

A photograph of a person sitting on a couch, reading an open book. The background is a Christmas tree with warm, glowing lights. The text is overlaid on the top half of the image.

12 Days of Christmas Grace

by Mike Q. Daniel

12 Daily Devotionals to
Encourage your Life in Christ by
Grace this Christmas

Welcome to 12 Days of Christmas Grace

Why I Wrote This

The Christmas season is wonderful - full of time with family, presents shopping, decorations, Christmas music, church events, special times with friends... and it's crazy for all these same reasons :) I am really excited to provide a tool to focus our hearts and sharpen our faith and understanding on our Life in Christ by grace through this wonderful time. I also hope this devotional series will be useful in sharing an idea, a verse, a gift, or a life-changing discussion with those you love!

Let me know your thoughts, questions, inspirations, or desire for future resources by emailing mail@MikeQDaniel.com.

This set of devotionals is a *free gift*.

The most transformation things in life always are.

If you'd like to learn more about Mike Q Daniel Ministries or help us share Christ Life truth throughout the world please visit **MikeQDaniel.com**.

Your tax-deductible gift of any amount help spread the freedom of joy of all God has done and all we have in Jesus.

How to Use This Book

This book has 12 devotionals, each centered on one scene surrounding the original Christmas story. The type is large so you can read easily on your phone or send to an e-reader. Here are a few suggestions how you might get all you can from your time in this series:

- Read these devotionals and share the verse and key points with your family
- Pick up a copy for your Bible study leader, a pastor, or members of your small group **(It's free to them by signing up at MikeQDaniel.com from now until Christmas!)**
- Read a new study each morning and use the added verses and questions as focal points throughout your day
- Create a prayer journal for the year ahead, using the desire and focus God gives you from each day of this study, and writing out relational goals in your walk with God - one devotional focus per month.
- Use each devotional as a discussion topic via email with your small group or leadership team during the holiday.
- Share your thoughts from each devotional every morning or evening with a spouse, friend, or family member and help one another answer or pray through the questions together.
- Meet with friends and family three times over the holiday - each discussing 4 of the devotionals. This is a *great way* to make sure you enjoy them all AND build community with friends or family during the Christmas season

Regardless how you choose to use these devotionals, my prayer is that you will deepen your dependence and intimacy with Jesus Christ

as your Life by grace this Christmas. As you go through these devotionals, always pray God will give you revelation and application of Truth so you can more fully and deliberately grow in your relationship with Him through Christ's indwelling Life.

He reveals – we believe – He transforms – we share with others. In this way we are changed and He is glorified by His grace and revelation in our lives! Enjoy the (sleigh?) ride!

What to Do After You've Complete the 12 Days

My ministry, Mike Q. Daniel Ministries, is a mission and discipleship organization. **We GREATLY appreciate your prayer and financial support as you are led for all God is doing in this ministry!**

I share at conferences, preache for churches, conduct leadership training, coach pastors and minister at every level of churches large and small. I also work with Christ as Life ministries and churches throughout the US and those who work in other countries, who at most supplement the gifts of our support family that make this message known around the world through your gifts.

As I create resources and minister to God's family **PLEASE** pray for me as I share Christ as Life Truth. Also, please consider **supporting our ministry** with a tax-deductible donation or recurring gift. You can connect or contribute online or by mail at:

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If you'd like to talk to Mike about leading a **conference**, filling a **pulpit**, or sharing with a **small group** or **pastoral team**, or anything else, you can email mike directly at mail@MikeQDaniel.com

12 Days of Christmas Grace

Intro

An "Amen Christmas"

“...the angel said to her, “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. 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.” And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God... For nothing will be impossible with God.”

38 And Mary said, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; *let it be* to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

- Luke 2: 30-37

When God lets you in on something that He is doing, it isn't for your endorsement of His plan, but your participation in it. Only He can bring about the God-sized reality of His vision for your life. Our job in His divine work is simply agreeing by faith with Him. We let Him do what only He can do, so we can experience all He truly is to us already by grace.

AMEN CHRISTMAS!

When our Heavenly Father reveals Himself through His incarnation - whether by Jesus through Mary or Jesus through you - God is not more sovereign or less sovereign because of your acceptance, but He is glorified by our choice to believe and walk in His grace. Our choice doesn't change Him, but changes our experience of Him in our circumstances.

The angel didn't tell Mary to have no fear because of how good God's plan was, or because of how much she would like the outcome. He said to have no fear because she had God's grace - "For you have found *favor* [greek: "*charis*"] with God."!

That same grace empowers His plan in you, too. And like it was for Mary, God-sized plans are daunting, apart from God's grace that comes with it.

What was Mary's response to this impossible plan of God? She didn't question His ability, but His methodology - how would God bring about this impossible thing beyond what was humanly imaginable?

Scripture is full of godly doubters - from Gideon wanting proof, to Zacharias second-guessing God, to Mary questioning God's methodology - we all wonder. But when God promises the impossible, the result for Mary is that wonder turned to wonderment! She took hold of God's promise and pondered all these things in her heart.

Too often we withhold our heart from the wonderment of God's work in us. We often want His plan *for* us more than His activity *in* us. (Read that sentence again!)

Whenever that happens, we are seeking His plan so that we can evaluate it for ourselves based on our human ability and objectives, instead of taking hold of His impossible promise as Truth which He alone can bring about. When our faith is in

AMEN CHRISTMAS! ourselves we want to know His plan to evaluate our potential for success or mitigate potential loss. But when our confidence is in Christ, we ponder in wonder at His promise, and embrace His grace to bring about His purposes.

For Mary - her response went from bewilderment, to wonderment, to submission.

"Mary said, 'Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.'"

Ultimately, the only response of the humble heart to the revelation of God must be, "Let it be to me as you have said."

The biblical phrase for "let it be" is "AMEN"! It is agreement and affirmation that what God has said is true. The angel told Mary, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found grace (*charis*) with God."

Why fear when you can walk in favor with God?

The favor of God is yours in Christ - and when we agree with Him by faith about all we have and all He is in us by that grace, the impossible, God-sized work of God within us becomes *our* experience with Him.

Imagine the *reality* of who God is being your *experience* of God in your circumstances today! That is the power of His Divine Grace meeting our receptive faith!

This Christmas, God would have you know that *in Christ, you have found favor* with Him. He would have you believe and ponder the wonderment of His righteousness and provision by grace made *yours*.

Just as with Mary, God isn't seeking your permission, yet He longs for your participation. What would your "let it be" look like with Him this week?

God invited Mary to embrace the wonder of His Son's indwelling Life by the power of the Holy Spirit. He invites you and I into the same wonderment of His Life - by His Spirit - in us, too. And when we embrace Him and by faith allow Him to work the miracle of Christmas in each one of us, we get to share His Life with the world.

AMEN CHRISTMAS!

Other Bible verses for you:

"...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**

"But at just the right time, God sent his Son, *born of a woman...*" - **Galatians 4:4**

Make it real:

1) Have you embraced what God has declared about you? Are you righteous by grace, perfect in Christ, and filled in Him with all the fulness of God by grace alone?

2) Can you ask as Mary did, how can this be, and let God reveal to you His indwelling Life, by His finished work, in accordance with His nature, not your merit?

3) What would it look like for you to say, "Let it be with your servant just as you have said!"? Can you say "AMEN" to His divine life placed within you, His finished work accomplished on the cross for

you, which by His grace you now can submit to let Him live His divine life through you? Write out your “Let it be” statement to Him here...

AMEN CHRISTMAS!

Perfect Timing This Christmas

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered... each to his own town. 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 2:1,3-7**

During the holidays, it seems like everything happens at once... or in the wrong order. Most holidays, people are visiting, but you also are traveling. There are holiday festivities, but also lots to be done at home - decorating and cooking and cleaning and preparing. There are parties to attend and trees to be dragged down from the attic. There are cards to be written and presents to get in the mail. We get some time off from work, but we also have extra work to get done in less time! And THIS year, is out of control in every way, isn't it? The words "hectic" and "holidays" have become natural companions in our culture, haven't they?

Many of us want to enjoy all that Christmas represents with our family and friends, but all it requires from our resources and schedules can make our “down times” some of our toughest times.

Others come to holidays with a sense of abandonment - without friends and family to celebrate with, it can feel like the normal circumstances we learn to get through with office mates and church friends is suddenly vacant without them, and Christmas can be an *especially* tough time for the exact opposite reason as others' - *not* as much to do or look forward to.

Regardless of our challenges this holiday season, God would have us reflect on the powers that have influence over us and on His divine appointments for us.

In Luke 2, Caesar definitely was not interested in launching the most glorious celebration of God's sovereign power and grace in all of history. He wasn't thinking how difficult it might be for people to travel to the town of their lineage to be registered and taxed. He certainly didn't consider how Almighty God desired to use Caesar's authority for the redemption of the world.

And yet, God did.

God orchestrated Joseph's betrothal to Mary for exactly this reason. In His sovereignty, God put Caesar in power for this specific purpose. The Creator of the Universe had raised up two young people in Nazareth who in His perfect timing would be brought together at just the right time for the coming of Christ to coincide with a cross-country trip, when Bethlehem would be bursting its borders with visitors and have no room in the inn. I suspect Joseph and Mary were more than a little bewildered at God's "poor planning" and "bad timing"!

Can you relate? Does it seem like what God is allowing in your life is unreasonable in your circumstances? Is it easy to imagine how God could have made your current season a little easier?

God's plans are rarely designed to make following Him easier; He has designed our circumstances to make our faith deeper within us and His grace more glorious to us.

With Joseph and Mary and Caesar and all involved, God was setting the perfect scene for the most glorious revelation in history: God made known in human form. Everything about the scene had His divine touch - an impossible journey, a complete lack of human comforts, a dictator's tyranny, threat of ostracism or even death for an unwed, immaculate conception - these and more were all the worldly constraints seemingly against God's work. Upon this backdrop of chaos, rejection, persecution, suffering, and lowliness God would reveal divine Peace, heavenly Joy, unconditional Love, supernatural sovereignty, and eternal glory.

In worldly terms, it seems *unnecessarily miserable*. Maybe you can relate. From a divine perspective it was truly perfect for all He would do. His hope and peace and joy and power could not be mistaken as anything *but* divine under these circumstances! All His divinity would be revealed within the contrast of the lowliest of humanity.

As Joseph and Mary trusted God's sovereignty over Caesar's authority, and His provision despite such impoverished circumstances, they could participate in His perfect plan to reveal Himself at just the right time, in just the right way, with just the right people.

That's you today, too. As you trust that His power, passion, and plan are perfect for you in what seems like imperfect circumstances, you too can walk in divine Joy and Peace and Hope as revealed in Jesus this Christmas. And His divine nature can be manifest by His glorious life revealed fully in Christ *within you*.

Maybe the obstacles to our well-laid plans this Christmas are the perfect setting for His divine touch in our lives. Maybe the Creator is bigger than the crowds and the Blessor of all Good Gifts is greater than all our busyness. Could it be that the crazier things seem, the more God is setting us up to share in His Life by grace, that we might

witness His glory by His supernatural Peace and Joy for us in the midst of Christmas chaos?

My prayer for you is that you would fix your eyes on the Christ of Christmas, see His divine appointment in His coming first through Mary and now through *you*, that you might experience the divine supply of His indwelling Life within you today. Would you choose to see Him in contrast to the conflict of chaotic circumstances this week?

Other Bible verses for you:

“Fix your eyes on Jesus, the Author & Perfecter of your faith, who, for the joy set before Him, endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” - **Hebrews 12:2**

“But at *just the right time*, God sent his Son, born of a woman...” - **Galatians 4:4**

Make it real:

1) What in your life right now is a potential obstacle to joy, peace, or hope this Christmas season? How might these bring your focus more fully on Christ as your Source?

2) If by trusting God's perfect timing and sovereignty for you, you find Jesus provides joy and peace within you, instead of from your circumstances, how might that encourage or minister to those you will be with this holiday?

Shepherds Keeping Watch

“...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,”

- Luke 2:8-9

Whenever people first hear about the finished work of Christ on our behalf, and learn of the rest we have in Christ, and realize our identity with Him is based on His grace not our performance, it's not long before someone begins asking about “our responsibility”.

“I can't just *rest in Christ* and not take care of my obligations!” Aren't we still responsible to be a good spouse, a good parent, a good child to my parents, a good employee or employer, a good steward of finances, a good citizen?

Shepherds's watch sheep. That's their job. More than that, good shepherds love the sheep and care *for* them because they care *about* them.

The shepherds on the hillside, just beyond the torchlight of Bethlehem the night Jesus was born were diligently caring for their sheep. But then something happened that changed their focus. The sky lit up with the glory of God as heavenly messengers told of a manger, a baby, and the hope of the world. *God had set them up for something much greater than the job at hand.*

When God shows up in glory, wise workers shift focus. It was not irresponsible for them to be attentive to God's glory, follow God's direction, and entrust their life and livelihood to God's grace.

Those men on the hill outside Bethlehem were given sheep by God, became shepherds through God's work, and even lived in that area by God's sovereignty for this very moment. The job, the sheep, their employers... all these were the context of God's activity in their life as He prepared them for something *more*, calling them to something *else*, and ultimately making Himself known through their availability in this moment through their lives.

They were not grazing sheep there because it was the good grass... it was the good grass and they were being good shepherds *because of God's plan*. He was setting them up for more than sheep.

Similarly, we don't embrace our work, relationships, and opportunities because they are the source for what we need or our responsibility to get done. We trust the sovereign hand of God to call us to and accomplish His desire through the very circumstance in which we get to know Him more. We work hard out of our trust of Him, not our need from a circumstance. We care for our responsibilities not because it is up to us, but because we are fully available and invested in what we believe God to be doing in our lives.

My friends, God can meet your needs *any* way He would like; He has sent you as His agent to your family, your job, and your circumstances; not because it's the only way to meet your need, but because of what He wants to do for you, demonstrate to you, and accomplish through you as you are attentive to Him.

God is at His work - and He's working in all the work He has given you to do, too! God is also working on your relationship with Him through each of the earthly relationships He's given you. He cares more for your needs and your family and those you minister to - His sheep - than you do. In a very real way, all your circumstances are not the calling of God upon you as much as the context of His calling you to Himself.

As you are keeping watch over what God has given you to steward in this life? The same God who set the sky ablaze with angel song has set your life ablaze today with His indwelling life. The same glory that shone around them shines through you as you lean heavily upon His grace, fix your attentiveness fully on whatever He has for you in the places where He has called you, and share in the Gospel of His finished work.

As He calls you to share with Him in working out His story in your circumstances, He will reveal in and through you more than you can hope or imagine to the praise of the glory of His grace!

...and like He did to shepherds keeping watch over their flock by night, God will reveal Himself to you right there.

Other Bible verses for you:

² “...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfector of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God..” - **Hebrews 12:2**

“¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him..” - **Colossians 3:17**

Make it real:

1) What is the difference for you between trying to be who you need to be at work, home, and elsewhere versus looking for God, His activity, and His purpose in each context?

2) Do you feel you will do more or less as you live dependently on Him in your work and family? Can you think of any examples or prayer requests about what you feel you must get done?

3) What are you taking responsibility for accomplishing instead of walking with Him regardless of the results? What is fearful and what is exciting about walking by faith that way?

Glory to God in the Highest!

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” - **Luke 2:14**

As I write this devotional, I've had all kinds of challenges getting what God has placed on my heart into this little book: computer crashes, unexpected calls from churches in crisis, a banking error that just popped up today, and then more computer problems! God clearly called me to put this devotional together (maybe just for YOU!), so why does it seem so challenging to bring it about?

I suspect you know that feeling, don't you? Do you ever feel like you are working on the very thing God has given you to do, yet it seems like all of creation is conspiring against you as you do it? Doesn't God *want* us to be successful in what He calls us to?

The Gospel according to Mathew starts out with a strange list of the lineage of Christ, concluding with a summary of the generations between Abraham to David and David to Jesus.

Many of those listed in the genealogy of Jesus we know little or nothing about. Those listed as the forebears of Jesus - such as Abraham and David, Bathsheba (the wife of Uriah, no less!), Tamar, and Rahab, - were used powerfully by God for His divine purpose, yet were often morally broken, foreigners to Israel, murderers, adulterers, liars, and cheats.

Our heavenly Father could have easily established a line of morally superior people as the forebears to Jesus. He could have made the royal thread of His ancestry so obvious that His earthly life would be clearly for divine purposes, easy, even opulent. Yet, instead of Jesus

being another Solomon on the earth, He was born to an obscure line, to obscure parents, in an obscure city, in a cave used as a barn.

You see, what God is calling you to is always going to be daunting apart from His divine touch.

He is not asking you to step up to do the impossible, but to let His life so work through you by faith that no one for a second might mistake His work as resulting from your ability and effort. Don't step up to the impossible - and it's *all* impossible! Step by faith into His grace for whatever He alone will do through you in impossible circumstances. He is the God of the impossible.

He has revealed that His hope for glory on the earth is by His indwelling Life, not our performance and excellence. (See Col. 1:27)

God's glory will come by one means only, His life by grace in us who believe. Our believing doesn't somehow *merit* His work through us, but *invites* Him to do by grace what only He can do. The result of His divine work through us is that He alone gets the credit. Not us. And not even our faith. It is not our competence or even our confidence He is exalting, but His grace to us through Christ's indwelling Life.

So, God is not glorified by your activity for Him, but by His grace toward you.

In fact, God isn't glorified *by* your faith. He is glorified by what He does because of your faith!

Whatever *you* do *for* Him speaks of you, but what *He* does *for* you and *through* you speaks of Him - of His grace for His glory.

In Ephesians, Paul wrote: “*God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.*”

What He has done in Christ for you, by Christ in you, and through Christ's sufficiency in your circumstances is sufficient for all the glory He desires. His grace to and through us truly is His "*Glory in the Highest.*"

The work of His grace is enough for Him. Let it be enough for you.

Other Bible verses for you:

"...God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." - **Colossians 1:27**

"¹⁷ So all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen generations, and from David to the deportation to Babylon fourteen generations, and from the deportation to Babylon to the Christ fourteen generations." - **Matthew 1:17**

Make it real:

1) If the sole hope of God's glory on the earth is by Christ in you by grace, what does that say of your effort, competence, and righteousness?

2) What does Christmas look like if our traditions - gifts, decorating, carols, etc. - are all to the praise of His grace and the life of Jesus within us? How does that impact your perspective of the holiday?

Oh, Wise Guys!

“¹Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² 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**

We don't usually think of the Book of Daniel, written more than 600 years before the birth of Christ, as a Christmas story. But it *really* is.

Nebuchadnezzar, The king of Babylon, had a bad dream. He told all the wisemen and sorcerers in his court to tell him both the dream and it's interpretation, or he'd kill them all - figuring if they couldn't know the dream, how could they know its meaning? Of course they couldn't guess the king's dream, and he knew they were conspiring to lie about their interpretation and advice, so he was having them all gathered up to be executed.

Enter Daniel, a young man captured from his homeland and placed as one of the wisemen in Nebuchadnezzar's court. Daniel knew God - he knew God was sovereign over his life, over Neb's dreams, over life and death, over kings and kingdoms. Daniel recognized that If God seemed to be putting Daniel in peril for a dream no one could know, it must for God's divine purpose. **Since Daniel was okay with whatever God had purposed, He trusted God would use him in it.** He set an appointment with the king in which God could reveal the dream. He didn't presume upon God's plan - what God would do - but he absolutely presumed upon God's sovereignty.

When God revealed the dream to Daniel along with its interpretation, Daniel didn't first go running to the king, but to the King of kings. He worshipped.

Declaring God's sovereignty over every other authority, Daniel exalted God, submitted himself to God, and proclaimed His grace. He had put His expectation on God's sovereignty, and then recognized God's unmerited favor (see Daniel 2:10-23). Daniel's attention clearly was toward God.

Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar the dream and its meaning. The king exalted the God of Daniel to a high level, and Daniel shared the gift of authority with his fellow countrymen, and raised up a group of influencers for God's purposes for ages to come in Babylon.

You see, God isn't working primarily for your success or against your suffering, but *uses both* for the revelation of His Life, love, grace, and glory. In this way, every victory and every setback is subjugated to His sovereign plan for our lives. But His character revealed to us is love *for us*. The Life He shares is sufficiency *for us*. The economy of His work is always grace *to us*. We are the conveyance of His character - and He is a truly great Father to His children. Everything will be used to exalt God, but God is exalted by His grace and love for you. It's always about Him, yet He's always caring for you, so you can trust Him in all things.

How is this a **Christmas story?**

Because of God's work through Daniel, 600+ years later a group of wisemen from the east came to Bethlehem looking to worship the King of kings, having seen His star and read His prophecy.

How did they know who the Christ was and where to find Him when all of Israel was missing it? They were from the area of Babylon. Their ancestors had seen the sovereignty of God over every other authority, and they embraced the worship - the exaltation, praise, submission, and thanks - toward God. They had learned from Daniel and the prophets he read that this day would come - and they were going to lead in the worship of Him who reigns forever and ever.

My friends, the One who is sovereign over every kingdom is in control in all your crises. The God who orchestrated a worship team in Bethlehem hundreds of years in advance is orchestrating the details of your life. The Lord who delivered Daniel is delivering you by the same grace, and the power of His Spirit that prevailed in Nebuchadnezzar's court through Daniel wants to prevail through His plans for you today. Here and now, and in the years to come.

Daniel presumed upon the sovereignty of God in worship so that God could be exalted before men who would also worship, so that years later a group of men would lead the world in worship, submitting themselves and their resources to the King of kings and Lord of lords. God is still making Himself known and using all things for His renown.

Maybe today you are in a crisis. Maybe things are not as they seem they should be in your career, your family, your health, or your finances. Maybe you are struggling with your own thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Whether you know it or not, God has got you. He is setting you up with a choice to exalt Him because of His sovereignty in your life. You may not be able to assume He will do as you'd like Him to, but you can absolutely, 100% of the time, without deviation trust Who He is. He is bringing you to exalt Him over every other desire, pursuit, threat, or hope in your life.

God is not daunted by your circumstance, nor is He worried about your success. He has sovereignly brought you to the place to read these very words and be invited by His Spirit to exalt His holy Name above all other names. He is summoning mankind to worship - to pursue Him from afar for those who don't yet have a relationship with Him - and to worship Him in spirit and truth for those who have by grace drawn close in humble dependence and intimacy with Him.

God is at His work. He is bringing about His plan. He will reveal His love and power in your life. And you get to respond to Him, point to Him, and celebrate Him in all things as you live for His renown. Wherever you are today, whatever God is doing, and wherever you are going, come and worship the Sovereign King of Christmas.

Other Bible verses for you:

“¹⁰The Chaldeans answered the king and said, “There is not a man on earth who can meet the king's demand, for no great and powerful king has asked such a thing of any magician or enchanter or Chaldean. ¹¹ The thing that the king asks is difficult, and no one can show it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

— **Daniel 2:10-11**

“²⁰ Daniel answered and said:

‘Blessed be the name of God forever and ever,
to whom belong wisdom and might.

²¹ He changes times and seasons;
he removes kings and sets up kings;

he gives wisdom to the wise
and knowledge to those who have understanding;

²² He reveals deep and hidden things;
he knows what is in the darkness,
and the light dwells with him.

²³ To you, O God of my fathers,
I give thanks and praise,

for you have given me wisdom and might,
and have now made known to me what we asked of you,
for you have made known to us the king's matter.’” — **Daniel**

2:10-23

Make it real:

1) Where do you need to see the sovereignty of God in your life this week? What would it look like to trust God with that circumstance?

2) What is the difference between presuming upon God's plan and presuming upon His character or sovereignty?

3) What might your work for His activity look like compared to trusting His work for, in, and through you regardless of your circumstance?

Josephology

“Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. ²¹ She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” ²² All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet... ²⁴ When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, ²⁵ but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus.”

- Matthew 1:19-22,24

Joseph was a good guy. He was no doubt a hard worker and took care of his responsibilities. He had a heart for God. He was a good citizen. He no doubt brushed twice a day. He was a really good guy. When he was betrothed to Mary, he expected a good, simple life together - working at his carpentry, taking care of people, raising a family.

He didn't deserve all the scrutiny, condemnation, even persecution having a child outside of marriage could bring.

Being a good guy, he didn't want to marry into an unhealthy life and lifestyle, and he didn't want the persecution of being an unwed father, but he also didn't have need to embarrass or hurt Mary if avoidable. How could he be a good guy and still be a good guy toward her?

As this good guy contemplated how to be just and loving in an impossible situation, the God of impossible situations, who would in Christ on the Cross prove Himself as both Loving and Just in one man, intervened. God didn't intervene by removing the crisis. Instead, God intervened by letting Joseph know he was still okay - he didn't have to "do the right thing", figure out the right course, or balance impossible conflicts. God would work it out, and Joseph would be okay. God would do a great work, and Joseph would get to play a part. But there was a cost... Both their families knew Mary was pregnant, people in the community would know, their wedding celebration certainly would be tainted, and criticism and condemnation from others was assured. There certainly could be persecution or even threat on the lives of Mary and Joseph.

Like his step-son 33 years later, Joseph chose to embrace what he didn't deserve, so that he could participate in a plan bigger than His own. He would suffer for sin he did not commit for the sake of God's revelation in reconciling the world to Himself.

The angel that visited Joseph outlined God's plan: Joseph's willingness to participate in God's plan would provide the context for God to introduce His Son, the Savior of the world.

God often works this way in our lives. What God brings about costs us our agenda, but also reveals His grace according to His plan in Jesus Christ.

Our willingness to give up life as we would pursue it for ourselves to participate in the Life He will bring about - that trust and submission and availability - is true worship. His grace and care toward us allows us to experience a plan bigger than our own, share in a life grander than we can ever produce for ourselves, and reveal the very nature of the love and sufficiency of Jesus Christ within our circumstances.

Just like Joseph, where you and I allow God to reveal His plan in us - even at our temporal expense - people are set free by the revelation of Jesus.

Where we submit to God's agenda at the cost of our own, God is exalted in our life. Where God is exalted, Jesus Christ is revealed. and where Jesus is made known, people are set free.

God is working on a really big plan in your life. His plan for you is to increasingly entrust yourself to Him. His plan will exalt Him in your life. His plan will make Himself known through you in ways you cannot cause or predict. And my friend - as God unveils the grace and power of His indwelling Life within you by the very real presence of Jesus Christ - people are being set free! And in the process, you participate in His Divine Life.

He is even now wooing others through you to be free from the bondage of sin, shame, and performance-based value. He is calling them through you to entrust their lives to Him and be free of identity in the failure and frustration of the flesh.

He is demonstrating through you the freedom others can have to participate in a plan for His glory and share in His Life by grace - free *from* condemnation, *from* performance, *from* the need to overcome the past or control the future. He is offering through you a freedom *to rest, to receive, to share* in work and life with the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Free from all that isn't life; Free to Live fully in Christ Jesus.

Because of His love for you, His sovereign plan for you, and His power at work in your life, you can give up trying to be the cause of what your life should be or the fixer of all you'd like changed. You can know Him, submit to Him, walk with Him, abide in Him, and experience and express the Life of Christ. Enjoy Him this holiday.

Like Joseph, you don't have to reconcile all things to be who you think you should be in every circumstance. God's got this. He *really* is a good God like that.

Other Bible verses for you:

“²¹ 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 5:21** (ESV)

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship”
- **Romans 12:1** (ESV)

Make it real:

1) What are the good plans you have for yourself that you can submit to a great God for whatever He would do as you entrust yourself and your needs to Him as your Source?

2) We've all been hurt by others. Where have you been wronged and want to be set free from having to hold others accountable or needing to be justified? What should your prayer be for God's work in your heart?

Happy Holy Day!

“³⁵And the angel answered her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy — the Son of God.’” - **Luke 1:35**

“Merry Christmas!”

I love hearing that, don't you? I love saying it to others, too. The phrase is simply well-wishing others on the traditional day of the “mass” the church celebrates the birth of Christ. In essence, saying, “Merry Christmas” is saying “Happy Birthday to Jesus!” to everyone we meet. Gotta love that.

Lately, it's becoming politically correct to say, “Happy Holidays”. Retail stores, government institutions, and secularists are choosing “happy holidays” over “Merry Christmas” because they don't want to mention Christ.

Of course, they don't realize that the “Holy” in “Holidays” is just another name for Jesus.

Not only does Luke say that He is *called* “Holy”, but Paul actually says He is *our holiness*. There are plenty of verses that say God in Christ *makes* us holy, but Paul wrote to the Corinthians describing how holiness is ours: by grace we have Jesus who has *BECOME* *our holiness*. (See 1 Cor. 1:30)

If He IS our holiness, we have no holiness *apart* from Him; He's it. We don't lack any holiness with Him, He's enough.

You can't pursue holiness apart from Christ, but you don't need any more holiness than you have in Christ by grace.

(Yeah, go ahead and read that again.)

Jesus will change our thinking and feeling and behaving from the inside out as we look to Him and trust Him more. Yet, we must never mistake *our* behavior for *His* holiness. You can't cause it, and you can't undermine it. Holiness by grace can't be removed or added to by your performance.

Jesus Himself is the pure, Living Water within you, and He is not made less pure or tainted in any way when our external behavior causes an external smudge on the vessel of His pure, indwelling Life.

The smudge outside the glass doesn't somehow make the water impure, does it? You don't cause His holiness - it's yours by grace. You don't impede His holiness, you live it out by faith. His holiness is a gift to you. Your experience of His holiness is a choice of trust.

His holiness is not diminished by your behavior. His holiness is never added to by your activity. His Life is made manifest within us *only as we live from Him*, but when we try to live from the flesh we haven't lost His Life. His work in us isn't undone by our actions. That's the power of true grace. His true character isn't diminished by my temporal immaturity.

Hebrews 10:14 says, "*By one sacrifice He has forever made perfect those He continues to sanctify.*" He who is Holy has set you apart completely and forever for His purpose. There's no improving or adding to His completed work - that's what "*made perfect*" means. But He will *increasingly* work out through us what He has *fully* worked in us.

What was described of Mary *physically* in Luke 1:35 is just as true *spiritually* of you today:

You have been overshadowed and completely overcome by the power of the Most High.

He has placed the very Life of Jesus Christ within *you* - not by the work of the flesh, but by His Spirit.

He who is in *you* is holiness *for you*, and by Him *you* are now God's child.

If "Merry Christmas" is saying "Happy Birthday to Jesus" to everyone we meet, then "Happy Holidays" is like proclaiming our own "Rebirth Day" in His finished work and indwelling Life!

I hope Jesus' birthday is full of merriment for you, but I also pray you walk in the fullness of Joy of His holy life that is yours by His sacrifice. He has given His Life that you might share in His holiness.

After all, "Christ" or "Messiah" is His title, but His Name is *Holy*. And you are God's happy, holy child by grace. That's certainly reason to celebrate!

So, **Happy Holidays!**

Other Bible verses for you:

"It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." - **1 Corinthians 1:30**

¹³ Therefore, preparing your minds for action,[a] and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he

who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “*You shall be holy, for I am holy.*” – **1 Peter 1:13-16**

Make it real:

1) Where have you identified - feeling good or bad about yourself - based on your behavior lately? What would it look like to identify with Jesus as holiness for you? To identify more with Him than with sin, or more with your savior than your success?

2) How do you feel when you see that what the angel foretold would be true physically of Mary is a spiritual reality for all of us born again in Christ? How do you respond to God because of this incredible work in you? Write out your thoughts as a prayer, poem, or even a song here...

Incarnational You

“**5** Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, **6** who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, **7** but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. **8** And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. **9** Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, **10** so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, **11** and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- Philippians 2:5-11

Paul wrote to the Church in Phillipi from jail. He had been arrested for sharing the Gospel, and used his Roman citizenship to be deported to Rome for trial. While in chains in Rome, he encouraged the local church there, and wrote the last of his letters to the Church and his pastoral letters.

Ironically, God did a whole lot with Paul while imprisoned by Rome to keep him from sharing about God! In fact, it's likely the letters Paul wrote from prison have had more impact on the Body of Christ over

the centuries than the churches and leaders raised up at the time. Soon after writing this letter, Paul was executed for his faith.

In this passage from one of those last letters, we see Paul describing the empowerment and motivation for this kind of obedience, even to death.

Paul says the mindset we should have - Christ's attitude - is the one we *already* have in Him, and that made the Christmas story possible: Though equal to God, He saw equality with Him as nothing to be grasped or held on to.

Seriously? That's often the *opposite* of our attitude, isn't it?

We are *not* God, but keep trying to be the director and source of our own life. Christ *is* God, but gave up living from His own authority and for His own glory.

We are NOT God, though often trying to live like we *are*; He IS God, but chose to live like He's NOT!

Why would He do this?

There is only one answer: Jesus gave up His authority and glory with God so you could share in God's glory and authority with Him.

He lived as *us* so that we could live *with Him*. He gave up His *divine position* so that you could share in His *divine nature*.

**He loves you so much that He would give up His life
so that you could take up His Life.**

He died for you, so He could share His Life with you. Let that sink in.

It was for you that He gave up living AS God to live obediently FROM God. But not only did He give up His Life as equal to God, He then gave His earthly life sacrificially for our sins. Left life with the Father to then also give up life here on earth. That's the love of Christ.

Jesus left the Father's side and chose to *live incarnationally* with us and as us, so that He could *move us* from where we are to where the Father is.

We could never *get ourselves* there, but nothing could keep Him *from* there - so He came and got us, and took us home.

Christ paid for our sin in His death, so that those who receive His death as our own may walk with Him in His resurrection. And by virtue of His Spirit in us and our spirit in union with Him, He has seated us at the right hand of God with Him forever.

Done. The End. Finished.

He did for us what we could not do, so that we could enjoy with Him what we could never deserve.

It is time you stopped trying to accomplish what He's completed, stop trying to earn what He's freely given, and *start* walking in the grace Jesus Christ has fully supplied for you to enjoy.

Abide in His Life by grace.

Here's the kicker for you and I today:

That same mindset is yours in Christ:

You have all things with the Father by grace, so you can afford to not live for yourself.

You have been made righteous and holy and blameless by grace, so you do not have to try to justify yourself in your circumstances.

You have a perfect relationship with the Father in Christ from eternity past, so you do not strive to please Him but live from the very pleasing life you have already with Him.

You can give up trying to produce what you want your life to be or control your circumstances and justify yourself, because all of that is done for you by the Lover of Your Soul. You can live from God as the Director and Source of your life, just like Jesus did.

Maybe today you can stop trying to live as god of your own life, because *you already fully share in God's Life* through the indwelling presence of the incarnational Christ.

This Christmas, know that the One who condescended to be born as a helpless baby in a manger has ascended above every other power and authority, and He has raised you with Him if you will receive His work for you, in you, and through you.

And now His indwelling Life makes us His hands and feet. It is through us - by our faithful dependence and obedience to the Father - that He will love others, reveal His grace, and live for God's renown. We are the Body of Christ. *We are His incarnation today!*

And as the Father exalts the Son, Jesus exalts us with Him - not by our doing, but by His grace. Jesus gave up exalting Himself and you and I can give that up, too.

And as we walk dependently and obediently from His incarnation within us, we will experience and express His Life to praise of the glory of His grace.

My friend - you have quite an attitude (a divine attitude!) in Jesus! To live incarnationally from God for others as you walk as He walked - and how He STILL walks in you.

Other Bible verses for you:

“...His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them *you may become partakers of the divine nature*.” - **2 Peter 1:2-4**

“...He said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit..”
- **John 19:30**

“When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”
- **Colossians 1:4**

“...to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,” - **John 1:12**

“But the one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him.”
- **1 Corinthians 6:17**

Make it real:

1) How does the life you have in Christ afford living incarnationallly - what does that mean to you?

2) If His work for you is complete, then what should you be living for if not to earn or payback or cause what your life should be?

3) What is one way you have tried to direct or be the source of your own life? How does Jesus' finished work by grace empower you to live dependently upon God for direction as your Source?

The "Witness" of Jesus

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name **Immanuel**” (which means, God with us).

– **Matthew 1:23**

I've done weddings for people I barely know, and more than a few for dear friends. As much as I enjoy seeing anyone celebrate God's call to marriage, I truly *share personally* in the joy of those I love when they get married. It may be the same event, and my role in each of their weddings may be the same, but *my experience* is entirely different. Relationship with them makes it different.

We hate hearing when someone has been hurt personally or physically, but *when someone I love is hurt or heartbroken* I hurt with them.

We love hearing stories of personal triumph and blessings, but *I actually celebrate with those I love* when they have a big event or blessing in their life - especially when we get to celebrate something together.

When you love someone, their win is your win and their loss is your loss.

Have you hurt along *with* someone recently? Have you cried *with* someone, not just been sad *for* them? Have you celebrated *with* someone, not just been happy *for* them? “*With*” is personal.

**What's informational becomes transformational,
when it becomes *relational*.**

What I mean is that we can know *about* something and not be affected much by it, but if we are close to someone, then what impacts them impacts us as well.

We cry when someone we love is hurt. We smile and laugh and even get excited when someone we love celebrates.

That's what it means that Jesus lives *with* us. God wanted to share in our life as one of us so that we could share in His nature in every way by grace. He wanted life *with* us to be made *personal* so it could be *transformational*.

Living *with Jesus* is different than knowing *about Jesus*.

God wanted to share in our life as a man, so that we could share in Christ's eternal Life with God. Living *with* God - not just for Him - is only possible *in* Jesus.

In fact, Jesus didn't reveal Himself by name as "God *for* us" or "God *far from* us" or even "God made *like* us". God revealed Christ as ***Immanuel*** - which means "God *with* us."

By calling Himself *Immanuel*, Jesus actually defines Himself for us by His relationship with us.

God's love for you is more than just wanting you to be with Him where He is. It's so great He is willing to be with you where you are. That's what the incarnation of Christ in human form is all about.

What do we get from the incarnational birth of Christ?

1. Jesus with us as a perfect intercessor

He went through the entire human experience as us so that His Life would be the perfect sacrifice FOR us. By living with us as we live, He can completely intercede on our behalf. He can truly be our replacement in death, our sufficiency in life, our intercessor with the Father. All this is possible because He lived as *us*, so He can intercede fully and forever for us.

Jesus is on your side forever.

He is always in your corner.

No matter what, He chooses to associate Himself with you in all things.

2. Jesus with us as God's love to us.

He is the greatest imaginable expression of love.

Most know John 3:16 - that God loved us so much that He gave His Son. Christ in you has made *you* a giver! Just like Him - we give by nature. He loves so He gives, and so do we in Him.

He is WITH us now, and continues to give to us. Out of His character of love and His presence with us, He is always giving and we are always receiving. **He gives by grace and we receive by faith.** Such is the power of His "*witness*" - it makes His love toward us practical because He is actually with us. He doesn't just give of the world, He is always offering *Himself*.

Paul said we know what love is in that while we were sinners in rebellion against God, Jesus died for us. (Roman 5:8). His love is a *practical reality* because of His grace which *gives*, and it's a revelation of God's character - now in you - 24/7 because of Christ's *ongoing* expression of divine love.

Jesus really is your Source.

3. Jesus with us in physical form.

Christ lived as man was designed to live - dependent on God as our Source. Scripture says we will be like Him in this world. We know what He is like because we can see and read from those who witnessed Jesus' earthly life.

We cannot live the life that God always intended Jesus would live through us. We can only live by faith - dependent on Christ - even as He lived dependently on the Father. In Jesus, we live as He lived!

Jesus is your example - living from and for our Heavenly Father.

4. Jesus with us through His indwelling Life

Imagine again Mary and Joseph being pregnant with Jesus as God incarnate. Imagine THAT constant reminder of the indwelling Christ! It would have changed everything they experienced in every moment of every day, wouldn't it? It would have overshadowed every other issue in their daily circumstances.

Do you think they felt secure in God's hand, knowing His purpose of the Life within her and God's constant presence? Do you think she felt loved to have been chosen as the vessel of Christ *everywhere they went*?

You and I have that same Jesus within us! His life is real, and ever present, and overshadowing every issue in our daily lives! God's purpose in our lives is totally reliant on His power to bring it about.

Jesus IS your LIFE!

He isn't just going to live the life or give the life; He IS the Life! He's the Life you will increasingly experience as you grow in

dependence on Him within you and confidence of who you are in Him. That's Christ-confidence instead of self-competence!

So - Jesus is *with* us. He *is* Immanuel.

He is for you. He is your champion. He is loving you right now. Anything less is just a lie.

And since He is in us, He isn't just loving you, but loving *through* you. He is moving us from within us out into a deeper fellowship with the Father as *He forgives and serves others through us*.

Faith is never what we do to cause Him to do anything. Faith is letting Him be all He is in us and through us by grace. In other words...

**Your faith doesn't cause God's activity,
it causes you to be His vessel for it.**

This Christmas, will you live deliberately and dependently *with* Him who is God *with* you? What would it look like to let Him who IS your Life *be* your Life - let Him love and direct you by faith, and experience all He is as He expresses Himself through you?

Other Bible verses for you:

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body is by faith in the Son of God who loves me and gave Himself for me." – **Galatians 2:20**

"Consequently, He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." – **Hebrews 7:25**

Make it real:

1) Do you talk to God like someone who really *gets* you, who truly understands and relates to how you feel and what you're going through?

2) Do you feel loved? Do you believe God loves you? If so, do you ever feel *unloved*? If He gave Himself when you didn't deserve it as the very revelation of love, why would you ever feel you can *undeserve* it now?

3) Are you coming to the revelation of the impossibility of the Christian life? If Jesus who was perfect lived dependently on His Father, what does that look like in your work, family, finances, health, and relationship with God?

4) In what circumstances are you trying to produce life or cause it to be what you want instead of trying to experience Jesus Christ as your life in every circumstance?

Good Tidings of What?

“⁹ ...An angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. ¹⁰ Then the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. ¹¹ For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this *will be* the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.’”

- Luke 2:9-12

Imagine it's late one night and you are looking at your schedule for the next day, evaluating all that must be done and seeing how early you have to leave to get where you need to be. Suddenly, there's a loud knock on the door; it's late and quiet, so you jump at the noise. When you open the door, it's two policemen. They have a small slip of paper in their hand from which they check your name. Your heart is beating - what do they want? Why are they here? What will they say next? You are full of dread. The police have authority, so are you or someone in your home in some kind of trouble? Has someone been hurt? Is there trouble in the neighborhood?

Now imagine their next words after confirming who you are, saying, “There's nothing to worry about, ma'am (or sir)...” Immediately you feel better, but terrible fear has just turned to milder anxiety - “If there's nothing to fear, then why are they here?” you think.

“We found this which belongs to you...” and show you picture of something of incredible value to you - your pet, your wedding ring, a precious heirloom, your car, maybe your teenager, your coin collection, etc. - which you didn't know was missing.

Finally they tell you it was stolen or lost and has been recovered. They hand you the slip of paper with a claim number on it. “Just go to the station at 127 Main....” You are scrambling for a pen... they tell you where to go, how to get your item or loved one back. You are relieved and anxious. You might run out without putting your shoes on, or still wearing your bathrobe. Not much matters but getting what was lost.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to the Shepherds the night of Jesus' birth, they were terrified - is God angry? What have we done? What can we do now in the face of such power and holiness and authority!?

In the span of a few minutes the angel facilitates a *huge transition* for the shepherds that night, and *the change they went through is the one God is calling us to today.*

1) **A Change of Heart - from terrible fear to great joy**

The shepherds were terribly afraid in light of what such great power and authority could do to them, and could cost them. But the good news of God's power at work for them, not against them, changed their heart from fear to joy.

2) **A Change of Focus - from self to Savior.**

They were humbled in light of God's glory. All the thoughts they must have had of their unworthiness, their lack, their desire to be better and to have done more must have flooded their minds at first. They were afraid of God's glory because of the contrast of God's divinity with their own humanity. But the angel didn't talk about their sufficiency or competence, but God's provision and salvation in the Person of Christ. He redirected their focus from their inadequacy to Christ's adequacy - from themselves to their Savior.

3) A Change of Hope - from personal occupation to divine direction.

Before the angel showed up in the night sky, the shepherds were busy with their occupation - watching the sheep. The passage specifically tells us that they were busy keeping watch over their flock by night. I have no reason to think the glory of God appearing above the hillside put all the sheep to sleep, or caused the shepherds to suddenly be independently wealthy. The sheep still mattered, still needed fed and protected. But the goal of the shepherds when they walked out to the flock that night was not the goal in their hearts when they walked away into Bethlehem. The good news of great joy carried with it divine direction to find Christ the Lord. Their hope was no longer in how well they did their job - they were suddenly filled with hope of a personal connection with God incarnate!

What is the result when by God's revelation He moves your heart from fear to joy, moves your focus from self to your Savior, and moves your hope from personal occupation to divine direction?

The result is your *alignment with God's activity and participation in His plan*. The angel knew these men would go looking for the One they'd been told about. He didn't tell them *to* go looking, he told them how they would find Him. The natural result of a change of heart, focus, and hope is to want to be where God is working, to know Him, to share in the great news.

God gives your mind revelation to change your heart, and the result always is to fuel a change in your activity. When God renews a mind to the Truth of Christ's Life, it will inspire a transformed heart and empower new behavior.

Our thinking, feeling, and acting can never be the same once we've encountered the glory of God *for* us.

The wise men were told of a King above all kings, and instead of serving in their king's court came looking for the Christ Child. Joseph had a mind focused toward Mary and himself, but when told of God's

plan shifted from self-motivation to the world's salvation. From Abraham to Paul and Moses to Zacchaeus, over and over in God's Word we see people encountering the work of God for us and shifting minds, hearts, and behavior according to His divine activity.

My dear saints, you cannot change your thinking or overcome your own emotions. You cannot fix your behavior or cause God's glory. All you and I can do is fix our eyes on Jesus, receive His revelation, increasingly seek Him to know Him and be with Him, and share Life with Him.

Because when we seek Him, He will be found by us *within us*. HE is the Revealer of Divine Life, the Source of Good Tidings, the cause of Great Joy, the Savior of Souls.

The more we see Him as He is, the more we will be transformed into His image in our mind, will, and emotions. So seek Him and see Him. *Receive* God's revelation of Christ as your Life this Christmas. And as Christ within you is revealed to you the desire of your heart, focus of mind, and hope in activity will all be filled with the reality of Jesus' Life for you.

Other Bible verses for you:

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:23**

“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. - **1 John 3:2**

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” - **John 3:17**

Make it real:

1) In the daily pressures and anxiety of life, what does your heart trouble over and when do you experience anxiety? What would it look like to truly know that God is for you in that area, and to be attentive to what He would share with you in it?

2) When things go well what do you tend to think of yourself? When things seem daunting how do you tend to defend yourself? What would a focus on Christ instead of self look like in those situations?

3) What in your circumstances might make you feel better about tomorrow - more secure, more successful, more hopeful? Be honest. What if God called you to find Him in those moments and circumstances and promised abundant Life as you find Him and share in His activity? What would that look like in your job, family, finances, health issues, career, and ministry opportunities?

Finders Keepers

“You will find the Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” - **Luke 2:12**

I love that the angel promised, “You WILL find the Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes...” Not *if* you can find Him, but you *will* find Him.

Jesus is discoverable to you and I today, too. *You will find Him if you seek Him with your whole heart!* (Jeremiah 29:13). *Having* is not the same as *Finding*. You *HAVE* Christ and His Life by grace. You *FIND* Him in your experience and circumstance.

But there’s a powerful 2-fold secret to *finding* God that is evident throughout Scripture and shows up in this Christmas passage:

First, seeking Him in a way that you will find Him means seeking Jesus *Himself*, not what you want *from* Him.

God told Jeremiah He desires His people seek Him with our whole hearts, notably not a *divided* heart - wanting anything else but God. We often seek God for something besides God Himself, don’t we? We want security in our finances and affirmation in our occupation and love from our worldly relationships and peace from our situation and joy from happy circumstances. We’d love to think that we can pursue God for what we want from our worldly life, but we must seek God with a heart *for* God if we are to *experience* God as He desires.

The shepherds didn’t go looking for security or purpose or prosperity from the baby they were told was lying in a feeding trough! They left

their security and worldly hopes on the hillside in order to go find Him.

Paul said that he wanted to know Christ, and the power of His resurrection, and even the fellowship of sharing in His suffering... He wanted to know Jesus AS Life not anything else He could get FROM Jesus FOR life (see Phil. 3:7-14).

Jesus said that we must lose our life to find it, and deny ourselves to follow Him. He isn't saying your new creation self isn't good. He's saying you aren't living for you when you're living from Him. If we want to follow after Him - to follow His example - that's how Jesus rolls. We will live as He lived as recipients of direction and supply from our heavenly Father. Like the shepherds being told "born to you this day," we already have Him - He is born within us - but if we want to find Him within our circumstance and experience, we must pursue knowing *Him*, not gaining from the world.

Seeking Him wholeheartedly is not for secondary benefit. God is calling us to trust Him AS our security and affirmation and love and peace and joy. Jesus is not the guaranteed means to anything else, and nothing else is the means of knowing Him more - nothing else is necessary! We seek Christ *for* Christ and *find* Christ... and He is enough.

Second, seeking Him in a way that you find Him means though we seek, it is always God who reveals.

It's not you and I who *accomplish* finding Him - not how devoted you are to seeking or how competent you are as a seeker - but God reveals Christ and His Life to those who earnestly seek Him - it's still His doing, it's still by grace, it's always divine revelation. Only God can make known what we cannot know apart from Him. Nothing you do can make you the cause of God's activity or revelation.

If you could deserve it, there's no grace in it. If there's no grace - it's not from God. So we seek - that's faith, but God reveals - that's grace.

How could these men outside Bethlehem find the baby the angel spoke of? Did they have to knock on every door in an ever expanding radius until they found Him? Did they have to know and exegete all of Biblical prophecy? No - if they were willing to seek the Christ Child, God would make Him imminently *findable*. If they would leave their worldly security and self-sufficiency, He would direct their search - they were told what they would find, not where to look. The “how” was personal - they followed.

The difference here is wonderful - God must reveal Christ as our Life, but *who* He reveals the Son to are those who *want* to know Him, who will receive Him as He is, not just try to use Him for what they want from the world.

Just like the angel to the shepherds, God gives us revelation of where to find Jesus today - not in the circumstances and worldly pursuits and self-justification or vindication where we often want to find Him. He wraps the fulness of God in the glorious light of His Son, and places Jesus with all that fulness of His divine nature - IN YOU. God told shepherds to find the King of Glory in a lowly manger. God reveals where we are to find Him, too...

**We who believe are the lowly resting place
of His divine life today.**

The God we seek is wanting a love relationship with you, and wants you to discover and experience Him and get to know Him from WITHIN you.

Maybe this Christmas we can find His love by letting Him love others through us. Maybe we can find His joy by encouraging others in our life. Maybe we can find Him and know Him more by pursuing Him wholeheartedly within us! Oh, God - reveal Yourself to us within us!

And as we let Him love and serve and encourage and equip others through us, we will see Him in us as He truly is! And my friends - we will be like Him in this world.

My prayer for you today and in the weeks to come is that seeking Him for Him and His Life, you will find Him within you; that finding Him you might know Him more dependently and intimately as your Life; and knowing Him, you might know more fully who He has made you as a new creation by grace.

A wonderful Truth of seeking and finding the indwelling Christ of Christmas is that the old cliché “finders keepers” has new meaning for us in Him:

As we find Him, we discover how wonderfully *He keeps us* by *His* goodness and faithfulness.

Other Bible verses for you:

“I want to know Christ and power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death that I might somehow attain to the resurrection from the dead.” -

Philippians 3:10 (-14)

“You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart.” - **Jeremiah 29:13**

“...God chose to make known how great ...are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” -

Colossians 1:27

Make it real:

1) Ask God to show you where you might pursue Christ as the means to getting what you desire from your circumstances instead earnestly wanting to know Him more as your Life. What does

2) What have you done in the hope of causing God’s revelation in your Life? How might God change that as He wants to reveal Himself based on your authentic desire to know Him more?

To You THIS Day

“**1** For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” - **Luke 2:11**

“**6** For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” - **Isaiah 9:6**

Did you catch the “to you” nature of Jesus’ birth?

Before God spoke the world into creation, He had a plan for your life and your relationship with Him. Before you were born - or your parents, or your parents’ great-grandparents - God knew every choice you would make and what would be necessary for you to come to know Him as your Source for Life.

When He put two trees in the Garden of Eden, when He delivered Noah’s family from the flood, when He led the Israelites through the desert and delivered them into the land of promise, when Mary and Joseph beamed with joy and wonderment at God lying in a manger, when Jesus walked up the hill of Golgotha to die, and when He came out of the tomb to unite all who would receive Him with the Father, *God had you in mind the whole time.*

He wanted you to know Him, to choose Him, to receive Him, and to walk with Him as your very Life.

**It was all for His pleasure
of being with you forever.**

So, from the very beginning He talked about how He would bring about His plan for you. He told Adam and Even about Jesus as the Seed that would crush our enemy. He told Abraham of the Offspring through Whom He would bless every nation. He told Moses of the fulfillment of the Law through Him, and all the prophets spoke of our Deliverer, Savior, and King.

Paul wrote of this saying:

“³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For he chose us in Him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight. In love ⁵He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with His pleasure and will— ⁶to the praise of His glorious grace, which He has freely given us in the One He loves.” - Ephesians 1:3-6

God had you in mind for Himself all along. His desire was to bring you into the family through Jesus from the beginning.

And as all of history and all the prophets waited eagerly for the coming of Christ, God worked out His plan for you from before creation. The choice in the Garden, the choice of self and sin or faith in God in the young world, the giving of the law for righteousness we could never fulfill, all the prophets, the Israeli captivity, dependence of the patriarchs, and finally the angels singing to shepherds on the hills outside of Bethlehem... all of them pointed to the fulfillment of God's perfect plan to capture *your heart*, restore *your life*, and reconcile *your relationship* with God.

The ancient text of Scripture shows us how all the promises of God to us are “Yes!” in the person of Jesus Christ, and we say “Amen!” to the glory of God in us (see 2 Cor. 1:20). In other words, because of Jesus all God’s promises are ours, as we receive and affirm them by faith. He says yes to us for all the fulness of Christ, and we say yes to Him agreeing that He has made His Joy and Peace and Abundant Life ours in Jesus!

This is how the wonder of His wisdom and the might of His majesty and fulness of His nature are all revealed as Christ in us by grace for the glory of God: God says “yes” to all His promises through Christ, and we agree saying “amen” to all His fullness in us.

The angels’ proclamation has even greater weight in the light of God’s perfect, unfolding plan. ***“There is born to you this day in the City of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord!”***

He is here! The time is now! The plan told from the foundation of the world is unfolding! You are being redeemed. Life is being restored. The promise is being fulfilled - TODAY! He is born - to YOU - HERE and NOW!

It’s no wonder He is called *Wonderful*.

The full counsel of God’s will and pleasure is Christ born *to you*, for you, to redeem you, and make you whole again with Him as our Perfect Peace with the Father.

What a gift! What a revelation! What a God! What amazing grace!

God has fulfilled His promise from the Garden and through the patriarchs, fulfilled the law, defeated the enemy, and brought us back to life in His Spirit through His Son! Jesus wasn’t just born. He was born *to you*. All this has been accomplished not despite you, but He came TO you to do all this FOR you!

God joined us as a human so that He could die for us, that those who receive Him would be brought to His divine Life!

The Life that was born to Mary in a manger has be reborn within you!

Romans 6 says that those united with Him in death are also united with Him in resurrected life. If we receive His death for our sin we are given Life in His resurrection.

My friends we are not united to Him by His humanity, but by His death on a cross. Our union is at the cross, not the manger. But God bridged the gap to humanity when we could not span the gap to His divinity.

Having become like us, He died for us, that in us He might live His divine Life through us!

God's plan was always to bring divine Life to you... to die your death for you... to place His Spirit within you. He was born so that you could be reborn.

His activity has a focus, and His Love demands it's focus. His activity is toward you, and the nature of His activity is always love. **God in Christ was loving you at creation, loving you at Jesus' birth, loving you at the cross, and loving you today.**

And in Jesus by grace are all the promises of God from ages past fulfilled to you. There is nothing left but to *behold Him*. As the angel said, receive Him, be united in Him, and walk by faith with Him in His finished work for you.

It is *to you* that He has been born anew. It is *within you* that He can now be found. It is *through you* that He is proclaiming His Life. So, this Christmas by the indwelling Life of Christ Jesus we proclaim with the heavenly host:

**“Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth:
PEACE among men with whom He IS pleased!”**

That's you. my friend. You are the recipient of God's pleasure as only Christ can cause! He was born to us as Savior and Lord, and resides

in you as Light and Life, to the praise of the glory of His grace *to you* and the world around you. What a gift.

Merry Christmas!

Other Bible verses for you:

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” - **Romans 6:4**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.^b The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” - **2 Corinthians 5:17**

“For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. And so through him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God.” - **2 Corinthians 1:20**

Make it real:

1) Is there anything God has said is true of you in Christ by grace that you hesitate to receive as true by faith?

2) In light of this devotional, in your words, what are you celebrating this Christmas?

3) Do you believe that God is pleased with you because of Jesus and that you have His Life? Share your thoughts with God here in the form of thanks, exaltation, and affirmation of His work for you and pleasure with you:

12 Days of Christmas Grace

Thank You!

Happy New You!

Congratulations!

You've made it through (in part or full) a journey of meditating on Christ as Life this Christmas! Each day, we've focused on parts of the Christmas story from the Bible and how the New Covenant Truth of our Life in Christ is demonstrated in each of those passages and in the lives of those seen around Christ's birth!

You may have heard other messages about the life we have in Jesus Christ by grace and about His finished work on the cross for us, or what it means to abide in Christ AS our very Life. If so, we at Zoe Code would love to connect with you more!

If in sharing these ideas you are seeing new and exciting revelation of your life in Christ, we want to encourage you to continue to pursue some ideas more clearly!

Some things you need to know - and continue to be convinced of:

Jesus Christ said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life..." and Paul wrote, "When Christ - who IS your Life - appears in glory, you will appear with Him." These passages point to an important facet of the New Covenant: God is not wanting you to live FOR Jesus out of your ability and resources, but to live FROM Jesus as your Source and from His ability and resources.

All these are available by grace - you can never merit or cause the Life He wants to freely give us. What He gives speaks of Him, but what we try to do for Him will ultimately speak of us and our ability and effort.

So what has He done to make it possible for us to life from Christ AS our Life?

As God in a human body, Jesus died in your place as payment in full for all of your sin against God.

He invites everyone to receive His death as payment for our sin, and to receive Jesus as our Savior - saving us from sin, eternal death, and the failure of the flesh (our selfish attitude of independence) to be sufficient for all we need.

If you receive Jesus, He places us in union with Himself by His Holy Spirit. In union with Him, His death becomes our death to sin. His resurrection from the dead is new life for us. We are unified in His death, resurrection, and ascension with Jesus. This is all by grace, not because of anything we do. Our union with Jesus by His Spirit makes us God's children with Christ.

All that is true of Jesus by His merit - His relationship with God, His divine nature, His eternal Life, His identity and significance and love and forgiveness and much more - all these are now true of us by grace!

Our faith is trusting God to accomplish all He wants for us and through us by grace - we don't cause it or earn it. When we live by faith in Him this way, we can experience His abundant Life and are available for Him to use supernaturally in other people's lives, too.

This Truth of the New Covenant is found throughout all of Scripture, but here are some wonderful verses that highlight these ideas:

Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ and i no longer life, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in this body is by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.

2 Corinthians 5:17 - If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!

Colossians 3:1-4 - Since you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is, and set your mind on things above, where you are seated with Him. For you died, and your life now is hidden in Christ with God.

Ephesians 2:4-9 - But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

These and many other verses, from many writers inspired by God in the Bible, all tell of the work of Jesus by grace to bring us into perfect relationship with God by grace, not our own performance. They speak of having identity firmly established in Him, not from the old self that was crucified with Christ.

So... What *NOW*?

I would love to come alongside what God is doing in your life, ministry, church, small group, and discipleship journey! Mike Q. Daniel Ministries is a discipleship organization helping people to experience and express Life in Christ by grace.

We offer weekly encouragement online, help pastors and churches around the US and abroad with discipleship opportunities, speak at events, fill pulpits, and help ministries operate from a New Covenant paradigm.

Let's connect!

Please take a moment to send me a short message to connect and let me know how you enjoyed this devotional, or how I can be working with or praying with you going forward.

Be sure to tell me how this devotional series challenged or encouraged you by emailing:

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***Mike Q. Daniel** is the director of Mike Q Daniel Ministries, writing and speaking, filling pulpits and leading retreats and conferences all over the world. Mike is also a board member for Network 220, an international discipleship association of ministries. He loves working with pastors and churches and other groups to live and lead from Christ as our Life.*

Connect with Mike on Facebook or Twitter @MikeQDaniel or email mail@MikeQDaniel.com. I'd love to hear how this devotional encouraged you!

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