



**From Eden  
to Bethlehem**

*An Advent Bible Study*



# *Tis the season!*

As December begins and the busyness of the Christmas season starts, we pray this guide will be a reminder to you and your family as to why we celebrate Christmas.

This Advent study is meant for everyone. Whether you choose to use it alone in your daily devotional time, with your community group, or with your family gathered around, our prayer is for this Advent study to be a way for you to refocus your eyes and hearts on Jesus and draw you closer to the Savior.

Each day of the Advent study has Scripture to read, a devotional thought written specifically for our church body, and questions to ask yourself or your family and discuss.

If you have kiddos, we hope you picked up the Kids Companion so your kids can color an ornament that connects to the devotional every day.

The devotions begin on December 1st and end on December 31st.





## *Genesis 1:1. John 1:1-14*

Well, we finally made it, December 1st, and the anticipation is building. Maybe, for some, it has felt like it's taken forever for Christmas to finally get here. Or perhaps, it feels like we've only blinked a few times and here Christmas is again, right around the corner.

And it can be a very busy time of the year. But for the next several weeks, we're going to ask you to join us for a few minutes every day as we focus on the One who is the reason for Christmas.

So, let's begin. And the very best place to begin is at the beginning. Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."

That's the first verse of the Bible. But before we even read that entire sentence, we could stop after only four words: "In the beginning, God..."

There He was at the very start. The Hebrew name for God here in Genesis 1 is Elohim. It's an interesting name because it's plural, but it takes a singular verb. That's not usually how grammar works, but in this case, it denotes a plurality, yet one. Why?

Because this is God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, three in one.

John 1:1-3 gives us more clarity. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made."

Often people think that Jesus didn't show up until His birth, but that isn't the case. Jesus was there speaking each star, planet, and galaxy into existence. He was there as every blade of grass, each insect, fish, and animal appeared, and he was right there breathing into Adam the very breath of life.

"In the beginning, God..."

# Day 1

*What is something you look forward to at Christmas time?*

*How does Genesis 1:1 tie to John 1:1-3?*



# Day 2

*Genesis 2:15-17. Genesis 3:1-19*

It was a perfect world. There were no weeds choking out the good plants and taking over the garden. There were no biting ticks or mosquitoes making an outside dining experience miserable.

Every piece of fruit was a delight. Each meal was perfection on a plate, although plates probably weren't even necessary. There was no fear, no anxiety, no stress. In the cool of the evening, the Lord Himself walked with Adam and Eve in the garden. It was a perfect world.

Until it wasn't.

The serpent entered. He tempted Eve with the one tree and the very fruit they were not to eat. He twisted the truth asking if God really said they could not eat from any of the trees. He deceived by telling her she would not die, and Adam and Eve ate the fruit, disobeying the Word of God.

One sin and perfection shattered.

That evening God came. Adam and Eve heard Him in the garden. They hid. They were frightened and ashamed. God called out to them.

Sin had entered and consequences came. Sweat would fall from Adam's brow. Thorns would grow. There would be pain. An animal had to die to cover their nakedness.

God spoke the first prophecy to address the coming Messiah. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

The Hebrew word for offspring indicates seed. It's an interesting word to attribute to a woman, her seed. But the Scripture is saying that One would come who would be from a virgin birth. And right then, right there, the promise of Christmas was spoken. Centuries later that promised One came, born of a virgin.

*Think about a place that brings you happiness.  
Where is that and why?*

*Ponder the consequences that happened because  
of one sin. What stands out to you in that?*



*Genesis 2:16-17. 3:8-19. John 15:1-17*

Let's face it, December is sometimes dark and gloomy. The Christmas lights help a lot; they add brightness. Garlands, shiny ornaments, and especially bringing in a live Christmas tree can help to dispel the gloom. Live Christmas trees...let's hold on to that thought. We'll come back to it in a moment.

Today, let's look again at Genesis 2. "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'" (Genesis 2:16-17)

But the serpent came and cast doubt. "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1)

And then came the out and out lie, "You will not surely die." (Genesis 3:4)

Okay, now let's get back to the live Christmas trees. When we bring them into our homes, they look alive. So, are they? They are not. Why?

They have been cut off from the life source.

That's what happened to Adam and Eve when they sinned. God said they would die if they ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

They ate the fruit. Did they die? They did. Oh, they didn't fall over immediately needing a burial, but they were cut off from the life source.

And just like Christmas trees, they looked alive, but every day their life ebbed away a little more because they were cut off from the Lord. It is why Jesus had to come. He came to bring life. When Jesus spoke words from John 15 to His followers, He was reminding them to be connected to Him. "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5)

He is the life source, and we must be attached to Jesus, the Vine. Otherwise, we may only look alive, not really be alive.

*What do you enjoy most about preparing for the Christmas season?*

*As you read John 15:1-17, what are some of the blessings of being attached to the Vine?*



**Day 3**

# Day 4

## Genesis 5

Have you ever eaten something you shouldn't eat?

C'mon, it's Christmas. There are doughnuts, candies, cakes, pies, cheesecakes, and, of course, we cannot forget cookies. So, that answer seems pretty obvious.

It was one sin. And it wasn't even one of the ones we consider to be really big sins. Adam and Eve ate a piece of fruit they weren't supposed to eat. They committed one sin. And they were cast out of the paradise of the Garden of Eden, because in its center there was the tree of life. God did not want Adam and Eve to live forever in their sin.

Here's another question: If one sin kept them from being in paradise, could it be that only one sin could keep us out of heaven? And the answer to that is also pretty obvious. It is why we need a Savior

From Adam to Noah sin grew. For today let's read Genesis 5.

Wait a minute, the passage today is a list of names, a genealogy. What are we supposed to take away from this? Genealogies are boring with hard to pronounce names. But is that all there is? You see, God had a plan. Every generation and every individual are important to God. We see that in the number of genealogies in the Bible. God wanted mankind to know that a Savior was coming. Names were repeated. The names from Adam to Noah were remembered.

Let's look at them. They are Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah. Yes, a bunch of names. Yes, a boring old genealogy. Or is it?

Each name has a meaning. In Dr. Chuck Missler's book, *Learn the Bible in 24 Hours*, he explained the meanings of each of the names from Adam to Noah.

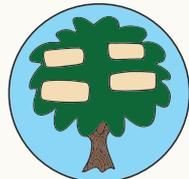
Adam means *man*, Seth *appointed*, Enosh *mortal*, Kenan *sorrowful*, Mahalalel means *the Blessed God*, Jared *shall come down*, Enoch *teaching*, Methuselah means *his death shall bring*, Lamech *the despairing* and Noah means *rest, comfort*.

Now let's put it all together: *man appointed mortal, sorrowful, the Blessed God shall come down teaching; His death shall bring the despairing rest and comfort.*

It's the Gospel in their names. From the beginning of time, God wanted man to know that a Savior was coming. It's even written in a boring old genealogy.

*Think through your family line. Who are the people in your lineage that stand out and why?*

*When and where was the first time you understood the Gospel?*



## *Genesis 6:5-8. 7:1-5. 8:1-4*

Sin grew. By Noah's time, life on earth was so corrupt, so evil, that the only thing that could be done was to stop its spread. The world needed to be cleansed, and God was going to use a whole lot of water to do it.

For over a century, Noah preached, but sin was rampant. Noah obeyed God and built a very large boat called an ark. He, his family, and groups of each kind of animal entered. Then God sent a flood, unlike any other flood.

For months that boat bobbed along carried by currents and winds until Genesis 8:4, "and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat."

The Bible is a most unique book. Every word is there on purpose for a purpose. So, if we see a date, a name, or a number we can ask, "Why is this here?" And in Genesis 8:4 we see a date and a name. So, let's ask, "Why is this here?"

It was the seventeenth day of the seventh month. At that time the seventh month on the Jewish calendar was Nisan. And that month is important because years later a young Jewish Rabbi (Jesus) rode into Jerusalem on Nisan 10. It was the same day that the Passover lambs were being driven into the city for families to select. People shouted, "Hosanna," and waved palm branches. By the fourteenth day, as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed, the shouts changed to, "Crucify Him," and He faced the cross.

But on the seventeenth day, Jesus rose from the dead, to bring salvation to the world. That date mentioned centuries before in Genesis of the ark resting safe and secure was a shadow of the most important date for the world. The seventeenth day is Resurrection Sunday.

But that's not all, there's a name in that verse, and just like the names from Adam to Noah, this name has great meaning. According to J.B. Jackson's book, A Dictionary of Scripture Proper Names, the name Ararat means the curse reversed.

So, on the seventeenth day of Nisan, the curse was reversed...enough said.

*What do you know about the time of Noah  
and the ark?*

*How do you think our world today compares  
to the days of Noah?*



# Day 5

# Day 6

*Genesis 12:1-3. Genesis 15:1-6. John 3:16*

When we think about Christmas, it often includes the promise of things to come. We have charming calendars and countdown boxes filled with little treats to help children in their anticipation. We eagerly count down the days to what we hope is coming.

Years before the first Christmas, God gave Abraham the promise of things to come. We see that in Genesis 12 in seven beautiful statements.

God said, "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God promised to make Abraham into a great nation. And what a promise that was, because at that point Abraham and Sarah were not only childless, they were also old. It seemed totally impossible.

But then, God reiterated His promises to Abraham when He told him in Genesis 15 to count the stars. Later, God told Abraham that his descendants would be like the sand on the seashore. What lovely promises and a constant reminder. If he looked up, he saw the stars. If he looked down, he saw the sand. If he was looking at the night sky, or if it was a bright sunny day, Abraham was reminded of God's faithfulness. God promised that He would make Abraham into a great nation. But that wasn't all. God also promised that all people on earth would be blessed through him.

But how could the blessing go beyond his own descendants? How could all peoples, all nations, the whole world be blessed through him?

It was the promise of the most amazing blessing ever given. The Messiah was to come through Abraham's line, and He would be for everyone, all peoples, all nations, every single person who believes. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

So, when we look up at the stars, or when we take a walk on the sand, remember the blessing is for us.

*During this Christmas season, what are blessings you have experienced?*

*During this Christmas season, what are some ways you can bless others?*



*Isaiah 7:14. Luke 1:26-33. Matthew 1:18-25*

Let's look again at Genesis 3:15. God spoke directly to the serpent with the guarantee that he would one day be crushed. In Revelation 12 the Scripture tells us that the serpent is the devil, the deceiver. He had certainly deceived Adam and Eve.

But God intervened with the promise of the Seed of the woman who would one day come and bruise, crush the head of that serpent. The promise of Christmas was given at that moment. Centuries later Isaiah reiterated that promise. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

To add some depth of meaning to that promise, let's look at a bit of teaching from Jonathan Cahn's book, *The Book of Mysteries*. He explored the Hebrew for the phrase, "God with us." In Hebrew, the words are arranged a little differently and it reads, "With us is God." The Hebrew is written, "Eem...anu...El." Take a moment and speak it aloud. Do you hear, "Immanuel?"

That simple phrase, proclaiming that God is with us, is literally speaking His name. What a fulfillment of the promise that He would come. He would dwell with us. He is God with us, Immanuel.

In the book of Luke, we read about the fulfillment. The angel Gabriel went to Nazareth and spoke to a girl named Mary with amazing news. "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." (Luke 1:30-31)

Matthew 1:23 restated it. "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us)."

God Himself was coming to dwell with mankind.

What a name! What a promise! What a blessing!

*How have you experienced God being with you?*

*God sent Gabriel to speak to Mary. How does God speak to you?*



**Day 7**

# S

*Micah 5:2. Luke 2:1-7*

It's the Christmas season and music is a huge part of it.

# Day

"Oh little town of Bethlehem"...reading those few words just might cause a lilting melody to take up residence in our hearts and minds over the next few hours. It's a song we've heard and probably even sung from our youth. And it's true. Bethlehem really is a little town. It was back in the day. It still is today. But what makes this tiny place so special that songs would be written about it? Why do Christmas cards show its scenes and Christmas programs around the world feature its location?

God had a plan for this tiny town even from the beginning of time.

But exactly what set it apart from other equally tiny and insignificant towns? The answer to that question is a prophecy: "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." (Micah 5:2)

This prophecy said that a new ruler was coming. And this Ruler, who would split time, and split nations, and change the world, would be born in this tiny place and alter this little inconsequential town forever.

His birth would take little and insignificant and make it important and well-known. And it's all because Jesus was born in this place. And if God can do that with a little unimportant town, think what He can do in our lives when Jesus comes to dwell in us.

*What is one of your favorite Christmas songs? Why?*

*When have you seen God take something that at first seemed insignificant, but then it turned into something big?*



*Genesis 35:16-21. Isaiah 53:1-3. 1 Peter 3:22*

They traveled the dusty road toward Bethlehem. While she was there, the time came for her to be delivered.

Sound familiar? A birth, in Bethlehem? We might tend to think that the first time this scenario is described is at the birth of Christ. But it isn't. Yes, it is regarding a birth, but this passage also includes a death.

As we read Genesis 35, we see Jacob was bringing his entire family back to the area of his childhood. His wife, Rachel, was expecting her second child, and as they got close to Bethlehem, she went into labor. It didn't go well.

Let's delve a little deeper.

As we've seen, names have meaning and the ones in this passage are no exception. Rachel's name means ewe, a female sheep. Interesting, because a female sheep gives birth to a lamb.

Is it a coincidence that out on a hillside centuries later, shepherds were watching their sheep and a perfect Lamb was being born in Bethlehem?

As Rachel gave birth, the midwife encouraged her not to be afraid; she was going to have another son.

Is it a coincidence that many years later an angel appeared to a group of shepherds encouraging them not to be afraid because a very special birth was taking place? In Rachel's story, as she was dying, she named her baby Ben-oni. It means the son of my sorrow. But his father renamed him Benjamin. It means the son of my right hand. Is it a coincidence that in Isaiah 53 the Messiah is referred to as the man of sorrows and in 1 Peter 3 it tells us that Jesus is at the right hand of God?

The story of a birth from Genesis 35, is it a coincidence that some of the details seem to point forward to another birth?

When it comes to the Bible, is there any such thing as coincidence?

*Look back over your life. Are there any "coincidences" that you now recognize were directed by God?*

*Choose two Scripture passages that you think might parallel each other. What connections do you see?*



Day 9

# Day 10

*Micah 4:8. Gen. 35:21. Luke 2:8-12. John 1:29*

Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. Jacob, also called Israel, buried his beloved wife, and even today in Bethlehem there is a place that marks her grave. Then the passage continued. "Israel moved on again and pitched his tent beyond Migdal Eder." (Genesis 35:21 NIV)

We see here a little phrase we might just easily skip over as we're reading. So, what is the Migdal Eder, and why is it important?

It is the tower of the flock and Micah 4:8 gives us an important prophecy about this place: "And you, O tower of the flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you shall it come, the former dominion shall come, kingship for the daughter of Jerusalem."

This promise hinted that someday there would be a birth, but this time it would be a King who would come to the tower of the flock in Bethlehem.

And a King did come, but He first came as a lamb, was laid in a sheep's feeding trough, and was attended by shepherds.

Years later, John the Baptist recognized Jesus. He said: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

John made this incredibly huge announcement. But why a lamb? Throughout the Old Testament, animal sacrifices were offered to cover over the sins of the people. Lambs, goats, oxen were offered to remind people that they were sinners and there was a cost to their sin. Time after time the sacrifice had to be repeated, because the sin was only covered, it wasn't actually paid for. The sin debt remained.

But look again at what John the Baptist declared. He announced that this Lamb would take away the sin of the world! The sin would be taken away, not merely covered over.

John proclaimed it. This Christmas season, it is a message we need to take the time, not just to proclaim, but to understand. The Lamb, born in Bethlehem, came to take away our sins. All we have to do is ask.

*What was the significance of a lamb in the Old Testament?*

*Why is it important for us to understand that Jesus came as the Lamb of God?*



*Ruth 1:1. Judges 21:25. John 6:30-35*

As we've already established, Bethlehem is a small town, yet it is very prominent in Scripture and very important to the Christmas story. Today, let's take another visit to this little town from the book of Ruth. It opens with these words: "In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons." (Ruth 1:1)

That verse says that there was a famine in the land. Famine was maybe not so unusual for many places in the world, but here it indicates that there was a huge problem. You see Bethlehem means the house of bread. But a famine meant that there was no bread in the house of bread. This was Israel, a land that was supposed to be overflowing with milk and honey, but there was no overflowing, no milk, no honey, just hunger and barrenness.

The reason? The last verse of Judges sums it up. "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."

The people of Israel had walked away from following the Lord to do their own thing, live their own truth, and the end result was famine. God wanted them to rely on Him, to call on Him for their daily bread and trust Him to provide.

You see, the real Bread was coming. The Bread of Life was going to be born in Bethlehem, the house of bread. He is the One who would come down from heaven to be the true bread, the satisfying bread, to feed the entire world for the rest of time.

In John 6, Jesus fed the crowd by multiplying the loaves and the fish. The crowd returned the next day and Jesus knew they wanted more bread. But Jesus didn't merely come to give people physical food, He came because He is the Bread of Life.

# DAY 11

*When was a time you remember being really hungry?*

*Look again at Judges 21:25. How are we seeing that in our world today?*



# Day 12

## *Ruth 3*

In the book of Ruth, Naomi had lived in Bethlehem, and found herself in a foreign land where she lost everything. Her husband and two sons died. She finally made it back to the land of her birth, but she was sad, broken, lost, and bitter.

Her widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, came with her. The women were destitute. To make ends meet, Ruth gleaned in the fields of a relative named Boaz.

All seemed helpless and hopeless for Naomi and Ruth. But God had a plan. Boaz was a relative. He could be their kinsman redeemer. This was a provision already in place in Israel. A relative could redeem, buy back, their lost property.

There were very specific qualifications for someone to be a kinsman redeemer. First, he had to be a kinsman, a relative. Second, he had to be able to perform the redemption by having the means to buy back all of what was lost. He also had to be willing to do it. Finally, he had to assume all the obligations, even any debt in the future.

Naomi told Ruth to go to the threshing floor where Boaz was threshing grain, wait for him to fall asleep, and then lie down at his feet. When he awoke, she asked him to become her kinsman redeemer. In essence, she asked him to become her bridegroom. And the love story began.

We are like Naomi and Ruth, helpless, hopeless, lost in our sin. We need someone to buy us out of the lostness we find ourselves in. We need someone to redeem us from our sin. So, did Jesus meet the qualifications? He had to be a relative. Jesus was born of a woman, fully God and fully man. He is our kinsman.

He had to have the means to redeem us. He lived a perfect, sinless life. He was without spot or blemish. His blood could pay for our sin. He had to be willing. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, telling the Father that He was willing.

He had to pay all the debt. When He died, He paid for all our sin, past, present, and future. But for each of us, we must come personally to Jesus, and ask Him to be our Savior. He is our Lord, our Redeemer, our Bridegroom. And our love story begins.

*Think about someone you know who has experienced loss this year. What is something you could do to make their Christmas season a little brighter?*

*The book of Ruth is about provision. How have you seen God's provision in your life?*



## Genesis 49:1-27

As parents, we love to give good things to our children. Christmas can become a time of abundance because of our great love. But with so many gifts to choose from, what is the very best gift we can give?

The answer is Jesus. Sharing truth and blessing is more important than any material gifts.

Reading the Bible with our families, teaching them the stories of Biblical heroes, helping them to memorize passages, teaching the need for a Savior and how to know Him, are vital as we raise our children. What words are we speaking over our children to lead them to the Lord?

In the Old Testament, we see fathers speaking words over their children. We find an example in Genesis 49. Jacob knew he was about to die. He called in all twelve sons. To some he spoke blessings, to others, because of their choices, he spoke consequences.

But one of the passages was a huge blessing to its recipient. That blessing was spoken to Judah. Judah? When we read through Genesis, we see that Judah lived a very challenging life. He did not always make good choices; in fact, he made a lot of bad ones. But as we study his life carefully, we see that his heart changed. A famine came. Jacob's sons traveled to Egypt to buy food. It had been decades since they saw Joseph, so the brothers did not recognize him. They had no idea it was their own brother who tested them by treating them harshly. When the youngest brother, Benjamin, was going to be placed in prison for the rest of his life, Judah stepped forward to plead the case. He offered himself instead of Benjamin. And we know that there is no greater love than a man lay down his own life for another. Judah was a different man.

It is a story of redemption. Our lives can be different too, regardless of what we have done. When we come to Jesus, our past is wiped clean, and we no longer live under the weight of it.

Judah received a blessing from his father that began with the fact that his brothers would praise him. But there is more.

*When have words of encouragement or blessing been spoken over you?*

*In this Christmas season, how can you use your words to encourage or bless someone?*



# Day 13

# Day 14

*Genesis 49:8-12. Revelation 5:1-5*

As we've already said, Jacob spoke a blessing to Judah which we see in Genesis 49:8-12. It began with the fact that the brothers would praise Judah, but went on to announce that the scepter would come down through his line. The rule of Israel would come through Judah's descendants and continue until Shiloh would come. Shiloh, the name that is used in Genesis 49 in the King James Version, is also used in the Hebrew. The religious leaders believed that Shiloh was a Messianic reference. This was prophesying the coming Savior.

As Jacob was dying, he shared the promise of the One who would come, One who would be worthy of all praise, from all the descendants. It is from this passage, reiterated in Revelation 5, where we have one of the titles for Jesus, The Lion of Judah. And the prophecy spoken over Judah was that the scepter would not depart until that very special One came.

Here's a bit of a history lesson. The rabbis and religious leaders believed that Messiah was coming. For all their existence, the Jewish people had maintained their autonomy. They had ruled their own people even under other rulers. That is until sometime in the early first century, around 6 or 7AD, when a Roman leader named Caponius came into power. According to Josephus, an ancient historical writer, Caponius stripped the Jewish leaders of the right to adjudicate, to carry out, to enforce, their own capital punishment laws. When that happened, the rabbis went out into the streets, wailing, covering their heads with ashes. The scepter, the right to rule, had departed. The prophecy from Genesis 49 seemed to be broken. They were overwhelmed with grief.

What they didn't know was that a few years before Caponius came into power, a baby had been born in Bethlehem and that child was growing up in a carpenter's home in a town called Nazareth. Shiloh, the One who was promised, had indeed come. The rabbis just didn't know it. But they should have, because God's Word is always true.

*List some of the ways that help you to know the Bible is true.*

*In the Scripture we know that Messiah is referred to as Shiloh and the Lion of Judah. What are some other names that refer to Jesus?*



## *Genesis 37:12-28, 39:19-23, 50:20*

We mentioned Judah, one of Jacob's twelve sons. Joseph is another of those sons, and in the book of Genesis, many of the chapters shine the light on him.

Why? Let's look at some of the major events from his life. He was the firstborn son of Rachel, but he was not the first born of his father. He was, though, the most beloved son of his father. But he was hated by his brothers.

In Genesis 37, at the direction of Jacob, Joseph left his father's house to check on the brothers while they were out in the fields. They saw him coming. They plotted to kill him, but instead, Judah made the transaction to sell him. Again, Judah didn't always make good choices in his earlier years.

In Genesis 39 we see that Joseph became a slave in the household of Potiphar. And if that wasn't bad enough, he was then falsely accused of a crime and thrown into prison. But God used Joseph even there.

Joseph was eventually brought out of prison to sit at the right hand of the ruler of the land. He was given a new name, Zaphenath-paneah. One of the translations of that name can be Savior of the World.

Is there more?

Yes. All prophecy of the Messiah in the Old Testament is not overt. Some prophecy comes in the form of types, pictures, patterns which point forward. Joseph's life pointed to the One who would be sent by His Father, hated by his brothers, sold by a man named Judas, falsely accused, arrested, killed, but three days later would come out of that grave and He truly is The Savior of the World.

Here's a challenge: Go back and read the account of Joseph. What shadows can you discover from Joseph's life that point to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World? It's a treasure hunt.

*As you glance through the account of Joseph, what other shadows of Christ do you see?*

*Look at Genesis 50:20. How have you seen God use difficulties, challenges, hurts in your life to advance His Kingdom?*



# Day 15

# Day 16

*Isaiah 7:14. Isaiah 9:6-7. 1 Peter 1:18-20*

In 1741, German-born composer, George Frideric Handel, worked in a rented room in Dublin for about three and a half weeks. What came from that effort is one of the most famous works in music. We often hear it at Christmas. It is called The Messiah.

And the inspiration for that beautiful choral presentation?  
God's Word.

Some of the songs came directly from the book of Isaiah.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time

forth and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this." (Isaiah 9:6-7)

1 Peter 1:18-20 tells us that, even before the world was created, the plan was known. Little by little, throughout the Old Testament, that plan unfolded. Man needed a Savior, and He was coming.

In Isaiah 7, it was prophesied that a virgin would conceive and give birth, and in Isaiah 9, we see who that One would be.

He would be the Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God incarnate, the Everlasting Father. He would be the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there would be no end.

And that is certainly something to sing about. Hallelujah!

*What is a musical presentation, or a Christmas movie, that is part of your holiday tradition?*

*What is something that causes you to be filled with praise? Take some time to praise the Lord.*



*Luke 1:26-38. Matthew 1:18-25*

This time of year fills our hearts with anticipation and joy. There are lovely Christmas services, uplifting music, shining lights, and then, of course, the fact that Christmas itself is just days away. The wait is almost over. But as we look ahead, we can also look back to remember that very first Christmas and what Joseph and Mary experienced. Let's examine some of what they might have felt.

Joseph, his heart had to have been filled with anticipation and joy because of his upcoming marriage to his beloved, Mary.

Mary, her heart was filled with anticipation and joy because she was highly privileged to carry the very Son of God.

Then Joseph, his heart would have been filled with pain and hurt because he assumed Mary had been unfaithful.

And Mary, her heart was probably filled with pain and hurt because of the reality that her story wouldn't be believed.

Joy and anticipation, but also pain and hurt.

Imagine Mary as she felt the pain of rejection from Joseph. She knew the truth. She knew she was telling Joseph exactly what happened. Yet, he assumed the worst.

Imagine Joseph since he knew the natural order of things. Finding out his betrothed was with child was the worst kind of gut-wrenching pain he had ever experienced. Thoughts flooded his mind. Divorce was a word that kept coming to the forefront.

Then God intervened.

A dream was sent from God, delivered by an angel, with the truth, and suddenly, the pain and sorrow were forgotten as they made their way to Bethlehem.

Mary and Joseph were then filled with the greatest anticipation and overwhelming joy as they awaited the most amazing miracle that had ever happened on the planet. God was about to be born on earth.

*What are you looking forward to this  
Christmas season?*

*God intervened in Joseph's life. When has God  
intervened in your life?*



**Day 17**

# Day 18

*Luke 2:1-20*

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear." (Luke 2:8-9) The shepherds played a very significant role in the first Christmas. Why?

We'll look at that, but before we do, let's look at why they might not have been chosen, and maybe even why they shouldn't have been chosen.

Shepherds had very little voice in those days. Their standing was maybe a little above thieves. They probably smelled bad. After all, living in the fields with sheep didn't lend itself to showers and good hair products. No laundry or dry cleaning, they didn't have clean clothes hanging in the shepherds' cave so they could switch out their outfits each day. They would have worn the same smelly clothes, the same smelly sandals, and combed the same smelly hair, day after day. Get the picture?

They weren't exactly considered at the top of the list as far as honesty. They weren't always trusted. They couldn't give testimony in a court of law. This disparity between shepherds and other citizens went way back. Some people just didn't like them. But here's a good reason why God did choose them. He did like them. As a matter of fact, He loved them, and He chose them on purpose.

These shepherds knew lambs. And they were going to meet the Lamb of God. These shepherds knew the lay of the land. When the angel told them to find the manger, they didn't waste any time. They went to the place and found Mary and Joseph and the baby, lying in the manger. God chose them, and they said yes to finding Jesus.

And that is a very good Christmas message for us. He loves us and has chosen us. We just need to say yes to Him. The world didn't have a very good image of the shepherds. But the world's image is not the bottom line. God's image is. He wanted the shepherds. They heard and they went. What a wonderful Christmas message. The world's image is not the bottom line for us either. God's image is. Yes, what a wonderful Christmas message.

*Why is it significant that God chose shepherds?*

*How has God used you?*



## *Luke 2:13-20*

"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.' And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." (Luke 2:15-16)

Let's take a moment to think about this story and the reaction of the shepherds. Yes, we've already talked about the fact that they were pretty low as far as the pecking order of society, but they made the decision to go and see.

Go and see. It's just what they did.

And it looks as if these shepherds were the first to see. They were the first to worship. They were the first to tell.

Shepherds, at the bottom of the heap as far as society, and suddenly chosen by God to be the first. Wow! The first!

In all of human history, they were the first. There is not one of us reading this who can make that claim with this story. Although their story indicates they may have been last as far as the world was concerned, they were chosen by God to be the first. The Lord was writing His story in and through their lives. And it's recorded in the book of Luke.

But again, there is a message here for us. What if we have been written off by society?

What if we seem to be at the bottom of the pecking order in school, our jobs, society? Do we have a place? Absolutely! Okay, it won't be the first in all of human history, but it will be a story. And it will be a beautiful one. Why? Because God is writing His story in us.

But what if we aren't at the bottom of the pecking order? What if everything is going pretty good? Does the Lord still want to write a story in us? Absolutely! Let's go and see and then tell.

*What are some reasons that people feel like they don't fit in?*

*What's the story that God is writing in you?*



# Day 19

# Day 20

## *Matthew 2:1-12*

The book of Matthew tells us of an event that took place after the birth of Christ.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'" (Matthew 2:1-2)

They have been called wise men, Magi, kings. We know very little about them even though we sing about them and see them featured in nativity scenes, movies, storybooks, and on cards. We do not know how many. We aren't told if they rode camels. We have no idea how many days they traveled. There is no mention of their names. We do know they brought gifts and came from far away for one purpose.

They were searching for the King of the Jews.

The person they asked for help turned out to be the worst. Wicked King Herod pretended to help. He told them he wanted to worship. What he actually wanted was to destroy. But God would not allow that to happen. The wise men found King Jesus and presented Him with gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Nothing stopped these wise men in their search for Jesus. They were very wise men.

There couldn't be a better challenge for us in the Christmas season. We must be searching for the King of the Jews. Maybe it's time to begin our relationship with Him, or it could be time to deepen our walk. Always, we should be on a path to read, study His Word, and grow.

Wise men traveled to find Jesus. They came to worship Him.

On this day, let's make that our focus also.

*If you are traveling over the Christmas season, where will you be going?*

*What steps can you take to deepen your relationship with Christ?*



## *Numbers 24:17. Matthew 2:1-12*

The Magi came, but how did they know?

An ancient prophecy, handed down for centuries, perhaps shared by Daniel while he was in Babylon, may have been the impetus for their actions.

"I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth." (Numbers 24:17)

The prophecy said a new star was someday coming out of Jacob, and then, when suddenly it appeared in the night sky, it spoke. It spoke loudly that something critically important was happening. This demanded a response. It demanded action.

So, the Magi came. Distance wasn't an issue. The cost wasn't a problem. This was the most important journey of their lives. They came to see. They came with their gifts. This journey was so important, and even though it meant dangerous travel to a faraway land, nothing was going to stop them. This wasn't just about seeing Jesus, this was about worship. Their words, "We have come to worship Him." (Matthew 2:2) So, when the star appeared they knew they had to follow.

And what about us? Do we simply show up at our church to see? Do we come with the crowds to merely observe? Do we only arrive when it's convenient or easy? Or does nothing stop us because the most important thing is to bow our hearts and knees to worship the King?

# Day 21

*Share a Scripture verse that is meaningful to you.*

*What can deter people in their spiritual growth?*



# Day 22

*Psalm 22:1-6. Matt. 2:13-18. Jeremiah 31:15*

Sometimes prophecy from the Old Testament reads almost like a news report describing some of the events in the life of Christ. Psalm 22 is like that. Details about Jesus were written hundreds of years before He was even born. As we read through the Psalm, we see the story unfold. Today let's focus on one verse from this beautiful Messianic Psalm. It's verse 6, "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people."

A prophecy about the Messiah, it says He would be scorned and despised. Was He?

Yes, and it began with the very wicked King Herod. When the wise men came with their question, "Where is the one who was born king of the Jews?," that evil king was threatened by the birth of a new king in Israel. He fancied himself to be the king of the Jews. That title belonged to him, and he would make certain it belonged to no other.

Cagey, sneaky Herod feigned interest. He acted happy and excited but lied about the desire to worship. The man was consumed with darkness. It flooded his wicked heart and left no room for the Light of the World.

He asked to be informed, kept in the loop, proclaiming a desire to kneel. Instead, he gave the order to kill all the baby boys in Bethlehem two years old and younger. And a prophecy was fulfilled. "A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more." (Jeremiah 31:15)

Herod lived in darkness; he died in darkness. We have to wonder how many times in eternity he has looked back on those missed opportunities and wept over his choices. The Light was right there. He chose the darkness.

Psalm 22:6 prophesied that the Messiah would be scorned and despised. We see in Matthew 2 that even from His birth, Jesus was scorned and despised.

*Compare and contrast Herod with the wise men.*

*How can wise men and women seek Jesus today?*



## *Psalm 22. Isaiah 1:18*

Psalm 22 is about the Messiah. Verse 6 also speaks this about Him: "But I am a worm and not a man." Why would the Messiah be called a worm? This is one of those places to ask, "Why is this here?"

The worm mentioned is called the tola'at shani, the crimson worm. In the Old Testament, we often see three colors mentioned. They are blue, purple, and scarlet. If we see that red color spoken about in the Scripture, the dye for it came from this worm. It's why it's referred to as the crimson worm.

Here are some of the significant characteristics of this little creature: If we were to come across it, we would see that it doesn't even look like a worm. It's so ugly that it actually resembles a growth on a tree. When the female worm gets ready to give birth, she climbs a tree and attaches herself so firmly that to remove her would tear her body.

She lays her eggs, and when they hatch, they have a choice. They can wander away or they can feed on her. Of course, if they wander away, they will die. If they feed on her flesh, they live. For three days she covers them over with a red dye. It's literally her blood. She gives her life for her children. Her body is left like a white waxen substance which curls into the shape of a heart and falls to the ground like snow.

When verse 6 in Psalm 22 says that the Messiah is a worm and not a man, it is referring to this worm. Just like this worm, Jesus was attached to the cross so firmly by the nails that removing His body would have torn it. He gave His life for His children with His shed blood. Psalm 22 goes on to say that the Messiah's heart would turn to wax, and Isaiah 1:18 tells us this, "Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool."

The crimson worm points to Jesus.

Now also think about this: if God can use an ugly little worm to point people to Jesus, how much more can He use us!

*What else do you see in Psalm 22 that points to Christ?*

*How can God use you to point people to the Lord?*



# Day 23

# Day 24

*Genesis 22:1-18. Matthew 3:17*

What does your family do for fun during the Christmas season? Some families play games. One favorite game involves trivia. There are lots of versions, but one of them asks Bible questions. So, let's play now. We're going to ask you a question that just might show up sometime in a good round of Bible trivia. Okay, here it is: When is the first time the word love is used in the Scripture?

You just have a few moments to answer.

If you said at creation, good guess, but you would be wrong. No, it wasn't then, although we know that it was out of love that God created man.

What about when He had to cover Adam and Eve with the skin of an animal after their sin? Again, good guess, but no. God was showing His love with His provision, but the Bible does not say the word love in that account.

Okay, time's up. We're going to tell you. The first time the word love is used might surprise you. Let's go to Genesis 22. It was when God told Abraham to sacrifice His son Isaac. He spoke of the love Abraham had for his son. God said to Abraham, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." (Genesis 22:2)

As you read those words, do they seem familiar? We think they do because similar words were spoken at Jesus' baptism. God said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:17 NIV)

How do these situations compare? Both sons were loved. Both fathers faced the sacrifice of their sons. Both sons had to be willing. The sons carried the wood. The sons were to be sacrificed.

We could add more, but let's stop here for now, because we know that Abraham did not have to give up his son, but God did. The much-loved Son of God had to lay down His life on the cross. He paid with His life by shedding His blood. This was the greatest gift ever given. What a gift to remember at Christmas.

*What is a favorite game you like to play?*

*Read Genesis 22:1-18 through the lens of how it points to Christ. What do you see?*



## *Luke 2:1-7*

It's Christmas! What has seemed like a long, long wait is finally here. The day will probably be marked with gifts, and food, and family, and friends, and more gifts, and more food. We pretty much know how to celebrate. Quite a change from that first Christmas all those years ago.

"And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." (Luke 2:4-7)

Alone in the town, this young couple sheltered in a place for animals. There was no room for them anywhere else. Not immaculately clean or pristine like our hospitals today, it housed animals. It wasn't exactly cozy or comfortable. And it definitely wasn't designed to be a human birthing place; it was less than private.

Quite a place for the King of Kings, the Creator of the Universe, the Ruler of the Nations, to enter the world. And yet, it's exactly what He did. He gave up the heavenly realm, the worship by angels, to become a servant, a sacrifice, our Savior.

Christmas happened because God wanted us to know Jesus. He came, lived, died, and rose again to come to live in our lives. There is no greater Christmas gift that we will ever be offered. To receive it today, simply invite the Savior into your life. And what better day than Christmas to receive the greatest gift ever given.

And so, on this Christmas day, we look back and remember that He gave up heaven, so that we could go there. He gave up His life, so that we could have life. He gave up everything, so that we could have everything.

Merry Christmas!

*What are your traditions on Christmas day?*

*The greatest gift ever given is Jesus. Have you received that Gift?*



# Day 25

CHRISTMAS



IS JUST THE

Beginning

## *Matthew 2:9-12*

Yes, we have arrived at that time of the season when Christmas day is over. Soon the Christmas tree will be coming down and the ornaments will be safely nestled in their boxes. The streets will dim, and the carols will be over. Ebenezer won't be seen pinching his half-crowns, resentfully paying Bob Cratchit until we view the Christmas Carol again. We will begin the countdown to next year's holiday. It will feel as if Christmas is being packed away.

But is it? Stop to think about it. Christmas isn't really something we can put away in a box. The Christmas story continues.

We see that with the Magi.

"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way." (Matthew 2:12)

The Magi had come to worship. They met the Messiah, the King of the Jews, but then headed back to their homeland. Was Christmas over for them?

Let's consider a possibility. These wise men, who had traveled so far, met Jesus Christ. They worshiped Him. They gave gifts to Him. They were then warned in a dream not to take that information back to Herod. The Scripture tells us that they traveled home a different way. Was that just the route or was there more? Certainly, they took a different road, but they would have also traveled home different men. You cannot meet and worship Jesus and remain the same.

Their Christmas was just beginning.

Too often, when the gifts have been unwrapped, we think we have wrapped up the day. But if we really stop to mull this over, we understand that Christmas isn't over just because the day ends. Christmas is just beginning. It starts with the birth, it then tells us the life, we witness the death, we grieve at the burial, but we rejoice at the empty tomb. And even that is just the beginning.

Oh no, Christmas can't be over...Resurrection Sunday is on its way.

# Day 26

*How can you make the joy of Christmas last?*

*Think about some other people in Scripture who had an encounter with Christ. How were their lives changed?*

# Day 27

*Matthew 21:1-11. Romans 12:6-8*

Christmas Day is over, and it probably carried with it the excitement of gifts. We maybe wondered if we would receive gifts we wanted, gifts we could use, gifts to treasure and tell others about.

Gifts...we reflected on the story of the Magi who brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. They were gifts for Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Today we're going to remember another gift that Jesus received only days before His crucifixion. He needed a young donkey to carry Him into Jerusalem.

"Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, 'Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, "The Lord needs them," and he will send them at once.'" (Matthew 21:1-3)

All the owner had to hear was that the Lord needed it. The reins were turned over to the disciples and Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The worship and praise began. We do not know the owner's name. We do not know if the owner was able to witness the event as the palm branches were waved. We do not know how long the donkey was in service. That information is waiting for us in eternity.

The use of a donkey may sound small. It isn't. Jesus knows how big it is.

As we reflect on gifts, maybe sometimes it feels like our gifts to the Lord of service, donations, prayer may seem small. Are they? We will not know until eternity how big they really are.

*As you look over Romans 12:6-8, which of these gifts apply to you?*

*How are you using your gifts?*

OUR GIFTS

to

the



LORD

are

NOT

SMALL

# 28 Day

*Isaiah 46:8-11*

We are approaching the end of the year. Let's look back and reflect, not just over the last year, but let's reflect all the way back to the very beginning. God created paradise. It was a perfect place, but then Satan snaked his way into the garden and into the lives of Adam and Eve. Perfection was lost because of one sin. Consequences came. Adam was told that by the sweat of his brow he would have to toil. From then on, the ground would produce thorns. Pain was going to enter their lives. At that time, an animal lost its life to cover their nakedness. God also let the serpent know that punishment for him was coming. He would someday be crushed under the Seed of the woman.

In Isaiah 46, God declared that He would make known the end from the beginning.

And when Christ came centuries later, He, in His great goodness, began buying it all back.

In another garden, The Garden of Gethsemane, the crushing of the serpent began as the redemption process unfolded.

The sweat: as Jesus prayed, He sweat drops of blood.

The nakedness: after the arrest and mock trial, He was stripped and beaten.

The thorns: after the beating, the Roman soldiers made a crown of thorns and thrust it on His head.

The pain: crucifixion was so terrible that to describe it, a new word, excruciating, had to be invented. It literally means of the cross.

Adam and Eve ate from the tree that brought them death. Jesus died on the tree that brought us life. They committed one sin. Jesus committed no sin but took on ALL sin. Adam and Eve had to leave paradise. Jesus opens the door for us to enter the paradise of heaven.

In the Garden of Eden, the sacrifice of an animal covered Adam and Eve. Hundreds of years later the sacrifice of the Lamb of God was so much more. His sacrifice not only covered our sin, it paid for it.

As we reflect, let's never forget what the Messiah came to do.

*The end of the year is a time to reflect. What has God done in your life over this last year?*

*Jesus fulfilled so many prophecies. What are some Scriptures that are currently being fulfilled?*

## *Luke 22:24-34. 54-62*

During these days approaching the New Year, we might be thinking about our New Year's resolutions. But in the past, how many of those have we actually kept?

Perhaps, we look back to broken promises, failed resolutions, or missed opportunities, and because of those, we might just want to give up. Ever felt like that? Ever felt like you should just walk away because you messed up?

You look at your life and see the times you've blown it: the promises not kept, the failed resolutions, and the missed opportunities. Wouldn't it be great to stuff that all deep down inside of a very large box, drag it out to the curb with all the torn Christmas wrappings, empty gift bags, and thrown out junk that's going to be picked up in the trash, and get a do-over, a new beginning, a fresh start? Is that even possible?

Today's passage is not a part of the Christmas story, but it is the result of the Christmas story, and a message we need as we go into the New Year. It had been the disciple Peter's sincere desire to follow Jesus, even if he had to die with him. He boasted at the last supper that he was ready to go to prison, and even face death. But desire is not accomplishment, and when it came right down to it, he blew it. He denied he even knew his teacher, his rabbi, not once, but three times.

"And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.' And he went out and wept bitterly." (Luke 22:61-62)

And there it was, Peter wept, but he could never change what he had just done. He failed the Lord big time. True discipleship was a lifetime commitment. It meant more than learning; it meant following and becoming like your rabbi. You gave up your life to become like him. A true disciple took on the very nature of his teacher and would never ever deny knowing him, and yet Peter did. And this wasn't a one-time slip up; he did it three times and once with a curse. This was serious. This was major. This was the end of his discipleship. Denying his teacher just erased everything. The name disciple was replaced with the name failure.

This couldn't be dragged to the curb. This would be the mantle he would have to wear. Or was it?

*What goals do you have for the new year?*

*How will your spiritual life help you to achieve those goals?*

# Day 29

# Day 30

*John 21:1-19*

After the resurrection, Jesus found Peter fishing; he had gone back to his old life. It was over, he would never become like his teacher, the One he called Rabbi.

"When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' He said to him, 'Tend my sheep.' He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.'" (John 21:15-17)

And there it was, forgiveness, restoration, a clean slate. Jesus, The Good Shepherd, challenged Peter to be the shepherd. It was not over; Peter could still become like his Rabbi.

Three times Peter had denied the Lord. Three times Jesus asked for his commitment. Did Peter love Him more than anything else?

Jesus already knew the answer. He knew Peter would become the powerhouse to preach, to face persecution, to die for Him. But Peter needed to affirm it. He needed to state it out loud and confirm to the others that he could and would follow faithfully. Church history proves that Peter became a dynamo for the faith. Church history proves that Peter faced death for the faith.

Amazingly, Peter's denial of Christ was pushed deep inside of a very large box, dragged to the curb with all of the torn Christmas wrappings, thrown out and picked up in the trash. Jesus gave him a do-over, a new beginning, a fresh start.

However, his story was not locked up. Instead, it is recorded for us to know that we too can have a do-over, a fresh start, a new beginning. It is called grace.

In this New Year, remember there is always forgiveness and there are always new beginnings.

*How have you experienced God's grace?*

*What can you do to share that grace with other people?*

*Romans 8:28. Romans 3:23. Romans 6:23*

Ah, yes. It's December 31st...the end of one year and the beginning of another. For some, the end of this chapter is a blessing. For others, it is hard to close the door. But for most, the year has held a mix of both the challenging moments and the moments we want to hold on to. It's the nature of time. It boasts the beautiful and the ugly. But here's the good news: despite the events of the past, we have a Savior who promises to take it all and make it work.

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

And what an incredible promise that is. Somehow, He takes the mix of everything and puts it all together for us. He makes it into good. But do you see that there is a prerequisite? We need to be part of the called. So, what does that mean? Let's tear it apart. It is not enough to just live a good life, because none of us is good enough. The Bible tells us in Romans 3:23 that we are all sinners. That means that every person on the planet has gone the wrong way at times. The Bible then goes on to tell us the consequence of our sin. Romans 6:23 is very clear that the wages, or the payment, for our sin is death. It means an eternal death. And if that was the end of the story, that would be hopeless. But it is not the end. Romans 6:23 goes on to say that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.

This Christmas season is nearly over, but the gift giving with Jesus is not. He is offering eternal life if we will simply receive it. The way we can do that is just to ask. It can begin with a prayer of invitation. We admit we are sinners, repent, and ask Him to come into our lives. It can be a prayer as simple as this:

*Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner. I'm sorry for my sins and ask you to forgive me. I know you died on the cross, shedding your blood to wash away my sins. Thank you for dying for me. Help me to live for you. I surrender my life to you.  
Thank you, Jesus. Amen.*

That prayer is the beginning, but only the beginning. It took a moment to receive this gift of salvation, just like it takes a moment to receive a Christmas gift. The question is what are we going to do now? It takes a lifetime to live out this relationship with Jesus. Prayer, Bible study, church, baptism, learning to share our faith are all a part of the growing process.

We must be committed to grow in each of these areas as the new year begins. It couldn't be a better way to start. Happy New Year!

*What goals do you have for the new year?*

*How will your spiritual life help you to achieve those goals?*

DAY  
31

●GOD IS OFFERING●



ETERNAL LIFE



IF WE SIMPLY

Receive it!





**Graceland**  
.CHURCH