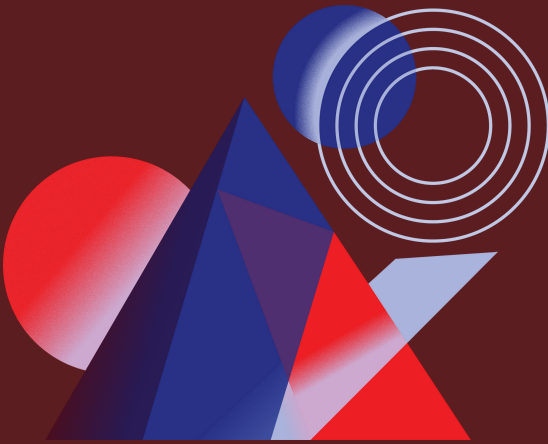


# Joey Schwartz

*FOUNDER, LIVEFULL*



## Power to Hope

*WAITING FOR JESUS BY THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT*

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POWER OF THE SPIRIT*

**Joey Schwartz**

*FOUNDER, LIVEFULL*



*A DIVISION OF LIVEFULL  
CHARLOTTE, NC*

LIVING ROOM BOOKS, a division of LiveFull Ministries

*Power to Hope*

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## Introduction

*“Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”*

ROMANS 8:24-26

In Advent, we celebrate and ache. Christ has come. *Hallelujah!* Christ has not yet come again. *Have mercy, Lord.* We rejoice, for the first-fruits of glory have arrived. And we groan, for the King of Glory tarries. Jesus comes “to make his blessings flow, far as the curse is found.” But for now, the curse remains.

“Joy to the world! The Lord is come.” Can we experience the joy of his coming today? Can we taste the Savior we cannot see? Can we hope for the world that is not yet here?

If Christ only came long ago and will come again someday, we are left as orphans. But there is another *adventus*, another coming, to celebrate. The Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of assurance, the Spirit of the “already” kingdom is here.

“Let earth receive her King! Let ev’ry heart prepare him room.”

## INTRODUCTION

We have good news of great joy today—news that can lift the downtrodden into the angelic choir. Not just “God with us,” but through the Spirit, God in us.

Through these meditations, may God fill you with hope in the unseen by the power of the indwelling, all-seeing Spirit.

Christ has come. *Hallelujah!* Christ will come again. *Amen!* The Spirit guarantees it (Ephesians 1:14).

**Waiting**



DECEMBER 1

## You Can't Hold Up Hope Alone

*“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.”*

ROMANS 15:13

God is not unsure about the future, vacillating between confidence and doubt.

He can see the fulfillment of every promise as clearly as you see your right hand. He sees a glorious future in the horizon, bursting through the darkness of this age as the sun lights up the sky.

He sees you not as you see yourself. You see your present state, a millimeter on the eternal timeline. He sees your glorious future—not just who you are for these eighty years, but who you will be for a *billion*—when you will “be like him, because [you] shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

God wants you to abound in hope. He wants your hope to match his. You can't see around the corner of eternity. But you can sit next to the God who does. You can experience the sweetness of his presence. And in the overflow of communion with him, you can abound in hope that his promises will come true.

God wants you to be joy-full, peace-full, and hope-full in the deepest sense.

But how can you walk in this fullness and abundance when life empties you of strength?

You need “the power of the Holy Spirit” (Romans 15:13).

We naturally think that what God does is promise, and what we do is hope. He gives his Word, and it's our job to trust in him. But Paul says that even our hoping is a joint project with the Holy Spirit, apart from whom we cannot hope.

You cannot pull yourself out of your own hopelessness. You need to become hopeless about your own capacity to hope, so that you may cast the weight of hoping upon the Holy Spirit who dwells within you.

And when you hand off the weight to the Holy Spirit, he will not put you to shame (Romans 5:5). He will fill you with hope, and will keep filling until you have an abundance—until

## WAITING

your certainty about what is to come matches his vision of eternity.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Where are you trying to hold up hope in your own strength?
- *Pray to God.* Cast your burden on the Lord (Psalm 55:2), and wait for his presence in silence: “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope ...” (Psalm 130:5).

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* What are your hopes for this advent season?
- *Ask the Kids.* What does the word “hope” mean to you? And what does it mean to hope in God?
- *Pray Together.* Ask the “God of hope” to “fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit, you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).

DECEMBER 2

## Waiting Means Praying

*“And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father ... you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”*

ACTS 1:4-5

Before the disciples could go (Matthew 28:18), they were to stay (Acts 1:4). The Spirit was not a part of the disciples' calling. The Spirit was the calling. He would fill them, renew them, revive them, embolden them, speak through them, and lead them one step at a time.

There was no going if the Spirit was not going, too.

So Jesus said: Wait.

The disciples could have taken Jesus to mean: *Carry on with the status quo. Sit back and relax. The gift will come when it comes.*

## WAITING

But they knew better. The promise that the gift would come “not many days from now” was not cause for presumption. It was all the more reason to pray without ceasing.

They knew that waiting meant praying. Their waiting room was the upper room, where they ruthlessly knocked on God’s door until he did what he had already promised to do.

*“All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.” (Acts 1:14)*

We should not expect God to pour out his power on those who presume—who claim to be waiting without praying. If anyone had reason to presume, it was the disciples who got the promise straight from Jesus, face to face. But even Christ’s mother did not assume her son would send the Spirit without her asking.

Devotion to prayer is the measure of your desire for God’s power. So what is your prayer life saying about how much you really want the Holy Spirit?

Turn the waiting room into an upper room. Do not merely *say* that you desire more of God—show your desire through devotion to prayer.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* If devotion to prayer is the measure of your desire for God's power, what is your prayer life saying about how much you really want the Holy Spirit? Where have you been presuming without praying?
- *Pray to God.* Repent of the ways that your desire for God has not matched his delightfulness.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* When Jesus told the disciples to “wait,” they knew that waiting meant *praying*. In what ways are we trying to wait on God apart from prayer? How can we take a step toward waiting through prayer?
- *Ask the Kids.* We all have a hard time waiting for things that we want. What makes it hard for you to wait?

## WAITING

- *Pray Together.* Ask God to teach you how to wait for him through prayer: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation” (Psalm 62:1).

DECEMBER 3

## Speak Truth to Your Thirsty Soul

*“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”*

PSALM 42:1-2

Are you thirsty for God? An aching dismay with your perception of his distance; a downcast discouragement about your erratic devotion; a nagging sense that there is more to be had of God—these are the signs that you’re like a deer in the desert.

*“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?”* (Psalm 42:5a)

The temptation is to be troubled about our thirst. We are discouraged about our discouragement, angry at our aching.

But spiritual thirst, in itself, is no cause for alarm. The deer pants for flowing streams because though she longs for



water, she remembers what it's like to sip from an inexhaustible fount.

Spiritual thirst is a sign that you have tasted God. It's the natural response of a parched soul that remembers him (Psalm 42:6).

Thirst keeps us going—for the same reason that a body lacking the biological response of thirst will soon die. We need to feel the gap between where we are and where God is, between who we are and who he is.

It's good to pant for flowing streams—so long as we keep believing there are flowing streams from which to drink. Spiritual thirst is good, so long as it contains hope. As we ache for God, we must anchor ourselves in the hope that God will lift us up from the aching.

*“Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.”*  
(Psalm 42:5)

It's OK to perceive his distance. But tell your soul that he is a very present help in trouble (Psalm 62:1).

It's OK to feel discouraged about your devotion. But tell your soul that he will finish the work he started in you (Philippians 1:6).

It's OK to have a nagging sense that there is more to be had of God. But tell your soul, again and again, that he who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for you, how will he not also with him graciously give you all things (Romans 8:32)?

Keep hope in your hunger; preach truth into your thirst. Long for the living water—this is good. But in your longing, remember what he said: “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:38).

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Write out all the ways you are thirsty for God, then preach truth to your soul, writing down specific Scriptures where God promises to satisfy your thirst.
- *Pray to God.* Get alone in a place where you can pray loudly (see Hebrews 5:7).

## WAITING

Walk through Psalm 42:1-2, and cry out to God audibly about the ways that you thirst for him. Then, using Psalm 42:11, cry out even louder in praise by faith, proclaiming the promises of God in his presence.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Recall the faithfulness of God together. Talk about a season when you were spiritually thirsty and God satisfied you.
- *Ask the Kids.* In Psalm 42, the Bible says that when we are “cast down,” or sad, we should go to God. When you get sad, what do you like to do (or where do you like to go) to help?
- *Pray Together.* Ask God together to satisfy your thirst with his presence, declaring by faith: “My soul will be satisfied as with fat and rich food, and my mouth will praise you with joyful lips” (Psalm 63:5).

DECEMBER 4

## What's Your One Thing?

*“One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.”*

PSALM 27:4

David had plenty of other needs that could have taken top priority. Evil doers assailed him. Adversaries and foes tried to eat up his flesh (Psalm 27:2). An army encamped around him. War arose against him (Psalm 27:3). His father and mother forsook him (Psalm 27:10). False witnesses stood against him, breathing out violence (Psalm 27:12).

David wasn't seeking God first because there was nothing else to want but God. He was seeking God first because there was nothing *better* to want than God.

## WAITING

If you could boil down your prayers to just one, what would it be? In a song full of requests, David gives God a one-sentence summary: *“I just want to be with you.”*

*“I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the LORD  
in the land of the living! Wait for the LORD; be strong,  
and let your heart take courage; wait for the LORD!”*

(Psalm 27:13-14)

What are you waiting for? That’s your “one thing.” Your heart waits for what it wants most. And when you believe that the “goodness of the LORD” is the greatest good, your heart will want him—and wait for him—more than anything else, even when the world is collapsing around you. It’s no surprise that the man who said God’s presence contained “pleasures forevermore” wanted God in the middle of a murderous siege (Psalm 16:11).

Though God’s deliverance from the valley is sweet, God’s dwelling in the valley is sweeter still.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* What are the things competing in your heart for the “one thing” of knowing God?
- *Pray to God.* Use Psalm 27:4 as a prayer of repentance and a request. Confess the other things that are grabbing your attention above God, and ask God to show you the superior sweetness of his presence.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Are there any ways we can better structure our time to remind ourselves that seeking God’s presence is our “one thing” (Psalm 23:4)?
- *Ask the Kids.* Even when King David was surrounded by all of his enemies, he said that *God’s presence* was the “one thing” he wanted more than anything else. What’s the “one thing” you want most right now? Why?
- *Pray Together.* Read all of Psalm 27 together out loud, and then pray together out loud at the same time, asking the same thing of God that David did: that you may “dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of [your] life, to gaze upon” his beauty (Psalm 27:4).

DECEMBER 5

## Stay Awake

*“But concerning that day or hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Be on guard, keep awake. For you do not know when the time will come.”*

MARK 13:32-33

When it comes to the end times, Jesus would have us focus less on when it will be and more on who we will be.

Will Jesus find us dozing off, drunken with the cares of this life, and caught off guard by his cloud-breaking entrance? Or will he find us waiting and awake—living in such a way that we are ready at any moment for his return?

*“It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to stay awake. Therefore stay awake—for you do not know when the master of*

*the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or when the rooster crows, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Stay awake.”* (Mark 13:34-37)

Apathy feeds on the notion that we can be zealous for Jesus later on. For now, we can enjoy “a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest” because the master isn’t coming home anytime soon (Proverbs 6:10).

But in Christ’s eyes, the delay of devotion is a dangerous presumption. Since the Master is coming at any moment, we ought to stay awake in holiness, wait at the door of prayer, and eagerly expect the sound of his knock (1 Thessalonians 5:6-7; 1 Peter 4:7).

When Jesus comes, will you meet him as a stranger? Or will his arrival serve as a reunion of friends—turning your ongoing prayer talk into face-to-face conversation?

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Apathy feeds on the notion that we can be zealous for Jesus later on.



Where are you dozing off, presuming on more time, and pushing off obedience to Jesus?

- *Pray to God.* Jesus says that the only way to stay awake is to pray (see Matthew 26:40). This morning, practice watchfulness by spending more time in prayer than you typically do.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Why is it hard to “stay awake” and continually remember the return of Christ? How can we better keep one another spiritually awake?
- *Ask the Kids.* The Bible says that Jesus is coming back to make all things new, and we should get ready for him. How do you feel about Jesus coming back again?
- *Pray Together.* Read 1 Peter 1:13-16 and pray that God would give you sober minds fixed on the grace coming when Christ returns.

DECEMBER 6

## Yes! Come, Lord Jesus!

*“He who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely, I am coming soon.’”*

REVELATION 22:20A

Jesus tells the apostle, “I am coming soon.” Note what the apostle does not say:

*That’s great, Jesus. I’m looking forward to it. But could you hold off until I get to walk my daughter down the aisle? Until I accomplish my career goals? Until the grandkids come? Until I enjoy retirement? Make sure I don’t miss out on this life, then you can bring me into the next one.*

No, John says: “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20b). Translation: Yes, Jesus! Go ahead and come right now!

There’s no negotiating for Jesus to hold off. Only a plea for him to come now.

## WAITING

John got it. If you stack life's sweetest experiences against the sweetness of being with Jesus, our deepest longings on earth become rubbish next to eternal communion with our Lord.

Whenever we long for anything more than Jesus' return, we are either overestimating the glory of this life or underestimating the glory of the life to come. Either we are overvaluing the goodness of Jesus' gifts or undervaluing the goodness of Jesus' presence.

Those who grasp this will fill their prayers with the apostle's cry: *Jesus, why don't you come right now?*

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* We underestimate the glory of the life to come. Meditate on the sweetness of eternal life in the presence of God.
- *Pray to God.* Practice the simple prayer of John: "Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!" Tell Jesus how much you want him to come back.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Talk about eternal life together. When it comes to Christ's return and the New Heavens

and Earth, what are you most looking forward to?

- *Ask the Kids.* When Jesus told the apostle John that he was coming back, John was overjoyed and said: “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus.” What are you most excited about experiencing in life? How is Jesus even better than that?
- *Pray Together.* Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 and thank God for giving you “eternal comfort and good hope through grace.”

**Believing**

DECEMBER 7

## Sing Through the Night of Sorrow

*“Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, but his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.”*

PSALM 30:4-5

David wrote a song of thanksgiving for a gift he could not see. He wrote the thirtieth psalm by faith, to dedicate a temple that would be completed after his death. God promised the divine house, but David would not build it because of the blood he shed in war (1 Chronicles 28:3).

Even in the night of unfulfilled promises, David writes a worship song. He extols (Psalm 30:1), he sings and praises (Psalm 30:4), he dances (Psalm 30:11), and then he shouts louder (Psalm 30:12).

Why does David thank God for a gift that he has yet to receive? Because God's faithfulness is not a gamble; it's as sure as the morning.

David remembered God's salvation, help, and healing from the past (Psalm 30:1-4). If God never failed to fulfill all his promises yesterday, would he not be faithful to fulfill all his promises tomorrow—even if David could not see it in his day?

So David chose not to wait. Though he sensed the anger of God in his situation, he knew it was but a wispy shadow hiding the view of eternal favor. The moment would pass; glory would swallow it up. Seeing the morning by faith, David started singing his song in the night—in the waiting.

You don't need to wait for your weeping to end before you rejoice. You don't need to see the morning rays before you shout for joy in promises fulfilled. We sing to God, even through the night of sorrow, when no trace of light is to be found. For we know that though morning tarries, it is coming soon.

As surely as Christ came at first, Christ will come again. The sun is making its way. It will rise. On that day, our momentary afflictions will give way to morning. Favor will soak up the fire. Dancing clothes will cover sackcloth. Every shadow

of sorrow will flee forever as the Son shines for a lifetime and then a million lifetimes more.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* David was able to sing through the night of sorrow only because he started by remembering God's faithfulness in the past (Psalm 30:1-3). Fuel your faith in the moment by writing down 10 moments when God healed you, redeemed you, or restored you.
- *Pray to God.* Start singing, even while you wait. Even though Jesus is the only one in the room, sing to him out loud. You can sing your own song of praise (see Ephesians 5:19), or you can sing a classic hymn like "Great is Thy Faithfulness."

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Ephesians 5:19-20 says that singing should be a constant part of our walk with Jesus. God uses singing to fill us with his Spirit through seasons of joy and suffering. How can we grow in the discipline of singing together?



## BELIEVING

- *Ask the Kids.* Why do you think we sing to God?
- *Pray Together.* Sing “O Holy Night” together.

DECEMBER 8

## The Antidote to Sluggishness

*“And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”*

HEBREWS 6:11-12

When the Holy Spirit gives the first breath of life, we are moved to action. The bright light of Jesus’ presence against the backdrop of our former darkness, the fresh joy of being adopted out of our hopeless orphanhood, the taste of eternal life replacing the fear of death—these are more than sufficient fuel to undergo the hard and narrow path.

But when the hard path begins to feel hard, then spiritual sluggishness comes in. The Bible, once sweeter than honey, loses its taste. You once fought the fight of faith with zeal, but now your flesh pulls you into retreat. Gospel conversations, once an uncontrollable overflow of your inner praise, become

forced then nonexistent. Like Peter, you once told Jesus you would always stay by his side. Now you're falling asleep in the garden.

You cannot fight against spiritual sluggishness with reason or energy. You can no more pull yourself out of spiritual sluggishness than you could raise yourself from the dead.

The antidote for spiritual sluggishness is “faith and patience” (Hebrews 6:12), expectant endurance, a patient plodding ahead in hopes of future reward.

Faith is required to take the next step forward in the Christian life. Patience is required to take the next ten thousand. If you're feeling sluggish in your walk with Jesus, odds are that you are underestimating the reward of God's promises or the waiting time required for their fulfillment.

For the joy that was set before him, Jesus endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2). Consider the joy. Meditate on the reward. Have faith. And then, do the most radical act of faith imaginable: take the next step of obedience.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Write down the ways you are sluggish right now in your walk with Jesus.

In these areas, where do you need faith? Where do you need patience?

- *Pray to God.* Sometimes the most radical act of faith imaginable is to simply take the next step of obedience. Ask God for your daily bread: the endurance and patience to plod ahead with one step of faith today.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Talk together about your journaled thoughts from the morning: Where are you sluggish? Where do you need faith and patience? Then consider: how can you help one another move forward by faith (see Hebrews 3:12)?
- *Ask the Kids.* Hebrews 6 says we can sometimes struggle with being “sluggish” in our faith. When was the last time you felt sluggish or tired in your relationship with Jesus?
- *Pray Together.* Ask God to help you “lift your drooping hands” and “strengthen your weak knees,” so that you can “run with endurance the race that is set before” you (Hebrews 12:1, 12-13).

DECEMBER 9

## Growing Without Knowing

*“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”*

HEBREWS 11:1

The testimony of Hebrews 11 is that God’s commendation comes for those who walk by faith, not by sight. Those who lean wholly upon the evidence do not need the existence of God. But those who bank it all on him, believing “that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him,” bring pleasure to the heart of God (Hebrews 11:6).

By faith, Noah prepared for a flood under a cloudless sky (Hebrews 11:7). By faith, Abraham set out to a land he had never seen (Hebrews 11:8). By faith, Moses left behind treasures of Egypt for the famine of wilderness, believing that the promised land was ahead (Hebrews 11:25-26). By faith, Jesus gave up his spirit, embracing the grave because he was

convinced the Father would bring a glorious resurrection (John 19:30).

There is no honor in half-hearted obedience, and there is no commendation for calculated faith. If you must always see the course before you are assured and run the numbers before you are convinced, you are not walking by faith—“the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).

What would you do if you really believed that all of God’s promises will come true? He is pleased when you “go without knowing” because you know that he is faithful. The reward of his presence in the going always exceeds the discomfort of not knowing.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Where are you wasting time calculating, when God is calling you to walk by the “conviction of things not seen”?
- *Pray to God.* Where you have been wobbling in uncertainty, ask God for the strength to walk like Noah, Abraham, and Moses: *by faith* (Hebrews 11:1-40).

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Without faith “it is impossible to please” God, “for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (Hebrews 11:6). Where do you need to increase your expectation of reward in God’s presence?
- *Ask the Kids.* What does it mean to “walk by faith”?
- *Pray Together.* Pray together in a way that pleases God (see Hebrews 11:6), believing that God exists and that he *rewards* those who seek him.

DECEMBER 10

## According to Your Faith

*“Then he touched their eyes, saying, ‘According to your faith be it done to you.’ And their eyes were opened.”*

MATTHEW 9:29

Jesus was delighted by unreasonably faith-filled prayers.

When the Canaanite woman offered to nibble on miracle crumbs, Jesus was amazed: “Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire” (Matthew 15:28).

When the centurion told Jesus to save the trip and command healing from a distance, Jesus “marveled”: “Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith” (Matthew 8:8).

When the ruler believed that even death couldn’t stop Christ’s power (Matthew 9:18), Jesus returned his faith with a resurrection (Matthew 9:25).



## BELIEVING

When the bleeding woman, who for twelve years had exhausted all other options, stretched out her hand, Jesus rewarded her: “Your faith has made you well” (Matthew 9:22).

And when two blind men believed without seeing, Jesus was thrilled: “According to your faith be it done to you” (Matthew 9:29).

In his infinite wisdom and sovereign purposes, God will choose whether to grant our request. But make no mistake: still today, Jesus is delighted by unreasonably faith-filled prayers. He’s eagerly searching for this kind of faith on earth (Luke 18:8). Will he find it in you?

What would it look like for you to make Jesus “marvel” with the faith of your prayers?

*But what if God doesn't answer...*

God is the Healer, the Savior, the Grower. That’s his job.

You are the asker. That’s your job.

When you pass from this life and come face to face with your Lord, do not let him say to you: *You asked too little of me.*

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* What would it look like for you to make Jesus “marvel” with the faith of your prayers?
- *Pray to God.* Pray like that (see above).

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* How have we been asking too little of God? What would it look like for us to collectively ask much of God?
- *Ask the Kids.* What does it mean to have faith in our prayers? Do you have a hard time praying with faith? Or is it easy to pray with faith?
- *Pray Together.* Ask God to increase the faith of your prayers, and ask him to help you notice when he answers (see Colossians 4:2).

DECEMBER 11

## Expectant Prayer

*“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and heaven gave rain, and the earth bore its fruit.”*

JAMES 5:17-18

The Scriptures do not depict the powerful God of the past as One who is inaccessible to us today. They reveal the great “I AM” who was, is, and will be. Every time you pray in Jesus’ name, you draw near to the God of the burning bush, the God who split the Red Sea, the God who poured out fire from heaven, the God who emptied the grave.

This God sits on the throne of grace.

God does not exalt the men and women of faith beyond our reach, so that we would admire them. He says they were just like us so that we would practice their faith. Perhaps this is why we do not pray with the same devotion of the early

church: we have magnified the greatness of the saints before us and minimized the greatness of the God with us.

God gave us biblical pictures of bold prayers and powerful answers so that we would pray the same way and expect the same answers.

Do not gawk at Elijah's faith and resign yourself to a lesser expectation of prayer. If Elijah's power in prayer came from his piety, then we should admire him. But if Elijah's power in prayer came from the greatness of his God, then we must imitate him.

Pray just like Elijah. Expect God to move just like he did.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* How have you resigned yourself to a lesser life of prayer than what God desires for you?
- *Pray to God.* Sin gets in the way of asking much of God (see James 5:16-18). Confess your sins to God. Then ask him to show you the "great power" of prayer (James 5:16).

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* How would you describe the

## BELIEVING

state of your prayer life right now? How did God use James 5:17-18 to encourage you?

- *Ask the Kids.* What is one big prayer that you want to pray to God?
- *Pray Together.* Pray like Elijah. Ask God to do something that only he can do.

DECEMBER 12

## Faith Only Needs a Fringe

*“And when they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret. And when the men of that place recognized him, they sent around to all that region and brought to him all who were sick and implored him that they might only touch the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.”*

MATTHEW 14:34-36

We slip into thinking that God will move in and through us as soon as we have gotten a hold of ourselves.

Once we have learned how to properly manage our sickness, he will heal. Once we have disciplined our minds to block out all the noise, he will speak. Once we have fine-tuned our ministry and perfected our work, he will bring fruit.

But such thinking is actually a hindrance to God working through us. It puts a mirror in front of our faith, turning our eyes away from the God who heals, toward our ability to be

healed; away from the God who speaks, toward our attentiveness; away from the God who provides, toward our proficiency.

Who does God make well? To whom does he reveal his power? Who is the kind of person who sees the wonders of God?

Not those who have gotten a hold of themselves, but those who have gotten a hold of God.

Even here, we must be careful—if our confidence is placed in how much we have grasped God, then we're still looking in the mirror, only staring at our spiritual mastery.

All who touched the fringe of Jesus' garment were healed. Because it wasn't about how nicely they asked or how much cloth they felt. It was all about Jesus—his compassion for the sick and his power to heal. They walked away well, not because they had made themselves worthy of healing, but because they had the faith to reach out and touch.

Your weakness is only a hindrance as long as you believe that it is a hindrance to God's power. Shatter the mirror of self-focus, see the God of grace on the other side, and stretch out your hand by faith to touch the fringe.

God's perfect power is for those who are weak: in other words, those who have little reason to look at themselves and every reason to look at God.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* How is your current weakness an opportunity to experience more of God's power?
- *Pray to God.* Reach out by faith, and ask God to pour out his perfect power in your weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* One by one, have each person share where they are currently weak. Then, have the others at the table use the Scriptures to share how God's power is sufficient in that weakness.
- *Ask the Kids.* Where do you feel weak right now? (Or when did you last feel weak?) How do you think God can help you when you are weak?
- *Pray Together.* The woman reached out because she was desperate for Jesus' healing (Matthew 9:20-22). Think about someone who desperately needs Jesus' healing, and pray for them right now.



**Receiving**

DECEMBER 13

## Unimaginable Immanuel

*“But will God indeed dwell with man on the earth?”*

2 CHRONICLES 6:18

In fulfillment of God’s promise (1 Chronicles 17:4, 10-12), David’s heir Solomon built the temple, a house for God. After the work was finished, the priests brought in the ark of the covenant, and “the glory of the LORD filled the house of God” (2 Chronicles 6:14).

When Solomon saw God’s glory descend among man, he was overwhelmed in worship:

*“Will God indeed dwell with man on the earth?  
Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain  
you, how much less this house that I have built!”*  
(2 Chronicles 16:18)

## RECEIVING

The king who built a house for God couldn't have imagined what God had in store for his people. One day, God would dwell with his people in even greater glory—not in a house but in human flesh.

*“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”* (John 1:14)

In Christ, “all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” (Colossians 1:19). The glory of Christ far surpassed the glory of the temple that had stunned King Solomon. As Jesus said, “I tell you, something greater than the temple is here” (Matthew 12:6).

But there's more. God had an even greater plan stored up for his people. The glory of God not only dwells with us in the Son, “God with us,” but his glory also dwells in us through the Spirit, God in us. That's why Paul writes, “Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

*“Will God indeed dwell with man?”* The Israelites who fell on their faces before God’s glory in the temple could not have imagined God’s answer.

This is unimaginable Immanuel: you are the temple of God.

How should you respond to such a glorious reality? The same way Solomon did, when he fell down and worshipped:

*“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.”* (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Because God’s glory dwells within you, every breath, every step, and every thought becomes an opportunity for worship.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Meditate on the truth that the Holy Spirit is living within you. How should God’s presence in you change the way you live today?
- *Pray to God.* Fall down in worship like the priests in

Solomon's day. Thank God for the inexpressible gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* How can we grow together in the awareness that the Holy Spirit is living in us?
- *Ask the Kids.* The Bible says that for those who believe in Jesus, their bodies become *temples of the Holy Spirit*, or a home for the Holy Spirit to live in. What do you think it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit?
- *Pray Together.* Even though we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit by faith (Ephesians 1:13), the Scriptures call us to “be filled with the Spirit” again and again (Ephesians 5:18). Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit afresh.

DECEMBER 14

## Spirit Poured Out

*“And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.”*

JOEL 2:28-29

We feel guilty about longing for the experiential presence of God because we think we should be satisfied enough that God has saved us. But God’s salvation always comes with God’s Spirit, and God’s Spirit always stirs up a passionate longing for God’s presence.

Imagine the tragedy of a child thinking the same: *I shouldn’t desire an experience of my father’s love. I should be glad enough that he’s legally my father.* If human parents, who are evil, want their children to experience their imperfect love, how much more does the heavenly Father want his children to experience his perfect love?

## RECEIVING

This is the Father's heart. As he pours out his Spirit upon all his children, he also pours out manifestations of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7). The Spirit seals us as children of God (salvation) and bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God (experience). Overflowing from his love, the same Spirit provides God's legal adoption and experiential power.

The Spirit poured out. All flesh. Prophecy, dreams, visions. Spiritual power poured out on all of God's children: *this was God's idea.*

On its own, God's salvation is worthy of our overflowing praise. God turned sinful rebels into redeemed children through the blood of Jesus Christ. This is the theme of our eternal song! But God gives grace on top of grace.

He doesn't just adopt us by the Spirit. He fills us with the Spirit. He didn't just become "God with us." He filled us with the Spirit, *God in us*. He doesn't just save us through the powerful resurrection of Christ. He gives us the same resurrection power, through which we experience afresh the fatherly love. Yes, God is *this* generous.

Do you expect and long for his power today? Or do you dishonor the blood-bought generosity of God by pointing to

your own unworthiness? By his grace and grace alone, you are welcomed into the power of his kingdom today.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). Meditate on the generosity of God. How have you underestimated his lavish love for you?
- *Pray to God.* Jesus made it clear what you should do if you long for more of the Holy Spirit: “And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you ... If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:9, 13). Simply ask!

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Where have we experienced the promise of Joel 2:28-29 together? Where are we still waiting to experience this promise?
- *Ask the Kids.* Did you know that the Bible says we not only believe in God, but we can also experience



## RECEIVING

his presence here and now through his Holy Spirit?  
Have you ever experienced (or felt) the presence of  
God's Spirit?

- *Pray Together.* Where you are still waiting to experience Joel 2:28-29, ask God together to “pour out [his] Spirit,” just as he promised.

DECEMBER 15

## Do You Know the Holy Spirit?

*“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.”*

JOHN 14:16-17

Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit lacked instructions about how the disciples would detect his presence. He simply said, “You know him.” How did they know the Spirit whom they had not yet received?

The Spirit dwelt with them. Just as the disciples already knew the Father because they knew his Son (John 14:8-9), the disciples already knew the Spirit because they had walked with the Spirit-filled Christ.

But Jesus went on: The Spirit will be in you.

## RECEIVING

Why didn't Jesus go on about how his disciples would detect the presence of the Spirit? Because when the third member of the Trinity made his home in their hearts, they would know it.

If you asked many believers about the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they would shrug their shoulders, assuming the Spirit is around them somewhere, doing something, leading them somehow.

But Jesus said that you wouldn't be guessing about whether the Spirit is with you and in you. If you know Jesus, you know the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is not an imperceptible and impersonal force, a light breeze of energy that brushes alongside you. The Holy Spirit is a palpable and personal God, a powerfully active Helper who lives within you.

Do you know the Holy Spirit? If you have been assuming the Spirit's presence instead of actively depending on him, go at once to God in prayer. Stop assuming the Spirit and ask for him.

Ask the generous Father to pour out the unmistakable presence of the Spirit in the name of Jesus (Luke 11:13).

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* In what ways do you long to know the Holy Spirit more personally?
- *Pray to God.* Ask the Spirit to “bear witness with [your] spirit” that you are a child of God (Romans 8:16).

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* “The Holy Spirit is not an imperceptible and impersonal force, a light breeze of energy that brushes alongside you. The Holy Spirit is a palpable and personal God, a powerfully active Helper who lives within you.” How is God calling you into a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit?
- *Ask the Kids.* What is your relationship with the Holy Spirit like?
- *Pray Together.* Pray 1 John 4:13, that through the presence of his Spirit, you would know that you abide in God and he in you.

DECEMBER 16

## From His Fullness

*“From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.”*

JOHN 1:16

We are prone to believe that as we progress in Christ, we will move on from needy dependence into self-sufficiency. Just as an apprentice becomes skilled enough to go off on his own, we will eventually accumulate enough strength to draw from our own resources.

But Jesus said that the eternal kingdom belongs to children (Matthew 19:14). You were born again into the kingdom as a needy child, receiving grace upon grace from the fullness of Jesus, and one million years from now, you will be a glorified child (1 John 3:1-3).

God did not show his love for you when you were spiritually disciplined, straightened up, and well-equipped. God

loved you when you were disorderly, crooked, and spiritually bankrupt (Romans 5:8).

That same grace is readily available for you today in Christ.

Are you lacking spiritual power? From his fullness, God “gives the Spirit without measure” (John 3:34).

Have you spent all your physical strength? From his fullness, God gives “power to the faint, and to him who has no might he increases strength” (Isaiah 40:29).

Have you lost all hope? From his fullness, God gives the “power of the Holy Spirit” so that “you may abound in hope” (Romans 15:13).

If God has made you aware of your spiritual emptiness, you are in the perfect position to be filled with divine power. From his fullness, God pours out sufficient grace upon grace over those who have abandoned self-sufficiency.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* How have you been drawing from the limited supply of your own strength? How is God leading you to draw from the inexhaustible well of his fullness?

## RECEIVING

- *Pray to God.* Put yourself afresh in the position of a child, and through prayer, lean into the fullness of your Father.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* In what ways is it easy for you to walk in the needy dependence of a child of God? In what ways is it hard for you?
- *Ask the Kids.* What does it mean for you to have God as your daddy?
- *Pray Together.* As the evening comes, instead of drawing your strength from how the day went, draw your strength from the never-changing steadfast love of God. Ask God to fill you from his fullness.

DECEMBER 17

## Abound in His Abundance

*“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 9:8

The cross is irrefutable proof that our personal resources are not enough to get us through. And yet we tend to start the day focused on our own supply: *I only have so much time and energy and resources to give*. Like a stingy man who keeps his eyes on his bank account and his hands in his pockets, we hesitate to give ourselves to good deeds for fear of not having enough to give.

Operate out of this deficiency mindset, and you will be consumed with whether you are enough for the task. Do I have enough vitality to be affectionate toward my children? Do I have enough saved to give money to the kingdom? Do I have enough faith to take this step of obedience?



## RECEIVING

As Paul urges the Corinthians to give cheerfully to the “ministry for the saints” (2 Corinthians 8:1), he pulls them away from focusing on their deficiency. Their generosity should flow from an abundance mindset: the belief that their sufficiency comes from God’s abundant supply.

How can we abound in every good work through our deficiency? Because “God is able to make all grace abound to us.”

We pour ourselves out for others because God overflows with abundant strength for us. We give to the kingdom, knowing that God will reimburse from his abundant account so that we can keep doing good (2 Corinthians 8:10-11). We take the step of faith, even when we feel like we are unable, because “God is able” to meet our weakness with the abundant power of his Spirit (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12).

Are you focused on your deficient grace and deficient strength and deficient resources and deficient time? Or are your eyes fixed on God’s abundance: his promise to make “all grace” abound to you with “all sufficiency” in “all things” at “all times”?

Out of the abundance of God, abound in good.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* How are you operating out of a deficiency mindset? How is God calling you into an abundance mindset (2 Corinthians 9:8)?
- *Pray to God.* Ask God to make “all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work” (2 Corinthians 9:8).

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Share your answers from the morning journaling time.
- *Ask the Kids.* Why do you think it’s hard to share, even when there are plenty of toys/things for everyone? (Use this question to teach the children about a deficiency and abundance mindset from 2 Corinthians 9).
- *Pray Together.* Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment on a brother, sister, or family to whom you can give a generous and sacrificial financial gift—and then, by faith in God’s provision, give the gift cheerfully (2 Corinthians 7:7).

DECEMBER 18

## The Goodness of the Good News

*“Therefore we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:20-21

If the gospel of Christ offers salvation to sinners, we must understand exactly what is being offered. The good news is not that sinners get a second chance. It’s not that sinners get to “do business with God.” The gospel of Christ proclaims that sinners may be cleansed, justified, and reborn in Christ. Our offer is nothing less than Christ himself—and new, unending life thrown in with him.

*We receive Christ’s payment.* “For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us ...” (2 Corinthians 5:21a). On the cross, the spotless Christ became sin. He took our full record of wick-

edness. He bore the full punishment of God's wrath. He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities (Isaiah 53:5). Because every drop of God's wrath was poured out on Christ, there is not one drop left for Christ's people. This is why we say with confidence: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Romans 8:1).

*We receive Christ's perfection.* If we only have Christ's payment, we don't have good news. We can call this hopeless message the "second-chance gospel." The second-chance gospel says God gave you a clean slate through Christ, and you have to make it right with him on your second chance. But the true gospel says that God gave you a clean slate through Christ, and he made you right with himself through Christ's righteousness. Jesus doesn't just empty our cup of sin and tell us to fill it back up with righteous deeds. He empties our cup of sin and then fills it to the brim with his righteous deeds.

*We receive Christ's power.* Coming to Christ for salvation is not like coming to a cashier: we give him our sin, he gives us his righteousness, and we call it a day.

## RECEIVING

*“For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised. ... Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15, 17)*

It is impossible to make a transaction with Jesus without experiencing transformation from Jesus. All who believe in Christ are filled with the Spirit, made a new creation, and granted resurrection life.

*We receive Christ’s presence.* Here is the greatest of all gifts. The gospel is good news because we get God. If we have the forgiveness of sins and the gift of righteousness and the promise of eternal life but we don’t have God, then the gospel isn’t good.

Forgiveness is so good because with sins erased, we can draw near to God. Righteousness is so good because in Christ’s obedience, we can stand before God. Eternal life is so good because in the New Heavens and Earth, we will dwell with God.

God does not just give us a second chance; he makes us a new creation. God does not just make a deal with us; he adopts us as sons and daughters. God does not just give forgiveness and righteousness and heaven and earth; he gives us the very best gift: *himself*.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Write out the story of how Jesus saved you. How did you receive Jesus' payment, perfection, power, and presence through the gospel?
- *Pray to God.* Thank God for saving you and making you a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17)!

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Out of the four gifts of the gospel (payment, perfection, power, presence), which one was most encouraging or refreshing to remember this morning?
- *Ask the Kids.* What is the gospel? (After letting the children answer the question, read them the story of how Jesus saved you).
- *Pray Together.* In praise to God, sing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" together.

**Rejoicing**

DECEMBER 19

## Behold Jesus, Behold God

*“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature ...”*

HEBREWS 1:3

Jesus is the perfect answer to the question: “Who is God?”

Jesus is not the tender side of God. He does not give a more calm and gracious revelation than the “Old Testament God,” as some are apt to think. All that is true of the Son is true of the Father and the Spirit. The Son is in perfect accord with all of the Triune God’s dealings with Israel in the old covenant, and the Triune God is in perfect accord with all of Christ’s dealings with the church in the new covenant.

Jesus gives an eternal “Amen!” to all the Father has promised and all the Spirit continues to do. All that Jesus is, God is. If your perception of the God of the Universe contradicts the Jesus of the Scriptures, you are perceiving a god of your own making rather than the God who is, was, and will be.



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When you behold Jesus, full of grace and truth, you do not need to look one degree to the right or to the left to behold God. Behold Jesus, and you behold the radiance of God's glory.

Can you see God's pursuit of you? Behold the Word made flesh.

Can you see God's acquaintance with your trials? Behold the Son of God, hungry in the desert.

Can you see God's compassion for your suffering? Behold, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Can you see God's love? Behold the nails through his hands and feet.

Can you see God's power to save and heal and deliver, to pull you out of the deepest pit? Behold, he is risen from the grave.

Can you see God? Yes, you can. Behold Christ, and behold your God!

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* What do you love about Jesus? Write out twenty reasons Jesus is beautiful.
- *Pray to God.* Work through your list of twenty reasons

Jesus is beautiful, and thank God in prayer for all of them.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Share your list of twenty reasons Jesus is beautiful.
- *Ask the Kids.* What do you love about Jesus?
- *Pray Together.* Read Colossians 1:15-20 out loud together, and then thank the Father for sending his glorious Son, the image of the invisible God.

DECEMBER 20

## Inexpressible Joy

*“Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*

I PETER 1:8-9

A day is coming, very soon, when you will see your Savior face to face. Unhindered joy will be yours. As soon as Jesus pours his eternally-heavy glory on you, your heaviest sufferings will turn featherweight. All you've sown in tears, for Jesus' sake, will become a plentiful harvest of laughter in the presence of God. Jesus will get all the glory due his name, and you will get the joy of sharing in his glory.

That day is coming: you will see the One you believed in.

But today, you do not see him. You believe, but you do not see. You carry the cross without seeing the promise of the resurrection. You sow in heaven without seeing heavenly

treasures stored up. You cry out to heaven without seeing the King on the throne. You bank life and death and heaven and earth on a Savior you have not seen.

So must we simply wait until we see? Will the experience of the Savior only come when we see him face to face? Is faith a feelingless gamble?

Peter, who had the privilege of seeing Jesus' glory before his second coming, tells us otherwise:

*“Though you have not seen him, you ... rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory ...”*

(1 Peter 1:8-9)

Inexpressible, glory-filled joy. Sounds like heaven. But Peter says this is ours now—before his return, before the dawn of new creation, before sorrow and suffering are forever wiped away.

Today, while you do not see him and await his final salvation, you can taste “the outcome of your faith,” the salvation of your soul.

When Thomas professed faith after confirming what he could not see, Jesus said: “Have you believed because you have

## REJOICING

seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

Those who believe after Jesus’ ascension, who cannot feel his scarred hands and side, are more blessed than those who believed because they saw. On this side of glory, it is more blessed to feel the fullness of Christ in your heart than feel the flesh of Christ with your fingers.

You can have a blessed experience of Jesus’ fullness now. If Christ is in your heart, eternal life has come.

Are you punting off the experience of Christ’s fullness until you see him face to face? Do not cast aside the glory-filled joy that Christ offers you here and now.

Go to Jesus, the unseen One you love. Reach out the hands of faith, and experience the blessed joy of being in the room with the Savior who died for you. Only believe, and Jesus will make you see.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* When did you last experience the inexpressible, glory-filled joy of knowing Christ? What might be hindering your joy now?

- *Pray to God.* Based on the promise of 1 Peter 1:8-9, ask God to fill you, even now, with the joy of believing without seeing.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* So far in this advent season, have you experienced the joy of Christ? How is God calling you to receive and walk in his joy?
- *Ask the Kids.* What does it mean to have joy in Jesus? Are you experiencing joy in Jesus right now?
- *Pray Together.* As a prayer of longing for Jesus to restore your joy, sing “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” together.

DECEMBER 21

## The Joy-Creating Worry-Taker

*“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”*

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-7

For good reason, Philippians 4:4-7 is one of our most treasured and remembered passages. In a culture that loves practical tips, Paul tells us exactly what we should do with anxiety.

What’s the command? “Rejoice in the Lord always” (Philippians 4:4) and “do not be anxious” (Philippians 4:6).

How do we do it? “Let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6).

What do we get? “And the peace of God ... will guard” you (Philippians 4:7).

The instructions for joy and peace are clear. But if we skim the passage looking only for the prescription, we'll skip over the key ingredient that makes the medicine effective. Between Paul's command for us to "rejoice always" and "not be anxious" is the foundational truth that makes all of this possible:

*"The Lord is at hand ..."* (Philippians 4:5)

It's all about Jesus, the joy-creating worry-taker. If Christ is not here, we have a million reasons to abandon joy and embrace worry. But if Christ is at hand—with us, in us, over us—then we can happily allow every fear to fade in the light of his face.

Christ's followers are called to be an always-joyful, never-anxious people. And it's not because we are flippantly cheery, hopelessly deluded from the perils and problems of life. We see the storm and crisis and darkness as clearly as the world does.

The difference is that we see Jesus, too.

How can we possibly be joy-full and anxiety-free when a ferocious storm surrounds our puny ship? Because Jesus is on the boat.



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How can we possibly bubble up in happiness when our provisions are depleting and the demands are growing? Because Jesus is with us, and he can feed thousands with a single loaf.

How can we possibly fear not when we face a legion of darkness? Because Jesus lives in us, and the demons bow at his name.

In our own power, we cannot rejoice always, and we cannot refrain from anxiety. How then can we possibly obey Paul's command? Because the Lord is at hand.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Where do you personally need to remember that “the Lord is at hand”?
- *Pray to God.* Practice Philippians 4:4-7. Because the Lord is at hand, let your requests be made known to God, believing that the peace of God will guard your heart and your mind in Christ Jesus.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Where are we experiencing anxiety right now? In these anxieties, where are we forgetting that the Lord is at hand?

- *Ask the Kids.* What makes you most worried? (After letting the children answer the question, teach them how to make their requests known to God).
- *Pray Together.* Practice Philippians 4:4-7 all together, praying one by one.

DECEMBER 22

## Peace Be With You

*“On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”*

JOHN 20:19

What would Jesus say to you if he showed up in the room right now?

Probably the same thing he told the disciples three times after his resurrection.

*“Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”* (John 20:19)

*“Jesus said to them again, ‘Peace be with you.’”*  
(John 20:21)

Eight days later, same message:

*“Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’”* (John 20:26)

The message of the resurrected Christ for his covenant people is peace. That’s what his death on the cross and devil-defeating resurrection accomplished for you (Colossians 2:13-15).

*“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*  
(Romans 5:8)

Is the shame of past sin disrupting your peace? Peace be with you. His hands and side were scarred for that.

Is hopelessness dragging you to the grave of despair? Peace be with you. Jesus got out of the grave, and he’s bringing you with him.

Are you doubting the love of the Father for you? Peace be with you. Jesus’ Father is your Father; his God is your God (John 20:17).

Peace be with you. Peace be with you. Peace be with you.

You don’t have to wonder what Jesus would say to you if he was in the room.

## REJOICING

The Spirit of Christ is in the room with you—even better, he’s in your heart. And he brings the same message (Romans 8:6): *peace, peace, peace*.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Recall the goodness of Jesus and write out the ways that he is speaking and bringing peace over you right now.
- *Pray to God.* Pray Psalm 85:8: “Let me hear what God the LORD will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his saints; but let them not turn back to folly.” Confess how you are turning to the folly that robs peace, and through the blood of Jesus, receive afresh the peace of God.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Read Psalm 85:8 together. What are the foolish things that rob us of peace, that we are tempted to turn back to?
- *Ask the Kids.* What gives you peace? What takes away your peace?

- *Pray Together.* Read Psalm 85:9 together. In the fear of the Lord, turn back to him from your fear and folly, and receive together the peace of God through the Holy Spirit.

DECEMBER 23

## The Happy and Holy Jesus

*“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness; you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions ...”*

PSALM 45:6-7

The psalmist beholds heaven’s throne and sees two figures merged in one: the eternal God and the Davidic king, ruling over an everlasting kingdom. The author of Hebrews reads this prophetic song as a pointer to King Jesus, the glorious convergence of the Son of God and Son of David (Hebrews 1:9).

This snapshot of Jesus’ reign raises us above the detailed gospels into an aerial picture of the happy and holy Christ.

Who is this Jesus we follow behind?

*Jesus loves righteousness.* In him, there is no shade of character, no spot of deceit, and no second-guessing (1 John

1:5). He is “Holy, holy, holy” (Isaiah 6:3). In all his being, for all eternity, the Son is the holiest of holies, the lightest of light, the purest of pure. He doesn’t merely accept the will of God. He delights to do his will with zeal (Psalm 40:8). He knows the perfect path of righteousness, and he runs in it without wavering.

*Jesus hates wickedness.* The two work together. With the same fervor with which he loves righteousness, Jesus hates wickedness. When he sees wickedness, he does not merely sigh and carry on. He burns with righteous anger at the sight of sin. Because he delights in the holiness that honors God, he detests the evil that offends God. Jesus is not wishy-washy between his allegiance to the Father and the world. His body, mind, and soul are consecrated without compromise to the kingdom of heaven.

*Jesus out-joys everyone else.* To say that Jesus is thoroughly enjoying his reign is an understatement. The farthest thing from a cold king, Jesus is the golden standard of eternal joy, compared to which the happiest of humans would appear curmudgeons. He has no personal sin that would cause him sorrow; no hidden iniquity that would make him toss and turn; no confused motives that would put him out of ease. In



his perfection, he has perfect peace. The highest peaks of joy we experience on earth are but a defiled taste of the happiness that flows unhindered through his veins forever.

*Jesus calls you into this kingdom life.* And this God-man says to you, “Follow me ...” (Matthew 4:19). “Follow me” into a life of loving righteousness. “Follow me” into a life of hating wickedness. “Follow me” into a life of superior, unstoppable joy.

But the best part about Christ’s call to follow is that we get him along the way. The holy and happy Jesus who holds the kingdom scepter also holds our hand, until his holiness and his happiness have become ours in him.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Where are you underestimating Jesus’ hatred for sin? Where are you underestimating Jesus’ exceeding happiness?
- *Pray to God.* Repent of the sin for which Jesus died, and through the Holy Spirit, receive the “oils of gladness” that are given by grace and grace alone.

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Jesus was exceedingly holy and happy. How are we tempted to disconnect holiness and happiness?
- *Ask the Kids.* Do you think of Jesus as happy or sad? (After letting the children answer, read Hebrews 1:9 and Isaiah 53:3, where Jesus experiences both).
- *Pray Together.* Ask the Father to conform you into the image of his Son, the holy and happy King (Romans 8:29).

DECEMBER 24

## Born is the King

*“He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David ...”*

LUKE 1:32

How was Jesus, son of a carpenter, born the king of Israel?

To answer this, you have to go back a thousand years to the reign of King David.

Under Joshua’s leadership, God’s people had inherited most of the land promised to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3). But rather than introducing an era of obedience, the conquest of the land brought an era of unprecedented sin. Israel began to serve the false gods of the nations, taking on their wicked ways (Judges 2:11-12). Without a godly king to curb their sinfulness, everyone in Israel “did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Hoping to recover from their chaos, Israel appointed Saul, a handsome man and mighty warrior, to serve as their first king. They thought that Saul would restore peace, but his erratic impulsiveness echoed the bleak reigns of judges like Gideon and Samson.

Israel needed a new king—a king that could defeat their enemies, restore peace, and recover the promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Out of the disheveled and unrested nation, God calls David and makes a covenant with him:

*“And I will give you rest from your enemies. Moreover, the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”*

(2 Samuel 7:11-13)

At first, David walks in the promise of the covenants. He defeats God’s enemies and secures Israel’s protection (2 Samuel 8:1). But soon, David finds that his greatest enemy lies within.

## REJOICING

David is able to defeat the Philistines, but he cannot defeat his own lust. His adultery and murder catalyze generations of wickedness that ultimately lead to the division of the kingdom and Israel's exile from the land.

In the darkness of exile, it becomes clear that God's promise to David wasn't *really* about David. God would be faithful to fulfill his promises, but he would do it through David's descendant—an anointed one, a “Messiah,” who would take up his throne and establish an eternal kingdom of peace (Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5, 33:15).

For hundreds of years, Israel hoped and prayed and waited for this Messiah, with no sign of his coming.

Until Gabriel gives a message to a young virgin in Galilee:

*“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”*

(Luke 1:32-33)

Though his people had been faithless, God was faithful. He was going to raise up David's offspring and establish his kingdom (2 Samuel 7:12).

This time, the King would not be overcome by the enemy of sin (Hebrews 4:15). He would not merely defeat our external enemies. Through his death and resurrection, the Son of David defeated our greatest enemy—sin and death (Hebrews 2:15).

Our King needs no succession plan. Raised to life, never to die again, he reigns over an eternal kingdom that will never fade.

This is why Jesus is born into royalty, King of the Jews from the manger to the cross (Matthew 2:2, 27:37). Where David could only give Israel rest from surrounding armies, Jesus gives us rest from inward sin.

In his coming, Jesus picks up the baton of God's promise to David and carries it all the way to glorious completion.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* After reading about Jesus as the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant, meditate on the truth that Christ has given you rest from all your enemies (2 Samuel 7:11).
- *Pray to God.* Praise God for coming as the Prince of Peace to give you rest, and cast all of your unrest onto

his shoulders (Isaiah 9:6).

**At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Where do you need rest from your enemies?
- *Ask the Kids.* Why do you think Jesus is called the Son of David? (After letting the children answer, show them how David's descendant Jesus fulfilled all of God's promises).
- *Pray Together.* In thanksgiving for the rest that Jesus has provided, sing "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" together.

DECEMBER 25

## He's Coming Back

*“And behold, I am coming soon. Blessed is the one who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”*

REVELATION 22:7

He who was born in a manger will come again through the clouds (Revelation 1:7).

He who was born on a silent night will come again with trumpet blasts (Matthew 24:31).

He who arrived with angels singing “good news of great joy” will come again with an angel proclaiming that “the hour of his judgment has come” (Revelation 14:7).

Many were surprised by his first coming. But Jesus says that we have no reason to be caught off guard when he comes again:

*“Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go*



## REJOICING

*about naked and be seen exposed!” (Revelation 16:15)*

Jesus is coming back. His return will mean unimaginable joy for those who have believed, for those who are covered with the righteous garments of Christ. And his return will mean unfathomable suffering for those who are naked and exposed, who have chosen to remain in their sin instead of finding refuge in Christ. But he has not returned yet. “Joy to the world” is available for all who would believe. Far as the curse is found, Christ comes to make his blessings flow.

*The Lord is come! Let earth receive her king!* Repent, remove the idols of your heart, and prepare him room.

Get ready for Jesus’ return, and you will repeat the sounding joy of Jesus’ redemption forever and ever.

### **In the morning alone**

- *Journal Your Thoughts.* Thank Jesus for coming in the flesh, and tell him how much you want him to come back again.
- *Pray to God.* Praise the Father for sending his Son and praise the Son for humbly coming in the flesh!

### **At the kitchen table**

- *Start the Conversation.* Recount all the ways that Jesus' coming has changed your life.
- *Ask the Kids.* Why is the gift of Jesus' coming so special?
- *Pray Together.* In celebration of Christ's coming, sing "Joy to the World" together.



**Jesus didn't just come  
and go away. He sent  
a Helper to stay.**

**This Advent, wait for  
the Savior's coming  
by savoring his  
promised Gift.**



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