circumstances? Who can you help encourage during this time who is also going through a difficult Christmas?

Go to our prayer wall at worldventure.com/praying for prayer support.

Nikole Hahn serves online as the Digital Disciple-Making Coordinator. Learn more about how to support her at worldventure.com/nhahn2021





The Concept of Kintsugi

DAY 21

Kintsugi: *The Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer dusted or mixed with powdered gold, silver, or platinum...As a philosophy, it treats breakage and repair as part of the history of an object, rather than something to disguise.*

The one-of-a-kind, handmade bowl slipped from wet, soapy hands to shatter on the tiles. It's not like I can buy another one just like this! *"This will never be OK again. I will never be the same again."*

"What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten., and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten..." - Joel 1:4, ESV.

After both my brothers' marriages and faiths fell apart, breaking our family into pieces, I spent much time considering the concept of *Kintsugi* in my prayer and art. At first, I thought redemption meant that God would somehow magically put our family back together the way they were. As I watched my brothers pursue their gods to greater extremes, I realized it was a mercy their wives were freed from them. If restoration does not mean, *"being put together just like it was before,"* what does the restoration of Christ mean?

Consider Job's words: *"My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh..have mercy on me, have mercy on me, Oh you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me?"* (Job 19:20-22 ESV). This is the cry of a man who has lost everything, and then been chided for his grief. People have made assumptions about his character, and told him to "repent," or "just get over it." His ten children had all died on the same day. His wife suggested, *"Curse God and die."* This man needed to grieve.

Thankfully, we worship a Savior who came to bring us joy, but was a man also of sorrow; one who suffered great loss through the suffering and sin of those he loves throughout the ages. He enters into grief with us. It is right to grieve the destruction of something beautiful.

It is also right to hope in the restoration of something new and more beautiful. Job never got his ten children back. He was given ten more children. Any parent who has lost a child knows that newborn or adopted children are not a replacement for the special souls that have gone into the afterlife before them.

As Christians, steeped in a form of triumphalism, we can struggle to walk through grief slowly, and to allow those around us to grieve at their own pace. As we look at the shattered pieces in our hands, not yet pieced together with the gold of the new creation, we take comfort that our Savior weeps with us even as he prepares to raise us from the dead. He will restore. Nevertheless, it is right to grieve, even as Jesus did (John 11).

“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer and the cutter...you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God...”

- Joel 2:25-26 ESV



Questions to Journal:

- What should we expect from God as far as healing? Am I too quick to gloss over my grief, unwilling to sit with my Savior and hold the pieces in my hands?
- What does it look like to “mourn with those who mourn,” (Romans 12:15 NIV) but also not to mourn “as those who have no hope?” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 DRA).

Faith Hampton is the contributing artist. You can learn about her art at faithhampton.com.

When Our Plans Get Interrupted

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.” (Proverbs 16:9 ESV)

When I think of Mary, I like to imagine she was preparing herself for a very “normal” life before the angel Gabriel visited her. She was to be married to Joseph, a carpenter and a descendent from King David. She would hopefully have children and persevere in bringing them up in the ways of the Lord.

All of that changed when Gabriel was sent to tell Mary she had found favor in God’s eyes. No, Mary’s life would not be “normal.” She let go of that dream and responded by saying: *“Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.”* (Luke 1:38a ESV) There was no arguing with Gabriel or asking for time to think it over. Mary’s heart was blessed by Gabriel’s announcement, and she responded with faith and obedience.

Like Mary, most global workers were living “normal” lives when we felt the Holy Spirit leading us to bring Good News to the ends of the earth. It can often be an interruption of our plans and goals. And like Mary, we feel blessed by our calling and so, respond with faith and obedience.

When I think of Joseph, I try to put myself in his shoes and imagine him planning to live quietly and respectably, raising a family, and passing along his trade to his children. He was already engaged to Mary and moving forward with his life plans.

However, when Mary was found pregnant, Matthew’s gospel tells us that Joseph wanted to quietly leave the situation in which he found himself. This was not, after all, how he imagined his life would go. It took an angel in a dream to calm Joseph’s concerns and assure him this was God’s plan. No, Joseph’s life would not be as he had planned, but he adjusted and pivoted and trusted God’s provision (Matthew 1:18-2:23).

Like Joseph, most families of Global Workers weren't expecting their lives to be interrupted by their children, siblings, or grandchildren moving thousands of miles away to share the hope of the Gospel. These family members weren't envisioning video chats over screens, sending gifts abroad, or keeping their passports regularly up to date. Like Joseph, they adjusted and pivoted.

Letting go of dreams, plans, and goals is no easy task. Learning to pivot when our plans are interrupted is challenging, especially if our hearts are aching. So how did Mary and Joseph do it?

Mary put herself in a position to receive assurance and encouragement from her cousin, Elizabeth (Luke 1:39-45), and she turned her attention towards praising God and focusing on His Gospel hope (Luke 1:46-55). Joseph trusted God's leading as he protected Mary and Jesus while fleeing to Egypt and then back to Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-23). Both Mary and Joseph were amazed at each proclamation that Jesus was the Messiah, first by the shepherds, then by Simeon and Anna, and lastly by the wise men.

We, too, can surround ourselves with those who will encourage and bless us. We can turn our hearts toward Gospel hope, clinging to God's promises for today and more importantly for eternity. We can trust God to be our security when our plans get derailed and lean on Him for comfort when our hearts ache over that loss. In the end, we will stand amazed by the work of God in our lives.

Activities to Journal

Read: *"Let Go of the Life You Wanted,"* by Greg Morse
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/let-go-of-the-life-you-wanted>

Activity: Draw or write out your expectations, dreams, goals, or plans that have been interrupted. Then, cover them with another drawing or mark through what you've written as if placing them into graves. Allow this picture to help you release your plans to God in faith and obedience and to trust Him with what lies ahead. (Activity adapted from the book, ***Expectations and Burnout: Women Surviving the Great Commission*** by Sue Eenigenburg and Robyn Bliss, pages 63-64.)

Mandy Post serves in Galway, Ireland. Learn how to support them at worldventure.com/post2021.

In Defense of Hope

In 1971, when I was a preschooler, the Coca-Cola company ran a television advertisement again and again. The visual was of teenagers from all races and all over the world on a mountaintop in Italy singing, *“I’d like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony. I’d like to buy the world a Coke and keep it company...”*

Throughout this past year, that song has run through my mind as I have watched a hurting world reeling from the pandemic, economic devastation, disasters and strife of all sorts. I wished I could do something to ease the pain and hopelessness all around the world, even for a few minutes.

One of my favorite verses is Romans 15:13 HCSB *“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”* I have recently heard that to hope is to be vulnerable, to choose hope is to risk disappointment, and to know that what we hope for might be taken away. The hope we have through Christ *“does not disappoint us, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit”* (Romans 5:5 Berean Literal Bible). In fact, Hebrews 6:19 NET calls it *“an anchor for the soul, sure and steadfast.”*

Christmas is indeed a time of celebrating the hope brought by God becoming man and walking with us, understanding our griefs. It can also offer counterfeit hope; sentimentality, glitter and empty words. As I prayed today about my own daily need for hope, I found myself earnestly asking not only for hope for me, but enough to give to others as well. The verse echoed back: *“...that you may overflow with hope”*. It is God’s desire to give his children hope and give it so abundantly that it can overflow to each other and to a hopeless world.

It is comforting that it is God’s design for me to overflow with hope, even now. Especially now. I have begun to see ways that he leads me to pray for and with people, to reach out to someone only to find that they *“just happen”* to be struggling, to creatively do something kind or fun for someone else.

The last time I wrote about that verse in Romans 15 was in a newsletter—we were in India and our daughter was a baby—in 2001, just after 9/11. So much has happened since then, and God has been faithful all the way. If we are his children, we can rest assured that He is with us and will never leave us or forsake us. (Hebrews 13:5)

It is comforting to know that every person in all of history has been born in their generation because of God's sovereign plan. That is true for me, my children, and anyone reading this, regardless of age. We are who God is sending into this world at this time with his good news, and he has promised to empower us as his hope-bringers.

Remembering God's faithfulness in the past is one of the best ways to have hope for the future:

“Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” - Lamentations 3:21-23 NIV

God's incarnational ministry to this world in Christ is yours also, not just to “keep it company” but to give the life-changing “*defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you*” - 1 Peter 3:15 ESV.



Questions to Journal:

- What comes to mind about God's faithfulness to you? Where have you seen Him come through for you in difficult situations?
- How does He want to use you to bring hope, even if you are in grief or difficulty?

Laura Joseph serves in the Philippines. Learn how to support them at worldventure.com/joseph2021.

Christmas in Transition

Matthew 25:40 “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

Compassion for children in transition was embedded in me long before I was aware of Bolivia. As an infant in South Korea, my birth mother left me on the doorstep of a church. The pastor and his wife took me in for four or five years until they could no longer afford it. I went to an orphanage for 8-10 months until a family in Eugene, Oregon adopted me.

My new dad was German. My mom was Danish. My oldest brother had enrolled in the Air Force. Another brother suffered from a severe speech impediment and mental retardation. He was a ward of the state due to the laws in those days, and I only saw him on the holidays. Like Christmas. Over the years, my parents fostered about 100 kids, adopting two other girls after me.

I don't remember anything before the adoption and very little of my first year in the United States. A psychologist once said that was probably due to the trauma of moving to another country where no one spoke Korean. Finding my birth parents weren't important to me. It was essential to one of my sisters. She went on the Korean version of PBS and located her birth family. Both mother and father, however, were deceased. She met some half-siblings and cousins. The picture of her mother was striking as it looked like my sister in another era.

My mom's influence lives on in me. The indirect ways my mom did what she could, taking in children others would reject—usually those suffering from mental or physical handicaps—especially when Juvenile Hall was overcrowded, built a sense of empathy. Kids in foster situations need attention and will grasp for any attention, even if it is negative. They are desperate for love, battle trust issues, and feelings of abandonment. We see the same things in the Transition Home.

Since moving to Bolivia and starting the transition home for girls leaving orphanages, Christmas has a different focus, more outward and simpler. We try to create a family atmosphere in the Transition Home. The orphanages vary in how Christmas is celebrated, but it is minimal due to a lack of funds. The girls come to us at some point after their 18th birthday and before their 19th birthday. The laws in Bolivia require boys and girls to leave the orphanages no later than their 19th birthday.

Most are not true orphans. They end up in orphanages because of abandonment, or the government has removed them from their homes for various unhappy reasons. Celebrating Christmas becomes crucial.

We decorate, play Christmas music, watch Christmas movies, bake goodies to share, hang stockings, and wrap an abundance of small, inexpensive gifts for each of our girls. The presents are a tangible reminder that someone is thinking of them and cares for them. Regardless of their past situations, they all have abandonment issues, a longing to be loved and belong. Most are emotionally immature and still very childlike. Most have been through trials that many of us can only imagine in our nightmares.

Therefore, the wonder of Christmas is easy to be caught up in, overcoming their shyness and reluctance to trust and love. It is the perfect time to share the story of Christ's birth and why he came. And to tell of his great love for each of them, that we love them because he first loved us (1 John 4:19). For that and many other reasons, Christmas is my favorite holiday of the year. And no matter what transitions you may be experiencing in your life, I wish you a Merry Christmas, and I hope you'll join me in sharing the love of Christ with others in need.

Questions to Journal

- If you have come from a childhood in transition (fostering, orphanages, adoption), journal out how God brought you to Himself through your experiences. Write out where you saw God act in your life.
- If you foster kids, how do you see God trying to get their attention?
- How can you help an orphan? Sending gifts or money is the easy answer, but do it wisely and carefully. You can sponsor a child in an orphanage and invest time to get to know them. Visit them often. At least one sponsoring organization allows you to visit with limits. How can you help an orphan who is over eighteen? Most sponsorships end at age eighteen, but we have found out that our girls need financial support to attend higher education for a better life.

The Gift of Gratitude

Merry Christmas! Christmas and Thanksgiving were usually special times for my family. We didn't have much, but it never felt like we were deprived at the holidays. We were excited to get the few gifts that came our way. The best part of it all was being together. We played games, did puzzles, and laughed a lot together. However, the holidays took on a very different feel for me one year.

After Thanksgiving, our attention turned to Christmas shopping and other preparations. I was a young teenager and I had drawn my sister, Audrey's name. She was nineteen, and there would be plenty of things she would enjoy getting. My problem was that the doctors had sent her home to die. She had a brain tumor. What do you give someone who is not going to live more than a few weeks or months? As I focused on that, I became depressed and the impending loss felt more real.

Audrey didn't die that Christmas. Instead, she lived for many more years than the doctors ever thought possible. She learned to read and write all over again and eventually was able to live on her own. During those extra years God gave, she impacted many lives. Her life was not easy, but her heart was big. As she continued to live, I realized my shortsightedness. My attitude affected my holidays.

Years later, I look at how we spend the holidays. I do not live close to my family, so there rarely is a family gathering. Without the special time with family, Thanksgiving can be just another day off work. While I may focus on giving thanks that day, I miss the underlying issue. Audrey modeled being grateful every day of the year. Her extra years were filled with gratitude. Each year on the anniversary of her surgery, she brought a birthday cake to choir practice. It was a thank you celebration for another year of life. Her life taught me that I should focus on the many things I can be thankful for, not just at Thanksgiving.

In the USA, Thanksgiving ends, and before we even finish celebrating the day, we run straight into Christmas preparations. Stores don't wait for one holiday to end before they promote the next one. The days become a frenzy of activities, shopping, and preparations for the Christmas feast. Looking at the season from the outside, it looks like a bunch of people hoping for what they will receive, buying things they want, and making sure their gifts to others are "good enough." By the time Christmas comes, we are exhausted and, often times, depressed. This takes us into the New Year with a negative perspective rather than anticipation of what the year will bring.

As the pandemic drags on, it is difficult to keep perspective. People lose jobs and find it difficult to find new jobs at the same income level. Do you know of individuals losing their homes due to financial difficulty? Many are dealing with the grief of losing loved ones or crushed hopes and plans for the future. Christmas on a "good" year can be a time of sadness, anxiety, or depression. How do we make Christmas a positive thing in the midst of all this pain?

"Research (and common sense) suggests that one aspect of the Thanksgiving season can actually lift the spirits, and it's built right into the holiday – expressing gratitude." (Harvard)

What if we took the spirit of Thanksgiving and carried it through to Christmas and beyond? How would that impact the negative aspects of life?

Courtney Carver says, *"Gratitude makes the hard stuff bearable and the good stuff even sweeter."*

Harvard.edu says, *"In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships."*

What really is gratitude? The word comes from the Latin word gratia, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. *"Gratitude is a thankful appreciation for what an individual receives, whether tangible or intangible. With gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives. In the process, people usually recognize that the source of that goodness lies at least partially outside themselves. As a result, gratitude also helps people connect to something larger than themselves as individuals — whether to other people, nature, or a higher power."* (Harvard)

For Christians, that connection is Jesus Christ. Ligonier says, "The essence of theology is grace; the essence of Christian ethics is gratitude.... A true understanding of grace—of God's unmerited favor—always provokes a life of gratitude and obedience.

"It's easy to focus on the bad things in our lives, the what-ifs, the should-haves. More often than not, it's negativity that keeps us up at night. Gratitude becomes a natural antidote to negativity. I've found it's nearly impossible to hold gratitude and negativity in your heart at the same time," writes Andy Otto.

Audrey chose to be grateful for every day and every gift. In those moments of anger and frustration at the challenges her life gave her, she would return to the truth of God's goodness, find something to be grateful for, and end up laughing at herself.

In positive psychology research, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. Gratitude helps people feel more positive emotions, relish good experiences, improve their health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships. (<https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier>). Audrey lived a life filled with friends and laughter. She was grateful in the midst of a difficult life. She had a clear understanding of God's grace to her that helped her live a life of gratitude and obedience.

Secular scientific research affirms the benefits of gratitude. That should be of no surprise to people who know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. **The Bible repeats over and over again the value of being thankful. It is mentioned about 140 times under the words: thankful, thanks, grateful, and gratitude.**

Looking ahead to the holidays, what might look different if our focus was on gratitude rather than getting gifts; on slowing life down and simplifying things rather than rushing without being present to the things we can be grateful for all around us?

"Everything I read suggests grace and gratitude as a solution to stress, frustration, and the overwhelming burdens of life. Better yet, if grace and gratitude come first, we can avoid some of the stress or at least navigate it in a healthier way. Instead of using grace and gratitude as tools to solve problems, let's start from a place of grace and gratitude."

(<https://bemorewithless.com/grace-gratitude/>)

"At the end of the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius presents a meditation on the love of God where he invites us to consider the many gifts God pours out upon us endlessly. He images this as a flowing fountain of love: We are filled to the brim with God's love and grace. Intentional days like Thanksgiving are fitting symbols of God's abundant grace. In normal times, we may gather with extended family and share in a lavish feast, alluding to biblical images of the kingdom

of heaven. The bread we break around our family table is a gift, the people we share that bread with are gifts. What is our love-response to these gifts from God? Gratitude.”

[\(https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2020/11/why-grace-is-revealed-in-gratitude/\)](https://georgiabulletin.org/commentary/2020/11/why-grace-is-revealed-in-gratitude/)

Merry Christmas! I hope that you will join me in making gratitude a year-round habit. I am grateful to have the opportunity to share my gratitude journey with you and hope that you will share your gratitude journey with me. I can be reached at g.jensen@worldventure.com.

Christmas Projects to Develop a Grateful Life:

- Consider making a gratitude calendar even during Advent.
- Make gratitude journals for each family member. Choose a time each week to share what you have written in your journal.
- Make ornaments displaying things you are grateful for this year.
- Send notes of gratitude to family and friends rather than Christmas greetings.
- Do a word-study on thankfulness in the Bible.



On the website bemorewithless.com/give-thanks, you can find this short list to get you started.

Ginny Jensens provides spiritual formation and care to WorldVenture workers. Learn how to support her at worldventure.com/jensen2021.





**Rejoice always
Pray without ceasing
Give thanks in all
circumstances;
For this is the will of God
in Christ Jesus for you.
I Thessalonians 5:16-18 (ESV)**







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