

DEEPER

MONTHLY BIBLE READING

THE LINK
CHURCH

DAY 333

Romans 13-16

Scripture Reading

The Bible Gives Light

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“Therefore let’s rid ourselves of the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light... put on the Lord Jesus Christ.”
Romans 13:12, 14**

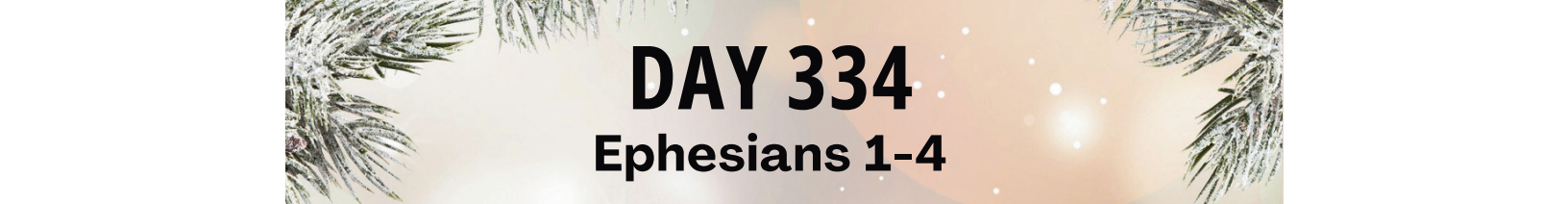
Augustine grew up in Africa. His mother was a Christian and prayed fervently for him, but his journey to belief in Christ took many detours. Gifted with a brilliant mind, he explored and followed several religions and philosophies, teaching in graduate schools. He indulged his sensual passions and lived with a woman for ten years.

He was drawn back to the church by powerful preaching and came to grips with his sin. At 32, he was in a friend’s garden shedding tears over guilt deep in his soul. His friend had opened the Bible and tried explaining the gospel to him. Augustine walked away but heard the sound of a child’s voice, as if from a house nearby, telling him again and again to “take it up and read.” He picked up the Bible, and his eyes fell on our reading for today. “Let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light... Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ,” Romans 13:11-14. He testifies, “I had no wish to read more and no need to do so. It was as though the light of faith flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.” God later called St. Augustine (A.D. 354-430) to become one of the most significant Early Church fathers. He preached over 6,000 sermons and wrote church doctrine that would forever shape the Christian church. Are you searching for truth? Are you in the dark and wondering about God? Take up His Word and read, asking God to reveal Himself, because He will.

Prayer

Lord, I gain understanding from your precepts; therefore, I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path (Psalm 119:104-105).
Amen.

NOTES



DAY 334

Ephesians 1-4

Scripture Reading

Dimensions of God's Love

TODAY'S FOCUS

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."
Ephesians 3:16-19

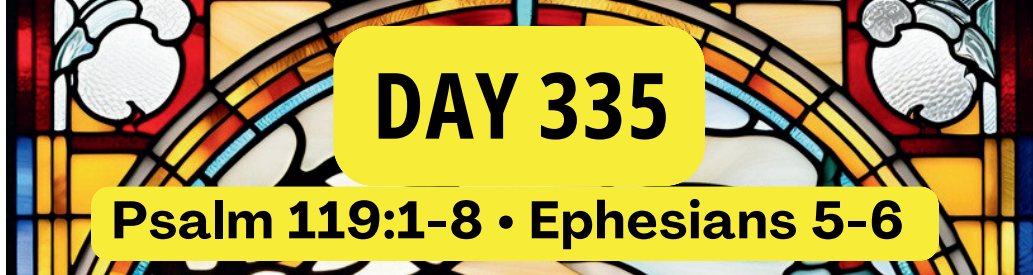
If you are a sports fan or familiar with any sport, think of the width, length, height and depth of the playing field. One of those measurements is significantly larger than the others. If all the measurements were the same, it would be an outrageously large playing field, even overwhelming. God's love is His playing field. How wide is God's love? How long is it? How high is it? How deep is it? How would you describe God's love for you in terms of size or measurements? Since God is infinite, His love is infinite. The Apostle Paul prayed many times for the Christians in Ephesus. He wanted them to know who they were in Christ, what God had given them, how much God loved them, and what God wanted to do in and through them. In his prayer for them in Ephesians 3:14-21

he prayed for them to grasp the love God. Paul knew that they would need the Holy Spirit's help in order to do that because God's love was greater in every way and direction than the human mind can fathom.

Why would Paul pray for them to grasp the full dimensions of the love of God? Was this for knowledge and personal use only? No. They were to know God's love so that they could realize God's heart was big enough to love their enemies and now their hearts, through the power of the Holy Spirit, needed to be big enough to do the same. The Christians in Ephesus were Jews and Greeks, and they needed to reach both Jews and Greeks (in other words, the whole world) with the Gospel. It was always God's plan to bring all of His worshipers together under one "roof", which is Christ Jesus. Are you keeping the love of God to yourself or are you expanding the kingdom of God with it? Are you consciously trying to find people who need God's love and give it to them? Ask God to help you to demonstrate His love to those around you today.

Prayer

Father, thank You for Your great love! I pray for everyone, who has experienced Your love through Jesus, to give it away to others. Help me to give Your love away to those around me and those who intersect my life, especially to those who are far away from You. In Jesus' name. Amen.



DAY 335

Psalm 119:1-8 • Ephesians 5-6

Scripture Reading

A Beautiful Bride

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her...” Ephesians 5:25

In many North American weddings, the moment a bride begins her walk down the aisle is very important. Everyone stands to join the groom in watching her as she processes to meet him. That moment is important for the groom, too, of course. He loves his bride and longs to have her with him. Her walk down the aisle is a picture of the approach that began before they met. And their meeting at the end of the aisle symbolizes the beginning of their new life together, which they pledge to continue throughout their lives. Jesus loves His bride too. Our text makes that clear even as it calls earthly husbands to give themselves up in loving service to their wives. After all, Jesus gave Himself up for His bride, the church, at the cross. Throughout Scripture, we find many pictures of Christ's bride, the Church.

We find ourselves in these pictures too, to some degree, because all who are “in Christ” are part of the church; all who are redeemed by Him through the cross. Rejoice! Together we are the one for whom Christ waits at the end of the aisle. And love! Cherish Christ's church, even when the church is not so lovable. You'll be loving what Christ Himself loves!

Prayer

It the end of time, Lord Jesus, we will be with you completely and forever. Thank you for making that possible through your sacrifice at the cross. In the meantime, we pledge ourselves to you and to all who are part of the church, your bride. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 336

Philippians 1-4

Scripture Reading

Godly Ambition

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility consider one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, as He already existed in the form of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself by taking the form of a bond-servant and being born in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death: death on a cross.” Philippians 2:3-8

Have you ever been mistaken for someone else? People always say that everyone has a twin somewhere! The real question is, could someone mistake you for Jesus? The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians sought to help the believers to understand the importance of unity and care for one another. The unity of the believers hinged on their exemplifying Christ Jesus' unselfish behavior. Philippians 2:3-8 points to the depth to which Jesus put the needs of others above His comfort. It is not that Jesus did not care about Himself or about His life. It is that He sacrificed greatly for the benefit of others because He valued people. He did not let His position as God or the pain involved in rescuing people deter Him from the sacrifice He needed to be for sin. He did not discard His life; He chose to give up His rights to secure eternally those who would accept His payment for sin.

It would be easy for people to say, “Well, Jesus could sacrifice for others and unite them to God the Father because He is God. I am not.” In the book of Philippians Paul shattered that argument when he mentioned Timothy, Epaphroditus and himself as examples of those who have sacrificed their lives for the benefit of the Philippians and others. Paul did not instruct the believers to not be ambitious. He did, however, tell them to not be ambitious for their own gain. They were to see ambition through the lens of valuing and helping people. Godly ambition includes gains for us and others; it is not gaining only for ourselves. Is your ambition godly? Are you valuing people in your pursuits?

Prayer

Father, help me to be godly in my ambitious pursuits so that I use all the gifts, skills, talents, and abilities you have given me to glorify you in helping others and myself in Jesus' name. Amen.

DAY 337

Colossians 1-4

Scripture Reading

Prayer

Grace-filled Christian Witness

TODAY'S FOCUS

Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone. — Colossians 4:6

Lord Jesus, thank you for your loving grace and for the ways I've learned about you through Christians who show and tell your grace well. Let my conversations be wise and full of grace. Amen.

God's grace in Jesus Christ changes everything! With sins forgiven and the Holy Spirit at work in us, God transforms and renews us day by day. His grace changes our lives. In fact, as God works in us continually, we show and tell the good news of full life in Christ in ways that we may not be aware of. The apostle Paul told Christians, "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Think of some of the Christians you appreciate. In what ways have they been wise in the way they speak and act, both with other Christians and with people who don't know Jesus? Can you think of times when they made the most of an opportunity to represent God well with their words and actions? Why not tell them you appreciate that? Together you can praise God for it. It will encourage both of you in your everyday living for Jesus. More important, how can you be like that too? Do you represent God well in what you say and do? How can you show grace and wisdom? Let's consider how God has worked through us. It will spark praise and inspire us to continue in grace-filled Christian witness.

NOTES

[illegible]

1 Timothy 1-4

Scripture Reading

Accepting Imperfection

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” 1 Timothy 1:15

A man once declared that whenever he bought a new car, he would whack it with a hammer. That way, he said, he wouldn't get upset about the other little dents and scratches that would surely happen. The apostle Paul was passionate about attaining righteousness (Philippians 3:7-11), but he was honest about his own imperfections (Romans 7:14-20). In today's verse, he openly accepts that he is like an old, beat-up car. But he accepts his dents and dings, even as he drives on for God.

Maybe you would be happier too if you accepted the dents and dings of your own life. A long time ago a woman went to a church. She wore fancy clothes, volunteered for everything, and worked extremely hard. Around church and in front of others she was upbeat, but she was troubled and anxious at home, when she was out of the public eye. Finally she broke down and wept, unveiling the sinful burden she carried on her heart. She had been trying to cover a dent. How nice it was to tell her she didn't have to act perfect in order for God or the church to love her. She's happier now that she has accepted imperfection. She is also happier in all she strives to do for God. I wonder—would you be too?

Prayer

Father, here I am again, wounded and a little beat up. I have failed you in so many ways. Help me to trust that your love is free and is greater than all my sin. Thank you, in Jesus' name. Amen.

NOTES

1 Timothy 5-6 • Titus 1-3

Scripture Reading

Contentment

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“Godliness with contentment is great gain
... If we have food and clothing, we will be
content with that.” 1 Timothy 6:6-8**

Do you ever sigh with contentment after a good meal? It's a great feeling. In some cultures, people have a saying that goes like this: "Full stomach, happy heart." But how long are we content? Soon after the meal we become hungry again. And even if our stomach is full, our hungry eyes may desire more. In 1 Timothy, Paul is showing amazing virtue when he declares he is content to have food and clothing only. In other words, he is content with enough to live on from day to day, trusting that God will provide for each day. Paul's contentment did not rely on gathering up possessions. He realized that stuff doesn't last, and it can be taken from us at any moment. Paul's relationship with God was the source of his contentment. Some people seem to think godliness is a means to financial gain, and thus contentment. They think that if God loves you, he will always bless you physically. They say if you claim a financial blessing in the name of the Lord, it will be yours. That is wrong. God does not promise we will be full of anything but the Holy Spirit.

Being a Christian does not mean you deserve many fine things. It means Christ has called you out of darkness into the fullness of life. But fullness of life is not measured in goods; it is valued in immeasurable grace. Be content with that; it is life's greatest treasure.

Prayer

With you, Lord, we have all things. May we give thanks and be content with the treasures of grace that you give us so freely. Amen.

NOTES

[illegible]

DAY 340

2 Timothy 1-4

Scripture Reading

Instruction Manual from
the Creator

TODAY'S FOCUS

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (right standing), so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work)” 2 Tim 3:16-17.

The book of 2 Timothy was a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, the young pastor of the church in Ephesus, who Paul loved and mentored like a son. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy from a Roman prison believing he would be executed and never see Timothy again. Paul's letter encourages Timothy to hold fast to the scriptures he learned to love and live from his mother and grandmother (Eunice and Lois), and later from Paul. As Christ-followers, we know we need

to read the Bible, but often we don't. Why? Well, the answers are obvious, but not pretty, and they are not what we like to hear or admit. One reason is that we take the access we have to scripture for granted. There are hundreds of websites we can go on for free 24/7 to read any verse in every translation. This is a privilege. Millions across the world want but can't get Bibles and millions are persecuted for having one. Another reason is that we don't make reading and studying God's word a priority over other things we do and want in our lives.

We often look to podcasts, YouTube influencers, self-help books, conferences, therapists, pastors, and our family and friends to learn what to do and not to do. These can be great sources and resources for great guidance. But often we forget to go to the Word of God. “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8). When you buy a product, you get the best instructions and repairs from the manufacturer who made it. If you want the best guidance for your life and instructions in righteousness, go to The One who made you. His word is THE ULTIMATE INSTRUCTION MANUAL to get you “repaired” and fully equipped for EVERY good work!

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, scriptures are Your very words to us. Please forgive us for devaluing and taking Your words and instructions for granted. In Jesus' name. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 341
Philem • Heb. 1-4

Scripture Reading

What Does God Look Like?

HEBREWS 1:1-4

TODAY'S FOCUS

“The Son is . . . the exact representation of [God’s] being. . . .” Hebrews 1:3

Have you ever been asked by a child, “What does God look like?” Or have you ever wondered about that yourself? Hebrews gives us the answer to this question: “[Jesus is] the exact representation of [God’s] being.” What does God look like? He looks like Jesus because Jesus looks like God. To some of us this might not sound helpful, because we do not know exactly what Jesus looks like. But this is about more than just a physical appearance. We know that Jesus became a human being, so we can assume things about his physical nature. But this also means much more. Jesus says in John 14:9, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” Likewise, we’re told in Colossians 1:15, “The Son is the image of the invisible God.” In Jesus we can see God—and this has to do with God’s character. Jesus reveals “the exact imprint” of God’s nature, as some Bible translations put it. In Jesus we see that God is loving, merciful, caring, just, righteous, and more. In the actions and words of Jesus, we see God’s character. Jesus revealed God’s character the most clearly when he showed his love for us by dying on the cross to save us from our sin. In that one act we see God’s love, mercy, care, justice, and righteousness. If you want to know what God looks like, look to Jesus. In him we see what God looks like in all his glory.

Prayer

Father God, as we look to Jesus, we can see you and experience your great love for us. Help us to show your love to others as your representatives. Amen.

NOTES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with ten horizontal dashed lines, typical of primary-ruled notebook paper. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

DAY 342

Hebrews 5-8

Prayer

TODAY'S FOCUS

Lord Jesus, help us to keep our eyes on you, knowing that you provide all that we need for salvation and full life forever. Amen.

NOTES

And He has made the perfect sacrifice, providing forgiveness of sins once and for all. Instead of looking at shadows, we are called to look to Jesus.

DAY 343

Hebrews 9-11

Scripture Reading

A Heavenly City

TODAY'S FOCUS

“They were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.” Hebrews 11:16

After a long, tiring day of travel, nothing is better than arriving at a destination where a meal and bed are prepared. Knowing the days journey is behind you makes the food taste better and the bed more comfortable. When you're not sure where you will eat or sleep, the journey is more stressful. The writer of Hebrews describes several Old Testament believers who were living and walking by faith. They really didn't know where they were headed. They could have gone back to their original country. But instead they were looking ahead to a much better place, one that they knew God was preparing for them. Christians—who long for the kingdom of God—can also be encouraged that God will take care of them and has prepared a place for them. The image here is not that of a tent or a hotel room, but something permanent—a home that will include everything a believer needs. The images Scripture uses to describe this home "a country of their own" and "a city for them" can inspire our imaginations, but we do not yet have all the answers about what this home will look like. But we do know it will be a place of rest and joy. How could it not be? The God of the universe is preparing it for us!

Prayer

King of Heaven, we long to visit your beautiful city. Thank you for preparing a place for us. Send your Spirit to give us joy and peace for the remainder of our pilgrimage. Amen.

NOTES

[illegible]

Hebrews 12-13 • Jude 17

Scripture Reading

Christmas Gifts

JUDE 17-25

TODAY'S FOCUS

“If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” 2 Corinthians 5:17

Soon the Christmas gifts will be opened, and some will immediately be broken or returned for refunds. Some gifts will be a hit, others a miss. What is the greatest Christmas gift you ever received? Look at the life-altering richness of God's gifts given to us through the Christ of Christmas. The closing words of Jude pulsate with hope and confidence. Jude speaks of faith, being kept from falling, standing faultless before God, prayer in the Spirit, God's love, the mercy of Jesus, eternal life, and great joy.

This is the life-changing, history-changing gift of God through faith in Jesus. God came to us in our helpless, hopeless brokenness and changed us and our future. Take time to reflect on each of these powerful truths as they apply to your life. Let their healing power penetrate your hurts and fears. These make up our reality in Jesus. We have a new identity. In Christ we are new creations; the old is gone. Our future is secure because of Christ's completed work for our salvation. Let's rejoice and worship our gracious God for his perfect gifts. "To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen."

Prayer

We worship and praise you, Lord, for your life-changing gifts through Jesus. With hearts of gratitude, may we live out our new reality for the glory of your name. Amen

NOTES

[illegible]

DAY 345

James 1-5

Scripture Reading

Brutal Honesty is Still Brutal

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.”
James 3: 9-10**

How many times have we been either the recipient or the giver of harsh words that were justified by calling it honesty, or even brutal honesty, which is worse. Children used to sing, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me." Sadly, we often sang it right after someone's words had hurt us. Here are some phrases people use to justify their version of honesty. These phrases are not all bad. But sometimes, they can flow from a place of self-centeredness or from the desire to hurt someone: "I'm unapologetically being my authentic self." "I can't be fake." "I tell the truth, even if it hurts." "I'm keeping it 100!" "I'm telling it like it is (an oldie from the 1970's)." How many times do you see the words "my" or "I" in these phrases? Too many! Now, here are some phrases from 1 Corinthians 13: "Love is patient and kind. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking or easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects." Let's use these scriptures to gauge our words and their intent before we speak to someone made in God's likeness. James 3 tells us that just as a large ship is steered by a very small rudder, our small tongues are a world of evil.

Proverbs 4:23 tells us to guard our hearts, for out of it are the issues of life that determine its course. And we do have issues! Both verses warn not to allow things in or out that can negatively impact the course—the direction—of our lives. Proverbs 4:24 goes on to instruct us to, "Rid yourself of a deceitful mouth and keep devious speech far from you." When I read these verses, I'm reminded of the computer technology slang expression "garbage in garbage out". We can guard our hearts and tongues to prevent garbage in and out with the choices we make: Do we choose friends with good or gossiping conversation? Do we prefer worship or worldly music? What are we watching and posting? And let's not forget the horrible things we say to and about ourselves that we would never say to anyone else. We have to read, study, and hide scripture in our hearts so that our default becomes God's life-giving words flowing through us instead of words that harm. So, what do we do when James 3:8 states that no human being can tame the tongue? We remember that Jesus can tame it. Our victory will be through Him!

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, Help us to must make You Lord over our entire lives, including our tongues, so that we speak with love, grace, kindness, and mercy. In Jesus' name, we stand in victory! Amen

DAY 346

1 Peter 1-5

Scripture Reading

What's on Your ID?

1 Peter 1-5

TODAY'S FOCUS

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

1 Peter 2:9-10

The conjunction “but” can be used to show two joining ideas that are opposite of each other. In verses 9-10 of 1 Peter 2, the word “but” is used three times. It’s the first word of verse nine because the adjectives “chosen”, “royal”, and “holy” describing Christ-followers are opposite of the behavior of those who rejected Christ described in the previous verses. The word “but” is used twice in verse ten to remind us that we were once without an identity as a people, but now we are God’s people; once we had not obtained mercy, but now we have mercy in Christ. Verses 11-12 remind us that Christians are “exiles”. This is not our home. If people reject Jesus the Cornerstone, as His children they will also reject us. Jesus warned us in John 15:19 when He said, “If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.”

Once we tell others we are a Christ-follower, we are under a microscope. They are watching us to see how “Christians” act. What are we showing them? Some are watching and waiting for us to mess up so they can say, “See! You Christians are all hypocrites.” Are Christians perfect? No. But we serve a perfect and holy God who freed us from the bondage of sin, so through Him, we can choose to carry ourselves as ones who have been chosen and have a new identity in Christ.

As Christians, Christ-followers who have asked Him to be Lord and Savior of our lives—we should be demonstrating the characteristics of Jesus. We should act and sound like our Father, demonstrating His love and hope to a world that desperately needs Him. We should praise and honor God, demonstrating our gratitude to Him for being a loving, kind, and merciful Father who adopted us out of darkness. We should keep away from sinful desires, which wage war against our souls that Jesus died to save. And even when unbelievers accuse us of wrongdoing, we must live righteously, so it will bring God glory (1 Pet 2: 12). How can we be righteous when we were born unrighteous? Our righteousness comes through believing in Jesus by faith; it’s a gift God freely offers because we couldn’t obtain or earn it on our own (Eph 2: 8-9 and Rom 3: 22-23). Look again at what a new identity in Jesus offers. You’ll be 1) a chosen people 2) part of a royal priesthood 3) part of a holy nation 4) and God’s special possession. This is amazing, good news! Did you get your new ID?

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for Your undeserved grace and mercy. Help us to live lives that bring You glory so that a watching world will know what a good Father you are. Amen

DAY 347
2 Peter 1-3 • John. 1

Prayer

Lord God, we pray for those who have shut you out of their lives. Change their hearts so they may receive you as Lord and Savior. In your name, Amen.

“He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” John 1:11

NOTES

[illegible]

John 2-4

"It Only Takes One Christmas!"

Many people readily complain that department stores and radio stations play Christmas music far ahead of the season: "The 'world' has kidnapped Christmas!" But since it is the feast of God's love for the world, shouldn't the whole world celebrate? We might wonder if the message of Christ, broadcast through so much Christmas music, makes a difference to anyone who is not a believer. But it can. The Spirit of God works in many different ways to bring people to faith in Jesus. And for some people, as a friend of mine once said, "It only takes one Christmas!" Does our Christmas celebration tell the whole good- news story? John 3:16 certainly touches all the main points: God's love, for the world, shown in the gift of the Son, so that whoever believes has eternal life. This year, let's have the kind of Christmas that tells the whole story. How? That's a good question to ponder. A friend told his family one year that they would be getting smaller presents, because he was handing out cash to people experiencing homelessness. Some families skip their big dinner on Christmas to serve a meal at a shelter. Another person may finally smile at that lonely classmate or neighbor and break the ice to begin a friendship. There must be a world of ways to show God's cosmic love.

DAY 349
John 5-6

Three-Personed God

TODAY'S FOCUS

Christians confess their faith in God the Father. Other major religions such as Judaism and Islam do the same. But Christians go on to confess faith in God the Son. Then they go further to confess faith in God the Holy Spirit. Christians confess a three-personed God. This declaration of the triune God is where Christians part ways with Jews, Muslims, and people of other faiths.

The truth of the Trinity connects with the way we experience salvation. We pray to the Father, who is above us. We confess the lordship of the Son, who has come to stand beside us. And we experience the life of the divine Spirit, who lives within us and sustains our Christian walk. In Christ and by the power of the Spirit, give thanks today for the God who is beyond all human definitions.

***Eternal God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
your mystery we cannot fathom. Yet you
have come to us in all your fullness to fill
us with your life. We offer you all praise.
Amen.***

[illegible]

DAY 350

John 7-8

Scripture Reading

Thirsty for the Spirit

JOHN 7:37-42

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."

—**John 7:37-38**

The end of the year nears. Soon Christmas will be only a memory. Who knows what we will face in the new year? Do we have enough trust in God's care to face the uncertainties of the coming year? We thirst for assurance. That is the reason newspapers and broadcasts feature forecasts and predictions. Economists, politicians, and healthcare experts tell us what to expect and what to prevent. At first, they couldn't believe it was him. How could it be possible? God doesn't answer prayers so quickly! But, as those early believers learned, God really does do amazing things. Jesus invites us to believe in him. He tells us that when we believe, we will be equipped for the future. Jesus uses the image of "living water" that he had used earlier when he spoke to a woman at a well (John 4:10). The prophet Isaiah used water as a picture of joyful, renewed living, guided and satisfied by "the Lord ... always," "like a spring whose waters never fail" (Isaiah 58:11).

John explains that the living water Jesus spoke of is “the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.” Things of the Spirit are difficult to understand. Does the image of living water help? For the woman at the well (John 4), it meant new life beyond the shame of broken relationships. To Isaiah it meant God’s presence and daily blessing. For us, soon after Christmas and before another year, it can mean that God, Jesus, Immanuel, stays with us and in us—by his Holy Spirit!

Prayer

***Lord, guide us always, satisfy our needs
in a sun-scorched land, and make us a
well-watered garden for your sake.
Amen.***

NOTES

[illegible]

DAY 351

John 9-11

Scripture Reading

Seeing is Not Believing—the
Power of Unbelief

TODAY'S FOCUS

Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now that you maintain, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.” John 9:35-41

Do you believe in miracles? Recently my wife and daughter walked away unscathed from a terrible car accident. The car struck the passenger side where my daughter was sitting. The driver never hit the brakes. Yet they are perfectly fine—not even a bruise. That was a miracle. Throughout my life, I have seen many such miracles. But to me what is even more amazing is the unbelief of those who see miracles and still choose not to believe. We think that if God were to miraculously heal or answer the prayers of our unbelieving family members, co-workers, neighbors, or friends, they will give their lives to Christ. We often pray, “God if you would just answer this prayer, my friend will know that you are real and put their trust in you.” Yet that is not always the case. In 1988, the famous atheist philosopher A. J. Ayer’s heart stopped for a few minutes after choking on a piece of salmon. Miraculously he came back to life. Immediately after the incident, he testified that while he was dead, he saw “a red light that seemed to govern the universe.” He confessed to believing that there was indeed life after death. However, even after this experience, he later recanted his belief in the existence of God describing his experience as, “a hallucination caused by a temporary lack of oxygen in his brain.” In John chapter 9, we see the same stubborn unbelief at work. The Pharisees and Jewish leaders refuse to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah despite seeing countless miracles with their very own eyes.

What does it take to believe? Jesus, healed the blind and the lame, cast out demons, walked on water, fed ten thousand people with five loaves and two fish, he even raised Lazarus from the dead. What more proof did they need? Here was God himself standing before them in the flesh and still the religious leaders, who devoted their lives to memorizing Scripture, refused to believe that he was the Messiah that the Scriptures foretold of. In contrast to their unbelief, we see a poor blind man, who did not know the Scriptures, put his faith in Christ. The Pharisees and religious leaders believed that this man was blind because of his sin. Moreover, they were more concerned that Jesus had broken one of their laws (they considered spitting on the ground “working on the Sabbath”) than they were with the man’s healing. The irony is incredible. The religious leaders who thought they were righteous because they studied the Scriptures could not recognize Christ as Lord, but the supposed sinner and ignorant blind man could see that he was the Christ. They were all eyewitnesses to the same miracles, but some chose to believe, and others chose not to believe. This shows us that even if we have undeniable evidence that God is real and His Word is true, and even if someone sees a miracle with their own eyes, they can still choose unbelief. In Luke 16:31, Jesus declared that the Pharisees and religious leaders “...will not be convinced even if someone were to rise from the dead.” Only God can open unbelieving hearts. Whenever someone comes to faith in Christ it is truly a miracle.

Prayer

Father, we pray that you will open the hearts of the lost so that they may trust and believe you. Amen.

DAY 352
John 12-14

Scripture Reading

"Secret" Christians

JOHN 12:42-43; 19:38-40

TODAY'S FOCUS

“They would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God.” John 12:42-43

Two prominent leaders, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, paired up to bury Jesus. These two men had been secret Christians, afraid at first to openly confess Jesus because they would have been excommunicated from the synagogue, the Jewish worshipping community.

But Jesus' death brought a crisis of commitment. Would Joseph and Nicodemus continue to side with family, friends, nation, culture, and place of worship, or would they identify with Jesus? Nicodemus had come to Jesus at night to ask him some questions (John 3). And in a council discussion he had tried to stand up for Jesus but was quickly shouted down (John 7:50-52). After Jesus' death, though, he came forward to help prepare Jesus' body, and Joseph provided the burial place (Matthew 27:59-60). In our day a new wave of tolerance is winning college campuses and social network discussions. Public pressure is rising not just to respect someone else's views but to say they are also true. Our culture wants us to say there are many ways to God, and that what is true for me is not necessarily true for you. Yet Christians believe that Jesus is God and is the only way to eternal life (John 14:6).

Are you willing to speak up for Jesus? What stance do you have to take in order to side with him?

Prayer

Lord, we confess that we like to be comfortable in our culture. Empower us to stand up for you, whatever the cost. Amen.

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DAY 353

John 15-18

Scripture Reading

Longing for Christ-mas

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Truly, truly I say to you that you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will grieve, but your grief will be turned into joy!” John 16:20

For most people, Christmas is a time for family and friends, giving and receiving, and peace and togetherness. But, for many others, the “most wonderful time of the year” can be the most difficult time of the year, especially in the looming shadow of death, divorce, health problems, financial uncertainty, or troubles of any kind. This struggle of the “Blue Christmas” for many people is real, but so is God's offer of hope. When the funeral is over, the condolences fade, the cards stop, and the flowers wither we are left to grieve the loss of someone we love. The pain is real. It can be numbing for some and debilitating for others.

It is especially difficult during the holidays. The American Psychological Association states that 38% of Americans will battle depression during the holidays. How do we keep from being overwhelmed by our grief? Jesus says that we have the marvelous confidence that our grief will be turned into joy because of his resurrection. He has overcome death and those who are in Christ will be united again. There is a reunion yet to come. Then, in John 16 he assures us that when he leaves he will send the Comforter. The promise of the Holy Spirit, God's personal and abiding presence will carry us through our tough times. We also know that the Holy Spirit works through the body of Christ.

He has given members of the Body of Christ the spiritual gifts of mercy, service, healing, and faith to minister to the hurting (1 Corinthians 12 & 13), but you must be in community to receive this comfort. Finally, Jesus says that you can exchange your grief for joy by anticipating his coming. He says that after a woman has given birth, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of a child being born into the world. In this holiday season, we can overcome the anguish of loss by rejoicing in the Son who came into the world so that we may know eternal life. Are you not looking forward to Christmas this year? Have employment issues or financial difficulties added stress to the season? Did you lose a loved one this year and you are about to face your first Christmas apart? Is your depression and anxiety exacerbated by the holiday busyness? Maybe you've gotten some bad health news and struggle to find cheer. Perhaps you're dealing with divorce and its aftermath. Whatever reason you may feel blue this year, your feelings are real and valid. In it all God promises you hope, not because it's Christmas, but for no other reason than he loves you. He's right there with you in whatever troubles you face; he has not left you alone. “Ask that you will receive, that your joy may be full”

Prayer

God of all Comfort we pray that you will exchange our grief for joy this season as we remember the birth of your Son the one who has conquered death. Amen.

John 19-21

John 19-21

Scripture Reading

Humanity in the Midst of Divinity

JOHN 19:28-29

TODAY'S FOCUS

Knowing that everything had now been finished, and so that Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, “I am thirsty.” John 19:28

In this statement, Jesus expressed a need so human that anyone could have said it: “I am thirsty.” Of all the needs of the human body, water is one of the most basic. More than 60 percent of the human body is water! As we become dehydrated, our blood vessels and other cells literally begin to dry up. By the time Jesus spoke these words from the cross, he had already been hanging there for more than six hours, and his body was becoming parched.

Foreshadowing this moment, Psalm 22:15 says, “My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.” A bruised, beaten man nailed to a cross and murmuring through cracked lips, “I am thirsty,” is not what most of us picture when we think of God. But these details remind us of a great truth. At the center of the Christian faith is not a remote and distant God who lives beyond human pain. At the core of our faith is a person who is not only fully divine but is also fully human—indeed, human enough to be thirsty. “I am thirsty.” These words remind us that “the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us” (John 1:14).

Prayer

O God, when I think you don't understand my hardships and pain, remind me again that Jesus took on human flesh, became one of us, and suffered in our place. Thank you that he knows all about being human. Amen.

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1 John 1-5

1 John 1-5

Scripture Reading

A Season for Christmas?

JOHN 19:28-29

TODAY'S FOCUS

“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands.”

1 John 5:2

The rustic town of Frankenmuth, Michigan, is known for savory German cooking and Bronner's Christmas Wonderland. Bronner's is always decorated for Christmas and sells ornaments, bows, and trees year-round. Since Michigan usually has snow at Christmastime, it is jarring to see the store on a hot July afternoon, but it fits the alpine look of the town. In a way like Bronner's, we do not need seasonal snow and icicles to celebrate Christmas.

The birth of Jesus is a life- and world-changing event, so it should be possible to celebrate it anytime and anywhere. It should be possible to stretch the generosity and goodwill of the season into spring, summer, and fall. John's letter gives us clues on how to stretch the season. We celebrate Christmas all year when we stick to the basics of "loving God and carrying out his commands." And these "commands" are not complicated. The central command is to love God and neighbor. For example, says John, "Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar." So, as we take down the Christmas tree and store the lights and decorations, we should keep celebrating the birth of Jesus by loving others as he loves us. "Peace and goodwill to all" must be a year-round labor of love.

Prayer

Spirit of God, help me to carry the warmth of Christmas into the next weeks and months. Thank you for the love I receive in Jesus' birth; help me to pass it on. *Amen!*

NOTES

This image shows a full page of primary-ruled paper. It contains ten identical sets of horizontal lines spaced evenly down the page. Each set includes a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line, providing a guide for letter height and placement for young learners.

DAY 356

Psalm 117

Scripture Reading

Praise the Lord, Everybody!

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol Him, all you peoples. For great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever. Praise the LORD. Psalm 117

Has anyone ever expressed great love to you? What did they do? How did it make you feel? What was your response? In Psalm 117, the shortest psalm and chapter in the Bible, the psalmist declared that all nations and all peoples are to praise the Lord God. The nations are people who have a similar language, culture, history, or common descent. The term peoples refer in general to human beings, which would be the same as using the term individuals. Through the use of two different terms (praise and extol), the Psalmist indicated that though the nations should praise the Lord, it is really the individual people who should have exuberant praise because the Lord God has been individually good to them. The psalmist understood the heart of God. God loves everyone regardless of their background, national origin, complexion, education, status, etc. God is worthy of praise, and everyone should praise Him.

Whether they are in a group of similar people or just a part of the human race, everyone has a reason to praise the Lord God. The psalmist gave two reasons to praise the Lord. One is that God greatly loves us, and the other is that God is faithful/truthful. His love is seen in all that He provides for us and how He protects us. As we remember each time that God has provided for our needs or done anything for us, we should praise Him.

Also, God has been and will continue to be faithful (consistent/truthful) not just at certain times but all the time. He is consistent in who He is and in the demonstration of His character because he is eternal. Has the Lord God done anything for you? Take two minutes and make a list of what God has done for you. If He has shown you love and has been faithful, then now is a good time to give Him your most energetic praise.

Prayer

Father, thank You for how You have been at work in my life showing me how much You love me. Thank You for embodying truth through Your faithfulness, which is not temporary but eternal. Thank You that I can trust You to consistently keep Your promises. Thank You, Lord! Amen

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NOTES

DAY 358

2 John • 3 John

Scripture Reading

Call, Don't Text

2 John 1:12

TODAY'S FOCUS

"Though I have many things to write to you, I do not want to do so with paper and ink; but I hope to come to you and speak face to face, so that your joy may be made complete."

2 John 1:12

I remember receiving my very first text message. I was serving with a Young Adult ministry in Philadelphia and one of the pastors on staff said he had been trying to reach me. I said, that is strange, I did not see any missed calls or voicemails. He said, "No, I sent you a text message." I had heard about texts but had not even set up my phone to receive them. I told him that I would look out for his text messages from now on. But as I walked away, I thought, "If he really wanted to talk to me, why didn't he just call me?" Years later, I am ashamed to admit that my first impulse is to text not call. I have succumbed to our fast-paced world that has prioritized communication over connection. We have all sat in a room full of people who are looking down at their screens transfixed on the bright displays emanating from their devices rather than interacting with the people in the room. Many studies suggest that although we are the most connected generation technologically, we are the most disconnected relationally. But are we really connecting when we text? Is one-way communication really connecting? Research suggests that texting is taking a toll on our relationships. It has caused people to be much more impatient, passive-aggressive, and even untruthful.

Texting absolves you from experiencing the pain that your words may inflict on another person, so you become harsher and more insensitive with your words. How many times have we jeopardized a relationship because of an errant text message? Let's admit it, we text when we know we should call, because we are lazy, or we do not want to deal with the feelings and emotions of the other person. Texting allows us to get the information we want from the other person without expending extra effort and time to truly care about them. In 2 John 1:12, John tells the believers that he would much rather spend time with them face to face than use paper and pen. If he had a smartphone, he would have said, "I would have much rather spent time with you in person or on the phone than sent you a text message." John recognizes that there is something about his presence that brings joy. There is no substitution for being with someone. Certainly, we should not abandon text as a means of communication. But we should never substitute it for real connection. How much joy are we missing when we choose to send a text instead of connecting with someone in person?

Prayer

Father, you prioritized us by spending time with us at great cost. Help us to do the same for others. Thank You, Lord! Amen.

DAY 359

Revelation 1-4

Scripture Reading

Here I Am! Knocking

REVELATION 3:20-22

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.” Revelation 3:20

An unexpected knock at your door from a dear friend or family member is a welcome surprise. Few occasions are as precious as seeing a long-absent loved one who comes to visit. "Here I am!" they say as you open your door, and their presence fills you with joy. Jesus stands at our door, knocking. We may think sometimes that he is far removed from us and our church bodies. But he is, by his own revelation, as close as the door to our homes and our church communities. He wants us to hear his knocking—he is that close. And Jesus longs for us to do more! He wants us to respond and open all our closed doors. Maybe you are afraid to open the door of your life to Jesus. After all, how does one welcome the Son of God, the Almighty, into their whole life? Or maybe just having Jesus inside your church building is as close as you want him to be. But Jesus keeps knocking, eager for us to open our lives to him. He wants to be as close as a beloved friend in our lives. Do not worry about how to welcome Jesus in. Just open the door. He promises to take care of the rest. He will come in and celebrate with whoever opens the door, bringing joy and abundance so that your life will be filled—with even more than the greatest feasting, fun, and goodness of life you could imagine.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, what a gift of love and honor you bring by knocking at our door. Please come in and transform us by your presence. Amen!

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DAY 360

Revelation 5-9

Scripture Reading

It's a Small World

Revelation 7

TODAY'S FOCUS

**“There ... was a great multitude ... from every nation, tribe, people and language.”
Revelation 7:9**

It's a Small World is hands-down is the most iconic ride at Disneyland. The fantastical ride takes you leisurely down a river while introducing you to hundreds of children from all 7 continents unified in singing “It's a Small World After All.” The ride was first featured at the 1964-1965 New York World's Fair before it was installed in Disneyland in 1966. It has since been a universal attraction at all the Disney world parks around the world. Walt Disney's imagination captures the beauty of the many cultures of the world united in harmony singing one song. The ride, as idyllic as it is, however, cannot capture the vision that John the Revelator portrays in Revelation 7. In John's vision, all kinds of people will be shouting in unison, praise to Christ the King. Disney's vision pales in comparison to the promised hope and fulfillment of Christ. The reason the Small World ride is the premier attraction for many is that it is what we all hope the world would look like. Everyone is happy, singing, and living in harmony. They are all chanting the same song in their own language. It is beautiful. Walt Disney was able to capture what we all long for. There is so much beauty in the world and so much beauty in all peoples of the world. Yet we never realize that potential. We instinctively know the world is not what it should or could be.

Rather than recognizing the beauty of our differences, we use our differences to put each other down and to elevate our own people, resulting in wars, racism, and injustice. The world we live in is broken and corrupted by our selfishness. We sing individual songs in praise of our own people and culture. This is the result of sin. Today, the ride is better than reality. But we eagerly await the day when our “Small World” will be even more perfect than the ride. There is coming a day when we will all be arraigned in our new bodies, clothed in white, and united in harmonious worship of Christ our Savior and King on the New Earth he creates.

Prayer

Father the earth is groaning in anticipation of your coming. We pray for the day when you will make things perfectly new again! Amen.

NOTES

DAY 361

Revelation 10-14

Scripture Reading

Take and Eat

REVELATION 10:1-9

TODAY'S FOCUS

“Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel. . . .” He said to me, “Take it and eat it. . . .” Revelation 10:8-9

Here we see a gigantic angel who can straddle both the land and sea. He comes with a message: “No more delay!” And he has “a little scroll” that is “open in his hand.” What do these pictures mean? Some thoughtful scholars of the Bible can help us here. First, it’s important to know that the Greek word for “angel” (angelos) in the original text also means “messenger.” God’s mighty angels can do many things, but one of their main jobs is to be God’s messengers to us. They come with important announcements, and these are often about the “good news” (euangelion) of God’s salvation for us. This good news is also called the “gospel” (from an old English word meaning “good news”). This helps us understand what “the little scroll” is that lies open in the angel’s hand. It is the gospel, the good-news message that is open for all to see and hear and live by. John, the narrator, is invited to take this message and preach it to the nations, without delay. It may seem like a small message. But like the mighty angel, it is sent with the power of God, so it can go anywhere, crossing the land and sea to the ends of the earth.

John is also told to “take it and eat it.” Why? God’s good news is food for the soul, and it tastes sweet. Sadly, though, it can also bring a feeling of bitterness. The message is bittersweet because when it is shared, some people refuse to listen and believe (see Ezekiel 3:1-15)

Prayer

Lord God, may your good news nourish us deep within our souls. And help us to share it, even though some refuse to believe. Amen.

NOTES

DAY 362

Revelation 15-18

"King of the Nations"

TODAY'S FOCUS

In a vision of heaven, John sees the victorious saints standing before a glassy sea. With harps in their hands, they sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. They offer the highest praise to the “Lord God Almighty,” to “King of the Nations.” The name “Lord God Almighty,” (Ho Basileus ton Ethnon) highlights God as basileus, meaning “leader of the people, prince, commander, lord of the land, king.” He isn’t the petty ruler of a minor state, but the King of all of the ethnos, “nations, tribes, and people groups” across time and space.

Prayer

NOTES

This image shows a full page of handwriting practice paper. It features ten identical rows of horizontal guidelines. Each row consists of three parallel lines: a solid top line, a dashed middle line, and a solid bottom line. These lines are evenly spaced across the entire page, providing a structured environment for practicing letter formation and alignment. The background is white, and the lines are a light gray color.

DAY 363

A day to Reflect

On this day, let's reflect on the year it has been. There have been highs and lows, ups and downs, good and bad. But through it all, Jesus Christ has remained by our side. He has been ever-present in every step we have taken.

How wonderful it is to know that through it all, Jesus Christ is here with us! We are not ever alone! As we prepare for the next year, let us rejoice that the King is on the throne, He is in charge. Let us give Him all the glory, all the praise and all the honor!

HE REIGNS!

Prayer

O King of the Nations, we bow before you and look to the time when all people will do the same. Until that day, help us to trust and joyfully serve you. Amen.

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