



ADVENT



A DEVOTIONAL

With contributions from
Salvationists across the Canada
+ Bermuda Territory.

HOW TO USE:

THIS DEVOTIONAL HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY CRAFTED FOR YOU. FOLLOW THE THREE STEPS BELOW TO THOUGHTFULLY ENGAGE WITH ITS MATERIAL:



Read

#01

Read the provided scripture and daily prompt. Highlight aspects that are capturing your attention.

Consider

#02

What is God drawing your attention to? What does the artwork capture for you? What emotions are you experiencing as you read and engage?

Respond

#03

How is God inviting you to respond? Feel free to use the journal pages provided or write your responses elsewhere. Share your responses with others!

DAY ONE

Isaiah 40 & Matthew 1-2

Major Ray Harris

Read Matthew 1:18-25

Advent is a season of hope. Advent marks the time when God did a new thing. Advent prepares us to celebrate the birth of Jesus. But as we know, new beginnings don't always come easily; new beginnings can disrupt. Such is the case with Joseph.

Engaged to Mary, Joseph learns that she is pregnant. What is Joseph to do? He could expose her to public disgrace; he has every right to do this. But this is not Joseph's way. His intention is to "divorce her quietly," out of the public spotlight. Mathew's Gospel lets us in on the reason: "Joseph was a righteous man" (verse 18). Only after Joseph acts with compassionate integrity does God respond with next steps. Joseph obediently, faithfully, takes Mary as his wife. He also declines sexual relations with Mary until after the child is born. Then Joseph names the child, "Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Reflection Questions:

- In what ways might God be calling upon your compassionate integrity as you consider this (your) vocation?
- As you consider God's calling for you, how might it be an expression of hope?

May you know God's guidance through this Season of Advent.



As you consider God's calling for your life, it may be that Salvation Army officership might mean a significant disruption. It could mean important changes not only for you but for family members. Like Joseph, you consider possible actions. And you do this because you are a person of integrity. You want to do the right thing, the compassionate thing. In time, and in God's way, you come to realize that God is helping you to consider next steps. God values people of integrity. As does The Salvation Army.

DAY TWO

Isaiah 41 & Matthew 3

Jenea Gomez

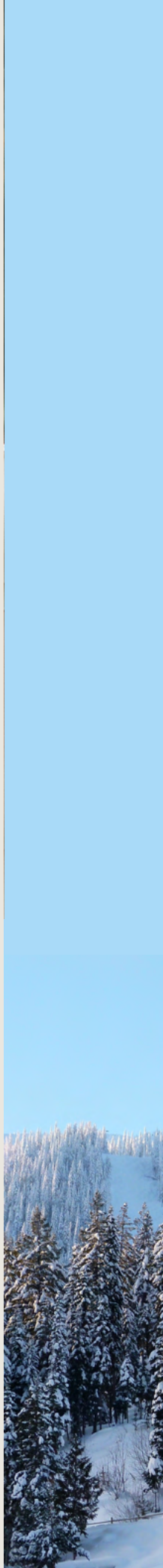
When I read scripture, I often hit a point where I ask myself, “Why was it important for the writer to mention this particular thing?” It’s an easy question to ask when I read the introduction of John the Baptist preparing the way for the Lord (Matt 3:3). Why was it important to mention such odd things about him, wearing camel’s hair and eating locust? So many people were coming to John for baptism, from Jerusalem, Judea and the whole region of the Jordan; why point out his particular interaction with the Pharisees and Sadducees? First off, only John and God really know why he lived the lifestyle he did and chose to preach the gospel in the wilderness rather than the town square. I suspect it was simply obedience and reliance on Yahweh. Reliance on Him to draw people in, no bright lights or flashy tricks. Reliance on Him for complete sustenance, no extra luxuries, or conveniences.

John’s response to the presence of the Pharisees and Sadducees has puzzled me though. I know there was bad blood there, but I mean, shouldn’t he have been happy to see them responding to his call to repentance? On the day I was enrolled as a soldier, I remember the officer talking about the fresh new uniform I was wearing - how on its own, the blue skirt and white shirt really were meaningless - but it was the covenant my uniform represented that was significant. I remember him quoting the now familiar line “it’s an outward expression of an inward experience”. The Pharisees and Sadducees were notorious for their outward expressions - not inward experiences, for their reliance on being “of the seed of Abraham” (Isaiah 41:8) as though that was enough to save them. John was right to warn them of this pitfall. He was right to boldly confront the sin that could ultimately lead to them being carried away like chaff to a flame (Isa 41:16, Matt 3:12).

John may have been an odd man, but I think that as we prepare the way for Christ’s second coming, there are a few things we can learn from his lifestyle choices.

Reflection Questions:

- During the baptism of Jesus, the voice of God declares, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”, confirming that Jesus is indeed the son of God. What does this mean for you?
- In Isaiah 41 God makes over a dozen “I will” promises. (strengthen you, help you etc.) In which promise do you find the most hope, and why?





DAY THREE

Isaiah 42 & Matthew 4

Major Sheldon Bungay

Can I make a confession? I am not a fan of holding hands. I am not sure why? Maybe I have a fear of sweaty palms, or perhaps I was forced to hold a parent's hand one too many times throughout my over-active childhood. And, while I promise that I do hold my wife's hand whenever she asks, that does not mean that I must enjoy it, right?

However, in my moments of need, this disliked act of holding hands is also the same act that brings me comfort. When a family member passed, or when I had an unexpected health scare, the loving touch of my wife's hand entwined within my own reminds me of her steadfast presence and her genuine love and care for me.

Recorded in Matthew 4:18-22 is the calling of the first disciples into a life of service. While I love their eagerness and willingness to drop everything in pursuit of Jesus, I cannot help but notice the absence of information regarding what it is exactly that Jesus was getting them into. Although oblivious to it here, the next years of their discipleship would prove to have incredible highs and some very challenging lows.

We too have been called into a life of service without knowing all the details. When we respond "yes" to the invitation to pursue God's will for our lives, we can testify that both "lows" and "highs" are inevitable parts of the journey. Thankfully, when the challenges come, we can find solace in knowing that there is a hand of comfort available, Isaiah 42:6 reminds us that it is the Lord who calls people into a life of righteousness, and it is He who will take hold of our hand and leads us forward. "Lord, I would clasp Thy hand in mine!"

Reflection Questions:

- Do you hesitate to say "Yes" to God when you do not know all of the details?
- How can you be the extended hand of Christ in someone's life today?

DAY FOUR

Isaiah 43 & Matthew 5
Major Keith Pike

I remember one Christmas I had just one thing on my gift list...a radio-controlled model airplane: The one with a real working glow engine. Now to be fair this was the 70's and technology was not quite what it was today. This was no modern-day drone. If I was lucky, I could get the plane to fly 4 or 5 metres then make a turn and come back. This plane was the one thing I hoped for. From the time I put the model plane on my list that seed of hope grew within me. Everyday was one day closer to my hope becoming a reality.

The author Paul David Tripp says, "Because we are made in God's image, we are hardwired for hope." I like that statement..." we are hardwired for hope" and when you stop and think about it, our daily language is filled with hope:

"I hope it doesn't snow today."

"I hope I did well on my exam"

"I hope they're not still mad at me"

"I hope our flight is not delayed"

"I hope the Leaf's can make it past the first round in the playoffs" (I'm not sure I would dare to hope beyond that)

Our scripture readings for today, Isaiah 43: 1-7 and Matthew 5: 1-12 both speak about this hardwired hope within each of us.

The prophet Isaiah is writing to the people of Israel. Their nation is no more, and the remnants are scattered to the corners of the earth. God through Isaiah is reminding His people that though they are scattered and feel lost, they are not without hope. In these first seven verses Isaiah plants that seed of hope in the readers with three statements.

1. God Created His People (v1)
2. God will Ransom His People (v2-4)
3. God will Gather His people (v5-7)

These three statements of hope expand to include all of us as Jesus begins His earthly ministry (Matthew 5:1-12). In Christ, God came to ransom His people.



Jesus would come as an atonement for us all and because of His sacrifice one day God will gather His people (v3,10 "for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven) to the eternal home prepared for them.

As we journey through this advent season, I pray that you will allow hope to take root in your heart. This baby we are waiting for will come and in Him we can have life that is abundant, free and hope filled. (John 10:10)

Reflection Questions:

- As we look at the current state of our world with all the uncertainty, where do you place your hope for the future?
- How does the hope that is ours through Jesus impact the way we see our world?

MY HEAD AND HEART SPACE

*use this space to journal your thoughts, emotions or anything that God is bringing
your attention to as you engage with this devotional material*

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DAY FIVE

Isaiah 44 & Matthew 6

Valerie Pavey

Are you like me? As the day's countdown to Christmas, do you hope you have bought the right or best gifts for your family and friends? Do you hope that you have everything you need to put together a delicious Christmas Dinner? Do you hope (maybe) that you will receive a gift that tells you how much you are valued by someone else? When I stop and reflect on these "hopes", I realize that they are really just "wishes"; something I desire. From a biblical perspective, hope is waiting and trusting in God and what He will provide.

As I read over the words of Isaiah 44, I am reminded of the things that I wish for. Though not wrong in themselves, they are things that can become idols in my life, having no meaning. In fact, they distract me from the one who formed me, the one to whom I belong. God promises in verses 21 and 22 that He made us, He will not forget us, and it is Him who redeemed us. Instead of wishing for life to go as I planned or for a perfectly happy life and all the things that I put into building that, I need to look to God and remember what He has done for me. I need to put my hope in Him.

How can I keep my focus, my hope, placed in God my redeemer? In Matthew 6, Jesus (God's gift of hope to us) teaches us how to pray. This prayer does not encourage me to pray for the earthly things I wish for. Instead, it teaches me to put my hope in the Father in heaven. Jesus teaches us to pray for God's Kingdom to come and for His will to be done. We are to pray for changed lives that fully trust and hope in God. In Matthew 6:33-34, Jesus reminds me to seek His kingdom, His righteousness and that these truly important gifts will be given to me. I am not to worry about tomorrow, but to leave tomorrow in God's trustworthy hands.

Today, as you reflect on hope, remember the one who has come to redeem us. Trust in Him to forgive your sins, provide for your needs, to care for your worries and to change your life through the coming of His kingdom.

Reflection Questions:

- What are the things you are hoping for as you prepare for Christmas?
- Read over Matthew 6:25-34. God is the one in whom we should put our hope. What worries or concerns are you carrying? What is stopping you from giving them to God? Take a moment to give those concerns over to Him.
- What steps will you take to hope in God? How will you put your faith and trust in Him today?



DAY SIX

Isaiah 45 & Matthew 7
Captain Jason Dockeray

Giving Hope Today, from coast to coast every year thousands of Canadians and Bermudians are provided with support at Christmas. People from diverse backgrounds come and receive food or vouchers, toys, or other tangible items of help. They come to our doors, receive welcome and are provided with items to meet their physical needs. I warrant a guess that everyone reading this advent devotion has given of themselves this Christmas to provide for the practical needs of someone struggling. And, honestly this is what makes me most proud to be a Salvationist. We are always willing to support those in need.

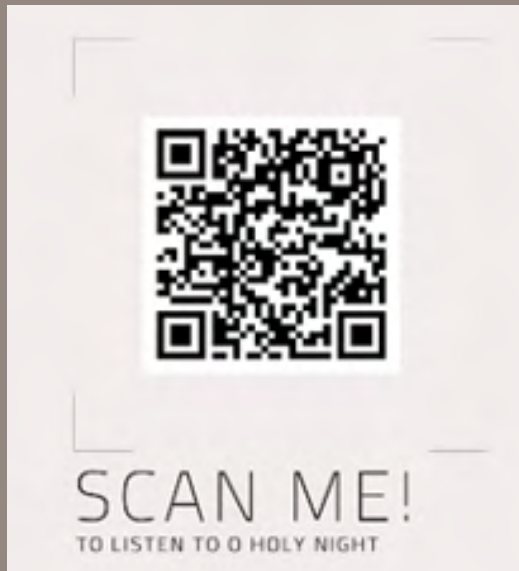
But, as I read through Matthew 7:7-12 this Christmas, I am confronted by the Gospel. I am reminded of the even greater gift that awaits those who “seek and knock”. The gift of Salvation brought to world through the birth of a baby in Bethlehem. So, the challenge for me this year as I provide practical support to those in need, is to help others come to awareness of the greatest gift ever given.

This Christmas we need to share with a hurting world that if they seek, they will find; if they knock, the door will be open. They will find the warm embrace of Jesus who won't rot like food, or break like toys, but His gift will sustain them through eternity.

How are you sharing the gift of Christ this Christmas to a world who desperately needs Him?



DAY SEVEN



Isaiah 46 & Matthew 8 Captain Kristen Jackson-Dockeray

Christmas in our house begins in early November. At that time, our home transforms into a space lit by candles on brass candle holders and white twinkly lights. The scents of our home can best be described as winter with key notes of pine needles, sparkling clementine, and spiced clove. Backlit by candles is a print that says, “the weary world rejoices”. The lyrics to my most beloved Christmas carol.

In the scripture passages for today both Isaiah and Matthew remind us as readers that Jesus is the long-anticipated thrill of hope for which the weary world has waited and now rejoices.

Isaiah dramatically and somewhat sarcastically drives this point home when he taunts the crowd about their weak idols who are supposed to save their devotees but cannot save themselves. In contrast to the weak idols Isaiah reminds his listeners that it is Yahweh who saves. In verse 10 Isaiah resolutely reminds us that the purposes of God “will stand” and that God will fulfill his intention. In response Isaiah invites his listeners in verse 11 to have faith in their weariness that what God has planned he will do. The kind of hope presented by the prophet is not of the dreamy, wishful-thinking sort. Isaiah does not deny the tragedy of lives of his listeners. He knows full well the reality of the weariness of pain and hardship that is conquest and exile. In the midst of this weariness, Isaiah invites his listeners to remember that God answers the cries of the oppressed and works to enact deliverance.

Matthew 8 continues the gospel arc and narrative of God’s redemption. In this chapter and in the ones that will follow, Matthew intentionally writes his narrative to allow readers to understand that the deliverance of God is at work in Jesus. Each story points to Jesus as the obedient Son of God, the Messiah, in and through whom God’s power is manifested for the sake of God’s people. And the invitation for deliverance is extended further embracing Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male, and female. The Messiah Jesus is the one who is healing broken relationships, diseased bodies and is bringing a new people of God into existence. A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices.

DAY EIGHT

Isaiah 47 & Matthew 9-10

Major Kristiana MacKenzie

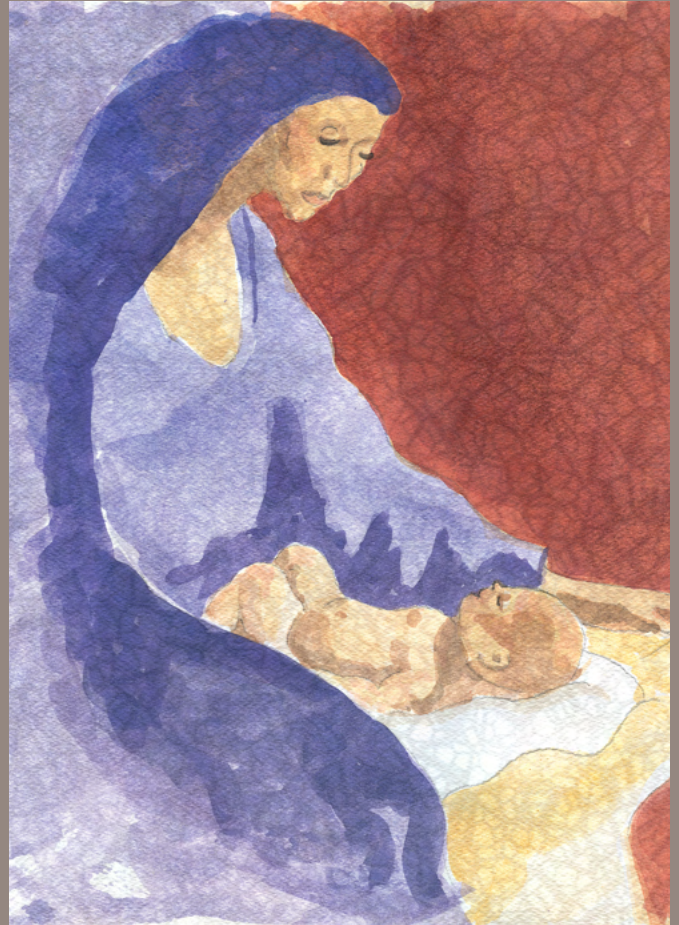
If you have ever had a dandelion in your yard, you will know how invasive they are. It will not be long before their pretty, yellow flowers are popping up all over the place. And then, the flowers turn into magical puff balls, full of seeds ready to be carried away by the wind to grow in the neighbour's yard. They will grow just about anywhere and will take over quickly.

Sin is kind of like the dandelion. It might be enjoyable in the moment, but it can quickly take over your life.

A little white lie grows into a whole series of lies you can't remember anymore. A weak moment causes you to lose your temper, acting out or saying something you regret.

Sometimes we deliberately choose to sin, sometimes it's an honest mistake. However it happens, it's not the end for us. Christmas is the reminder that there is a love so great, it overcomes the sin in our lives. Jesus as a little babe brings the gift of salvation to the world. When he stepped into the world, he brought love and forgiveness in ways the world had never seen before. When he performed miracles, it wasn't to show off. When he interacted with people, it wasn't to bring judgement. Every person he encountered experienced the unconditional love of God and the forgiveness of sins.

As we begin this second week of advent, take a few moments with God. Allow Him to expose any sin that may have crept in and taken root. Ask Him to forgive you and then enjoy the love He pours out on you.



Reflection Questions:

- Matthew 9 gives us a glimpse into Jesus' perspective on the needs of those around him. What is the greatest need of humankind?
- We don't often associate Christmas with our sinful nature. How does your perspective on this holiday change when you consider that Jesus was born so that we can be forgiven?

Check out these verses that speak of God's forgiveness: Psalm 103:12; Jeremiah 31:34; Isaiah 43:25.

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DAY NINE

Isaiah 48 & Matthew 11

Shona Burditt

How often have you heard the phrase head knowledge vs heart knowledge? Head knowledge is knowing all about a certain subject whereas heart knowledge is understanding how this head knowledge applies to you. It's a movement to action and in this case from our readings today, the acceptance of an invitation to follow God.

In both of our chapters today we come across people who would have known all about God and who Jesus was. In our reading from Isaiah, they professed belief in God as well as their church and in our reading from Matthew, these were people living while John and Jesus were preaching. What a time to be alive!

And yet they hadn't translated that head knowledge into heart knowledge. They depended on themselves, keeping both God and Jesus at a distance. They were indifferent to the invitation they were given and the promises that were made to them, relying instead on themselves and their understanding.

"I am the Lord Your God, who teaches you what is good for you and leads you along the paths you should follow. Oh, that you listened to my commands! Then you would have peace flowing like a gentle river and righteousness rolling over you like waves in the sea" Isaiah 48: 17-18 NLT. God was telling them that out of his unconditional love for them, he would lead them, guide them, and give them peace.

Matthew 11 holds a similar story; they rejected John and Jesus teaching, taking the opposite view. They did not like their comfortable, secure, and self-centred lives being challenged. Again, they knew about God and may have even heard Jesus in person but weren't willing to listen to what He had to say as it may have meant they had to change the way they lived.

We are invited into an intimate relationship with God through faith in Jesus, to move from knowing about God to being in relationship with Him, being fully known by Him. Being fully known by God is accepting that we are worthy of His unconditional love - warts, and all. Knowing about God can be a comfortable place as it means we can keep Him at arm's length: this knowledge can be shelved without us having to make any changes. But this is a half life, a life lived in part, not in full, that is not what God wants for us. He wants us to live full, abundant lives, being loved and fully known by Him.

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly." Matthew 11: 28-30 (MSG).

This is a promise of true rest, from the burden of sin, religion, and expectations of others. It is the promise of a life lived in partnership with God. It isn't a promise of an easy life but one where we do not have to travel alone. As we journey through this advent season, take time to think about this question.

Do you know about God, or do you know God? Because He wants to know you and show you how much you are loved by Him completely. Translate that head knowledge into heart knowledge and accept God's gracious invitation to join with Him.

DAY TEN



Isaiah 49 & Matthew 12

Sara Rowe

Shout for joy, you heavens,
Rejoice, you earth,
Burst into song, you mountains!
For the Lord comforts his people
And will have compassion on his
Afflicted ones.” —Isaiah 49:13

Think about Christmas, the Advent season. What are some feelings that come to mind? Joy. Peace. Love. What about comfort?

For me, Christmas is comfort. It's time spent with the people I love most. It's the candlelight of Christmas Eve surrounding me in warmth. It's getting cozy around the tree with my family in our pyjamas Christmas morning. It's turkey dinner.

And of course, it's the knowledge that Jesus came to be our never-ending comfort.

In Isaiah 49, we hear promises being made about how Jesus is going to come and bring comfort to all people because of his compassion. Jew or Gentile, whoever you might be, Jesus will provide comfort when you come to him. Matthew 12 provides us with evidence of just that. We read of Jesus explaining that healing on the Sabbath is allowed because doing good is allowed. He provides comfort to the man with the shrivelled hand and the demon possessed man through healing. He provides comfort to the crowd who listens to him by assuring them of his purpose as well as telling them that they are his family. They are his brother and sister and mother. They are granted his compassion because they are all family under the Father in heaven.

What could be more comforting than knowing we are granted compassion and comfort from Jesus Christ himself, that we are a part of his family? This season brings us the promise that he was indeed brought to earth so that we would never be without this source of comfort. We are promised in Matthew 12 that our sins will be forgiven if we go to Jesus. He is waiting with outstretched arms to comfort us regardless of where we go or where we've been. Will you accept this comfort this Christmas?

Reflection Questions:

- When you reflect on this idea of Jesus as our “comfort” this holiday season, what sort of imagery does that bring to mind? Write it down or even draw yourself a picture to revisit when you feel the need for that comfort again.
- Jesus is known by many names—Saviour, Lamb of God, Bread of Life, Redeemer, Lord, Son of God, Son of Man, and so many more. Which name fully captures the idea of Jesus as “comfort” for you?

DAY ELEVEN

Isaiah 50 & Matthew 13

Colonel Evie Diaz

“Listen Up!” When I was young, this was a phrase my dad often used if a group of kids at church were not paying attention. I can hear his voice and especially the tone he used. I knew I needed to stop talking and listen! Have you ever been frustrated when you’ve asked someone a question or made an important comment, thinking that person was listening, only to realize they had their earbuds in and didn’t hear a word you said? Maybe you’ve used the phrase, “Did you hear me”? Not just your voice, but did they actually listen to your words and understand? Our scripture texts today are about listening and understanding.

In Isaiah 50: 4b (MSG), the prophet says:

“He wakes me up in the morning, wakes me up, opens my ears to listen as one ready to take orders”.

I want to really listen to God as He speaks during this Advent season. As I pray, ‘come Lord Jesus’, I want to listen with ears and eyes alert to His words for me. And I want to do what He asks. In the familiar parable of the seed and the sower, Jesus provides this interpretation: “the seed cast on good earth is the person who hears and takes in the News, and then produces a harvest beyond his wildest dreams” Matthew 13:23 (MSG).

God wants us to pay attention as He speaks so that He can use us to tell others about Jesus and His love for the world.

Let’s listen to God, act on what He says and then see what amazing things He will do!

‘Lord, wake me up and open my ears. Make me ready to really listen to you today and ready to do what you ask.’

Reflection Questions:

- How can you be ready to listen to God speak to you through His Word? In worship? Through others? Through Creation?
- In this Advent season, what new or different spiritual practice could you try to help you listen to God? (For example, meditation, fasting, prayer walking)



DAY TWELVE

Isaiah 51 & Matthew 14

Commissioner Floyd Tidd

Christmas is often described as the greatest expression of God's love for his creation. To the broken people of Israel, living in desolation and despair God announced, "my salvation is on the way", through the prophet Isaiah, (Isaiah 51:5b). Out of love for his people he offered a word of hopeful anticipation: the practical expression of his love – his 'salvation is on the way'. This was the message John the Baptist would carry, inviting people to respond by 'preparing the way' for the promised salvation, for the Messiah who was coming. John the Baptist lived out the calling and purpose of God for his life. John the Baptist was executed while he was obediently following God's will for his life.

Corrie ten Boom, a Dutch Christian who was imprisoned for helping rescue nearly 800 Jews escaping the Nazis, coined the famous phrase, "The safest place is in the center of God's will." In recent years that phrase has been misunderstood from its original intent and context. It has come to be understood that we are immune from suffering and challenges in life if we are being obedient to God as we follow Jesus. Corrie ten Boom and her family followed Jesus whatever the cost would be. Her father and her sister died in concentration camps. Corrie endured the horrific experience of being imprisoned in a concentration camp for ten months until her release.

During Advent we recognize the promise of God to send his salvation and we prepare for the celebration of the birth of Jesus. Let us hear the invitation of John the Baptist to prepare the way for the King of kings and Lord of lords and consider our willingness to obediently follow Jesus wherever he leads. Like John the Baptist and Corrie ten Boom may we choose to live our lives in the centre of God's will wherever that will lead us and whatever that may cost us.



Reflection Questions:

- Who first shared with me the story of Christmas in its meaning for my life?
- In our world, who am I in relationship with that needs to know that God has fulfilled his promise to send his salvation – Jesus? Does this Christmas season open a window for that conversation? Make this a matter of prayer and walk with eyes and ears wide open
- Considering John the Baptist and Corrie ten Boom – are there others I know that have obediently followed Jesus even when it meant suffering and risk?
- Am I prepared to put the cause and call of Christ ahead of comfort and security as I obediently follow Jesus?

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DAY THIRTEEN

Isaiah 52 & Matthew 15
Lieutenant April Keeping

I'm not sure in all my years I will ever forget the sound of my boys' feet as they ran down the hallway in the early hours of Christmas morning. The sound of their feet was only matched by their own exuberant cries of joy as they showed us the contents of their stockings they had waited so long to open. My own enthusiasm matched theirs that Christmas morning as the sound of their feet woke me to the reminder that Christmas morning is a time of joy and celebration.

The Prophet Isaiah announces: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news" (Isaiah 52:7). If I can experience such joy on Christmas morning as I hear my children, how much more joy do I experience as I consider the good news that Jesus has brought me? Jesus brings the news of peace, good tidings, our salvation, and the reminder that our God reigns above us just as He always has and just as He always will.

We turn to Matthew 15 and see Jesus's real-life walking out of this good news. We see him heal the daughter of a gentile woman. We see Jesus feed four thousand people while he healed many of the sick in the crowd. Matthew writes that the people were amazed when they saw the results of Jesus' healings. The "mute spoke, the crippled were now well, the lame walked and the blind could see" (Matthew 15:31). People were healed. The crowds praised the God of Israel. As Jesus brought to life the Good News of God's Kingdom, he pointed the crowds towards their God just as Jesus continues to point us towards God the Father. During this Advent Season we are invited to admire and exclaim the beauty of the One who brings us good news – news of peace in a world of violence, good tidings in a world of suffering and free salvation in a world of striving.

Reflection Questions:

- What does it feel like to celebrate good news? What real life examples of Jesus's Good News have you see in your life?
- Where do you need the good news of the Gospel in your life today? Invite the Spirit today to reveal the Good News of Jesus' Gospel to you in a fresh way.

DAY FOURTEEN

Isaiah 53 & Matthew 16 Lt. Colonel Ann Braund

Jesus asked his disciples “Who do people say the Son of Man Is?” (Matthew 16:13). They shared some answers, then Jesus pressed them harder, “Who do you say I am?” Through today’s Scripture readings, you, are asked this most important question.

Peter answered correctly, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Yet having the right answer did not mean he had the right mindset (Matthew 16:23). Peter had no room in his mind for the message of a suffering Christ. Immediately following Peter’s confession of faith Jesus proceeds to explain that he would suffer, be killed, and rise from the dead. Peter resisted, “never Lord.” Jesus said of Peter “You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of man.”

Isaiah 53 expounds the mind of God. “The LORD was willing To crush Him, causing Him to suffer;

If He would give Himself as a guilt offering [an atonement for sin], He shall see His [spiritual] offspring, He shall prolong His days, And the will (good pleasure) of the LORD shall succeed and prosper in His hand. (10). He was wounded and pierced for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities (4-5). He was cut off from the land of the living, and for our transgressions He was stricken (v.8). He poured out His soul unto death (12) for you and me. Matthew 20:28 says of Jesus, “He gave his life a ransom for many.” John 14:10 tells us that Jesus acted according to the will of the Father.

This advent season will you

- profess your faith in Christ Jesus as your Lord and Savior?
- follow Him, deny yourself and take up your cross?
- Let this mind that was in Christ be also in you (Philippians 2:5-11)?



DAY FIFTEEN



Isaiah 54 & Mark 1-2 Captain Crystal Porter

Amazement gripped the audience, and they began to discuss what had happened. "What sort of new teaching is this?" they asked excitedly. (MARK 1:27a NLT) Something was happening... The atmosphere was changing... people living in sickness were suddenly healed. Unexpected and ordinary people were given a voice. People in places of power were challenged and systemic injustices were exposed. Word was spreading of a new teacher who was transforming a broken world. Conversations were rooted in hope... finally there was something worth celebrating.

In a world in need of healing, Jesus entered. I am often a person who finds solace in the middle of creation. Place me on a rocky shoreline with waves crashing around me and my soul finds rest. Let me walk in the freshly fallen snow and breathe the crisp winter air and my mind is at peace. I like to think that it is because creation offers a level of silence and solitude that I can't seem to find in a bustling city, but the reality is that creation is often overwhelming loud.

When the Creator spoke the world into existence- it was good. The creeks spoke of his abundant love. The trees revealed her mighty strength- the sounds of creation shouted the Creator's praise. It was good.

Thousands of years later- the world doesn't seem as good anymore. Indigenous communities are left without clean drinking water, Black and Indigenous people are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, Indigenous women, girls and 2 spirited are missing and murdered at alarming rates. Creation groans as its gifts are overused, disregarded, and mistreated.

And yet in a world in need of healing, Jesus enters. His teachings still changing perspectives. His life story continuing to show the world that God is here in our midst. It creates a beautiful picture, doesn't it?

Christmas- a time when we gather, celebrating with friends and family, focusing on the one who restores the goodness in the world.

Jesus enters the story at a crucial moment- darkness, pain, sorrow was all around- and he offered light. The same light that was at the beginning. These new teachings, these amazing moments were not creating some new world- it was redeeming the Creator's already formed masterpiece. A restoration to goodness and completing the circle.

DAY SIXTEEN

Isaiah 55 & Mark 3
Lieutenant Andrew Sweet

The opening of Isaiah 55 invites all to come. Those who are thirsty, those who are hungry, and those who don't have enough money to purchase what they need. Just come and enjoy. Doesn't that remind you of Christmas with The Salvation Army?

Often Advent and the Christmas season can be the busiest and most stressful time for those working with The Salvation Army; those who long to serve those in their community. But have you ever gotten to the end of the season feeling like you were the one that was hungry, thirsty and without the ability to get what you need most? In an effort to give hope today and ensure that everyone has all that they need, how often do we invite everyone else to come and receive without also coming ourselves?

God is inviting us into a different way of life. A way that gives space and peace in the midst of struggle. God is calling and saying: "Come to me so that YOU may live". We can't just focus on others, but we also must come to God to have our needs met.

When we choose to come to God, the end of the poem in Isaiah 55 tells us that:

12 "you shall go out in joy
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle,
and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off."

In a time of the year when it becomes so easy to keep doing more and where we find ourselves pushing our own limits to serve others – let us choose to come to God first.

Reflection Questions:

- In what ways are you needing to come to God for refreshing this season?
- In the midst of serving others, how can you choose to come to God first to find joy and peace?



MY HEAD AND HEART SPACE

*use this space to journal your thoughts, emotions or anything that God is bringing
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DAY SEVENTEEN

Isaiah 56 & Mark 4

Lieutenant Joel Torrens

It's 12 days until Christmas. I'm sorry if that freaked you out. It's possible that you are joyfully waiting for the clock to turn from 11:59 on the 24th to 12:00 on the 25th. Unless you have a list of all the things you need to accomplish before Christmas, and you've been nervously praying for time to stand still for a few hours so you can get it all done.

However, you are coming to this devotional, whether you're rested, frantic, or somewhere in between, take a break.

Christmas is probably one of the fullest times of the year. There are special events in our churches, workplaces, and communities. There are kettle shifts, Christmas hampers, band concerts, commercials, carols and more. At this time of year that word seems to be so prevalent; more. The challenge in all of this, is to carve out the space for less. Even while he was teaching in Mark 4, Jesus felt the press of the crowds, and He needed less. He kept teaching. He continued to spend time with His disciples discussing the kingdom of God and how its citizens should live in this world, but He needed to get away from the crowds. He found a way to escape the 'more' and live in the 'less'.

In Isaiah 56 we read about two groups who often feel separated from the Kingdom of God. The eunuchs feel separated because of the life they have pursued, by choice or duty. The foreigners feel separated because of the circumstances of their birth. The prophet calls them both to keep the Sabbath. The way into the kingdom, the way through life, the thing you need, is less.

In that 'less', with the volume of the world turned down, listen for God's voice. *What do you hear?*

Reflection Questions:

- What are some of the extra things that fill your life at Christmas?
- What can you do to create space, to pursue less?

DAY EIGHTEEN

Isaiah 57 & Mark 5

Major Stephen Wiseman

Read Matthew 1:18-25

The opening two verses of Isaiah 57 remind me of the very tough six-month period our family recently experienced. During that period, we lost three very influential people. “The righteous are taken to be spared from evil.” They each lived and breathed righteousness. They lived righteousness into a peaceful rest in death. A faithful “well done” I am certain.

I, on the other hand, after twenty-two years of Corps Ministry, hit a wall. A series of discouraging circumstances was unsettling me.

Enter my own long dark period. I felt isolated from God. The silence was madness. I began to doubt. My faith. Him. My sanity. The Spirit arrested my spirit in vs. 10-13. As I read, I felt the conviction of the Spirit, this was me – total opposite of the three influential people of righteous, hopeful, abundant life-giving faith. They had many reasons over their years to lose hope & faith, yet they did not.

Consistently, I would ask the Almighty to give me even one word of encouragement. Assurance that they are close and in control. Nothing. Days, weeks, months.

“There are all kinds of ways in which God speaks to us—through our thoughts or any one of our faculties. But keep in mind that God’s first language is silence”. - Thomas Keating

The cry of a baby always shatters the silence. Jesus’ entrance into the world was no different. The difference is in His person. He can relate and is in the silence with me. He had experienced discouragement, silence, and many dark periods throughout his short life. I continued to act in faith even though I was grieving, lamenting, sad, frustrated and discouraged. I continued to be brutally honest with God about how I was feeling and the deep longing I felt for His closeness. I believe God was using my longing and emotion to bring me closer to Him. Could Creator be doing the same in your life?



Reflection Questions:

- When have you most recently experienced the silence of God? How did you respond? How did you or how are you journeying through it? What have you and are you learning from this experience?
- How are you feeling about your relationship with God right now? Can you find hope and peace in the reality of the Christ child this advent season? Are you anticipating and participating in the Christ child being born anew in you today?

Take a few moments to journal your responses. Allow your responses to flow, without judgment. Hold nothing back and receive everything you need for life and godliness from them – Creator, Incarnate, breathe of life.



DAY NINETEEN

Isaiah 58 & Mark 6 Cadet Tharwat Eskander

As a child, I learned that God wants me to work hard to find him. I was taught that if I wanted Jesus to love me, I must obey my parents; I cannot lie; I had to do my homework, and not cause any trouble at school; finish all the food on my plate, and so on. I really wanted Jesus to love me, so I tried my best to do all that. Yet I failed to be the perfect child, and every time I failed, I would immediately think that I wasn't loved because I wasn't perfect. As a teenager I started to do more to earn His love. I attended church religiously, prayed using a prayer book 7 times a day, and I fasted, and fasted, and fasted even more.

For a teenager to fast - not eating meat or dairy products for long periods of time, sometimes lasting 55 days at a time - was something remarkable. Even my own family would encourage me to take it easy on myself. For me, it was a challenge to myself, and a way to finally earn God's love.

When I turned 18, I had a real encounter with God, and that is when I knew that he really loved me, unconditionally, unreservedly, and absolutely. I did not have to earn this love, I only needed to accept it.

The words of Isaiah 58 became a guiding light for my life, the fast (or works) that God desires is more than just a fast, more than hard work to earn his love and acceptance. It's every act of love I do for Others. God's love for us demands a response from us - that response is to love back in the most practical way possible, to share my food with the hungry, clothes the naked, free the oppressed and give shelter to the homeless. In doing this, I'm able to tell God, "I love you too".

Reflection Questions:

- What are the motivations for my spiritual practices? Is it a response to God's love?
- Take a few moments & read Isaiah 58. In light of these verses, how well do I live these words, and what would I change in my daily routine, to create opportunities to love my neighbours?

DAY TWENTY

Isaiah 59 & Mark 7

Jessica MacKenzie

Merry Christmas! This has always been my favourite holiday, but it can be very easy to get caught up in the busyness and chaos that comes with Christmas time (especially for officers—I'm sure they would tell you the same thing). In the busyness, we sometimes miss out on its significance. If that's how you're feeling right now, take a moment. Breathe in. Breathe out. God is with us.

Isaiah 59 starts off on a bit of an unpleasant note: "It's not that God can't save you...but He won't, because you don't want to be rescued—you love your sin too much". And so, God turned away from the people. The bluntness of it is shocking, and yet, it is exactly what we need to hear. Sin is not something we can indulge in without consequence. Sin is expensive; it costs our relationship with God and the Life He gives us & it costs the life of our Saviour. We can keep sin and surrender real life, or we can take the cross and surrender our sin. Persisting in sin only separates us from God. It doesn't matter what sin looks like—whether it's kept a secret or if it's out in the open—sin separates us from God.

There is an interesting passage in Mark 7:1-23, where Jesus is confronted by a group of religious leaders, and Jesus calls them out for their sins. The religious leaders may have seemed like they were perfect and had it all together—they had money, power, respect—but they wanted honour for themselves and not for the Lord. Their hearts were far from God. In other words, their sin separated them from God. The scary part? They didn't even realize that they, the leaders in the Temple, were themselves, living in sin...at least, not until Jesus pointed it out.

You are a leader. As you are discerning your call to officership, check your heart and consider;

1. What are your motivations?
2. What are the things that might threaten to draw you away from God?

Take a moment to pray and ask God to reveal any and every sin that is in your heart. Whatever it might be, take it to God and leave it there.



PHOTO BY LT. BRANDON KEEPING

MY HEAD AND HEART SPACE

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DAY TWENTY-ONE

Isaiah 60 & Mark 8

Lt. Julia Marshall

Building off Isaiah 59, chapter 60 continues to foretell the coming of God's anointed one – the Messiah. The author tells us of the darkness that is over the people but really emphasizes here the “glory of the Lord” which shines. When it seems dark and like things will never go right, God promises to send the Messiah to bring light. What exactly is this “light”? According to Isaiah 60, it looks like the radical reversing of the sinful world's natural order. There will be peace – both in a political sense (v. 10) and a military sense (v. 18). The poor will become rich, and the rich will become poor (v. 22). But of course, these are just examples of how God can bring about total and radical restoration of his world.

In Mark 8, a significant event takes place. Jesus asks his disciples who they think he is. People around them think that Jesus might be John the Baptist, or Elijah, or some other person. But Peter replies that the disciples think that Jesus is the Messiah. Knowing what has been prophesied about the Messiah, particularly in Isaiah 60, this is a monumental statement. Peter is declaring that Jesus is the one to bring about this radical restoration, to bring about the total reversal of what is considered “normal.”

But there's a catch: Jesus says this in Mark 8:34-35: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it”. The pathway of Jesus bringing about the restoration of the world goes directly through the cross. In his suffering and death, Jesus has made an atonement for the whole world. Though he could (I imagine) simply make all things right again with the snap of a finger, this is the way that God ordained for the world to be restored through Christ. For us to participate in this restoration, we must deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus Christ. We must die to ourselves and be made alive in Him! This is the way to real, authentic radical restoration.

Reflection Questions:

- What areas of your life would be most impacted by radical restoration?
- What words come to mind as you consider who Jesus Christ is to you?



DAY TWENTY-TWO

MARY: SHE OF GRIT & MINCE

Isaiah 61 & Luke 1-2

By Auxiliary-Lieutenant Rosy Keane

Zygote:

Technically the tiniest
Form of new life

Two cells

Before the split

One flesh

And then it divides

But instead of mere halving

It's a harvest that multiples

Becoming twice as much

And much more again

Exponential growth at a rate of knots

In a gelatinous slop of fluid

Christ the
Microscopic.

I wonder if Mary had morning sickness?

After all, she didn't float on clouds of glory so the Son of All
Stories could be given –

gut-wrenching, side-splitting, curtain-tearing, earth-shattering,

pelvic widening, heart-aching, oh GOD, is this God, oh the

humanity, hold my hand, I can't breathe,

BREATHE, JUST BREATHE

Breathe –birth to.

They talk about immaculate conceptions, not immaculate
births.

That stuff is messsssss-Y.

I suppose Mary didn't feel special beyond measure

When at times the earth seemed to shift and pitch under her



When at the outset she
couldn't
maybe
eat certain foods

Or as the hormones from a tiny baby inside her womb
pinched and wrecked her moods
(Is there such thing as Holy Hormonal Acne?)
Oh the indignity
Oh the humanity
Oh the mundanity
Of this everyday Diety-pregnancy

Author of the earth
Being written code by code
Christ the Embryo
Inside her.

But I bet sometimes she could sit
And feel
And listen
And hear
The tiny growls from within her body
The alien shape of a Holy Somebody
Beneath her own flesh
The flesh of the One
Who was, and is, and is to come
Taking shape within her very self.

It's sacrilege.

You don't put a Bentley in an overstuffed shack.
You don't put a Rolex in a student's backpack
you **SHOULDN'T** cram the
SAVIOUR of the **WORLD** in the **WOMB** of a
WOMAN and when she's pre-pregnant,
Pre-married,
Pre-Bible-ified





Just a random girl who loves the Lord wandering AROUND –
let HER hear and rightly divide the Divine Word of God

I'm a virgin, how can I?
Yes, Lord though I
be

Deeply troubled by the
greeting

Your will be done
I
Even I
Am your servant.

Like mother, like son.

And that poem that poured forth from her heart
Like speech from stars
More beautiful than Jupiter and Mars
And books and rabbis and streams
And choirs and Holy choruses for centuries since,
Well, she was the one of meat and mince
Who agreed to host
In the most
Intimate way
The one who owns the universe

And yet had no home

Mary did you know
When that tiny zygote began to grow
That all your most private places, words and hidden thoughts
Would be put on display
In a thousand languages
For ages since?

You were a woman of grit.

And as you watched that full grown babe-now-man,
Hung upon a tree, his face turned upwards and then towards
thee
Binding you with his last breath to a foreign son
My time has come
It hadn't come then, woman,
In Cana with the wine
But now it's come,
And you wished to mop the blood from his brow, and back,
And lips,
And kiss that head once more with tenderness,
DAMN THE THORNS THOUGH THEY MAY SHRED
YOUR FACE
And you wonder in a quiet moan
In the hollow place
Where the treasure kept and stored has since poured out on the
floor of the throne room
Why, take, my, son?

And you remember holding him
His tender curls
His face by yours
The smell of life
The freshness of birth

The wonder of this
Of a God born in a
human woman,
The remnant of your own flesh and blood upon his face,
Knowing your Flesh and Blood must
die
And become truly
Once for all
The source of all life

Your Father, Spirit



Reflection Questions:

- What image(s) sticks most prominently in your mind as you reflect on what you've read?
- What are you feeling?
- How can you carry these feelings and images into your approach to the season of Advent?

MY HEAD AND HEART SPACE

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DAY TWENTY-THREE



Isaiah 62 & Luke 3-4 Captain Colleen Gleadall

I am someone who needs to prepare for everything. My method is lists. I enjoy crossing things off as they are completed. I add things as they come up and I am certain to forget something not on the list. A mundane office workday is driven by the to-do list. Spring cleaning, an extensive checklist. Vacation time, catch me with multiple lists. Christmas, you better believe multiple lists and spreadsheets are created to follow. Without my preferred method of preparation, the lists, it can feel like chaos for me. But as I have learned in life, sometimes there is beauty in the chaos and letting go.

The people of God in the book of Isaiah knew this reality all too well. They were living in exile feeling a sense of chaos, grief, and turmoil. Living in a reality so out of their control that it may have seemed like God had abandoned and betrayed them. But into their chaos, Isaiah came to remind them that all hope was not lost because God was preparing the way out for them. That they would go from Deserted and Desolate (Isaiah 62:4) to Holy, Redeemed and Sought After (Isaiah 62:12). That their transformation was part of a great plan to prepare the way for the Saviour, our Saviour who will come (Isaiah 62:11).

A Saviour would be born generations later and who came to prepare a new way of life for all people through baptism by the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:16). The Holy Spirit who will ordain you for His service. Who will be a reminder in the chaos and circumstances of life that we can trust God to prepare the way. A way for us to be Holy, redeemed and sought after too. A way that tells us that sometimes the best thing we can do in the chaos is to put down our list and trust God to prepare the way.

Reflection Questions:

- What chaos, struggle, challenge or obstacle are you facing today?
- How can trusting in God's preparations free you from trusting your own preparation?
- What things do you need to let go of to trust God to prepare the way for you today?



DAY TWENTY-FOUR

Isaiah 63 & Luke 5

Commissioner Tracey Tidd

Jesus answers the cry of our hearts for peace. In Luke's account of the early months of ministry of Jesus we see Jesus meeting people where they are and bringing peace to their lives.

When Peter is overwhelmed during his encounter with Jesus having put out into the deep waters and casting his nets at Jesus instruction, Jesus speaks peace into his life. "Don't be afraid from now on you will fish for people." Jesus brings peace to our hearts as he gives purpose to our lives. Even as Peter looked at the miraculous catch of fish surrounding him in the boat, Jesus knew that Peter's heart would crave a purpose even greater than a successful catch. Jesus gives purpose to our lives that will outlive our lives.

Jesus stepped alongside people that many people would avoid leaving them all alone. "Immanuel, God with us" is the message for everyone. There is a peace that comes to our hearts when we know that we are not alone. Like the leper who met Jesus, there are so many people in our world and in our communities who feel outcast and alone. Jesus stopped and reached out, touching the leper, and engaged in conversation. He has chosen to step into our world and into our lives, promising to never leave us. We are not alone.

Jesus meets our deepest needs. As his friends pulled back the thatched roof to lower their paralyzed friend down to Jesus, they knew the obvious need their friend had, but Jesus knew the deepest need in him, and all of us. Having encountered Jesus, the paralyzed man not only walked out of the house with his matt under his arms, but he also walked out as a man forgiven of his sins. Peace permeates our hearts and lives when the presenting needs and the need to be forgiven are met. Only in Jesus do we find this peace.

Thank you Lord for saving my soul,
Thank you Lord for making me whole,
Thank you Lord for giving to me,
Your great salvation so rich and free.

Reflection Questions:

- Have I discovered and surrendered to God's purpose for my life?
- In preparing for Christmas and gift-giving, how do I express my appreciation for the gift of God's great salvation?

DAY TWENTY- FIVE

Isaiah 64 & Luke 6

Colonel Eleanor Shepherd

The prophet Isaiah proclaims the might and power of God in Isaiah 64, verses 1 – 4. While hearing Isaiah describe how God acts on behalf of His people, they become aware of their own unworthiness. (v. 5 – 12). Our situation is also summarized: We are clay in His hands (v.8). Unclean and unworthy, we find ourselves mired in ruins. Yet His power is without limit. We hear the prophet echo the cry of our hearts, for God, our only hope. “After all this, Lord, will you hold yourself back? (v.12, NIV).”

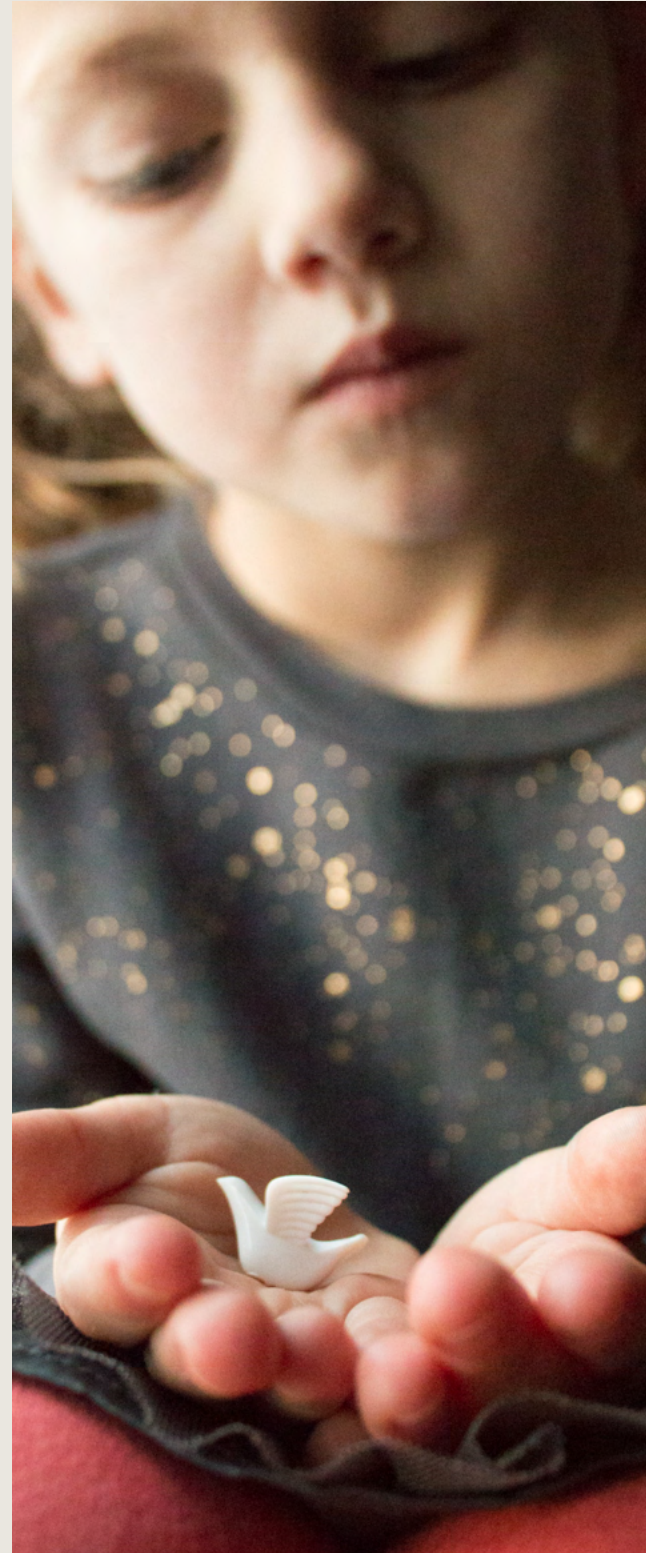
The answer comes to us in a remarkable way, in the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 7 presents a picture of the Prince of Peace moving amongst His people. To those with only a small portion of faith, He offers His peace. Look at the examples: In response to the request of a Roman centurion who is aware of his own unworthiness, Jesus offers healing to his servant. In response to the tears of loneliness and sorrow of a grieving widow, in compassion He stops his funeral procession and raises her only son from death.

We can hear Luke answering the prophet Isaiah by his words in Luke 7:16, “God has come to help his people.”

Aware of the smallness of faith, in his own situation, John the Baptist sends his messengers to confirm Jesus really is the promised One. Has God really come to help His people? Jesus sends them back with news of what He is doing, to boost the weak faith of John.

Finally, an unnamed woman, aware of her own unworthiness pours out her perfume to try to show her love for Jesus. She receives peace in the gift Jesus gives to her of love and forgiveness.

The Prince of Peace who came into the midst of the ruins of our world that first Christmas comes to us where we are today.



DAY TWENTY-SIX

Isaiah 65 & Luke 7

Lieutenant Renee Mailman

Christmas has always been one of my favourite holidays. While I do love the traditions of Christmas from the tree to the gingerbread houses, there is always something profound and wonderful about God sending His Son to earth as a baby.

God had long sought out a relationship with humans. In Isaiah 65 we see that God was calling out again and again to people who were constantly rejecting Him. They willfully turned away from Him and chose other gods. God then says that He will seek a different way, a different people. We see this in Luke 7 as Jesus interacts with a wide range of people; a Roman centurion, a Jewish widow, a sinful woman. The Roman and the woman had heard about Jesus, so they reached out to Him, and their faith brought healing and forgiveness. The widow did not refuse Jesus when He was moved with compassion for the loss of her son and her son was returned to her.

These people would have been considered unexpected to receive a miracle but that is what they received. They responded to Jesus and reached out to Him - what a contrast to the people in Isaiah who have willfully ignored God. Even the Pharisees in Jesus' time were so rigid in their understanding of law that they couldn't see Jesus for who He was. It was the unexpected people who exhibited true faith and true repentance, they reached out to Jesus, and they were able to experience Jesus in ways the others couldn't. This Christmas we have a choice as we continue in the busyness of life, to ignore God's call or to hear it and reach out to God, who is calling to us to come to Him.



Reflection Questions:

- Sometimes our turn from God is slow and less obvious, skipping devotions regularly, not engaging in prayer etc. What actions might you be taking, or not taking, that are turning you away from God?
- How have you been responding to God when He calls out to you? Or have you been ignoring Him?
- How can you reach out to God in faith this Christmas season?

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DAY TWENTY-SEVEN



Isaiah 66 & Luke 8

Auxiliary-Lieutenant Florence Yau

Isaiah 66:1 KJV “Thus saith the LORD, the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?”. In the Old Testament, the people of Israel built a grand temple for God to dwell in.

In this passage, God is saying that heaven, with all the splendour, is His throne and the earth, with all its wonder, is His footstool. In other words, even though the temple was built magnificently, and man marveled at the temple’s grandeur, the works of man fail in comparison to the wonders of God’s creation.

Through this scripture, God makes it known that He does not desire to dwell in a building but yearns to reside in the innermost part of man: his heart. However, humanity’s sin stands as an enmity from having this desire fulfilled. That is why the angels proclaimed “peace on earth and goodwill to men” at the birth of our Lord. They were prophesying that this child would pay the price for sin and reconcile us to God.

There is, however, a part we need to play to have God reside in our hearts. Luke 8:15 KJV says: “but that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience”. This illustration regarding the word of God as seeds shows how we invite the almighty God into our hearts. Our hearts need to be honest and good to receive the word preached with faith and patience.

The yearning of God to dwell not in temples but in the hearts of men is fulfilled in Christ. As we approach the eve of Christmas, let us pause and consider truly how significant the birth of our Lord is.

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

Isaiah 9:1-7 & Luke 2:1-20

Major Mark Braye

“...and he will be called,” wrote the Prophet Isaiah, “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” For thousands of years, Christians have used these royal titles as names for the Messiah: names for Jesus. The Church has used these monikers to help tell the story of Jesus, his ministry, and mission.

The “Counselor” part of “Wonderful Counselor” equates “wise governance.” Counselor in this context refers to the capability to govern, to lead, and the capacity to administer, to plan, and to execute policy. While Jesus never held office and he was never given an earthly royal title, he was certainly wise and wonderful. Christ’s preaching, teaching, and very life displayed the above abilities in the context of counselor.

When we look at, think about, and speak of Jesus as “Mighty God,” we are affirming and proclaiming his divine nature. Jesus is God; Mighty God. We are declaring the Biblical and theological truth that not only is Jesus truly and properly man, he is truly and properly God - Mighty God.

At first, “Everlasting Father” may seem like an odd name for Jesus the Son, the second person in the Trinity, between God the Father and the Holy Spirit. When we break the title down, however, we access the beautiful picture it paints for considering Jesus and our relationship with him. The “Everlasting” piece means Jesus is with us always; Christ’s presence in our lives is eternal, it will not end, it is everlasting. “I am with you always,” Jesus says to his disciples and us at the end of The Gospel According to Matthew. The entry point for “Father” in this name is in John 14:18 when Jesus tells his disciples: “I will not leave you orphaned.”

“Prince of Peace” is a title with political implications, as well as significant Biblical and theological connections. This peace is Shalom. It is not merely the absence of war, conflict, and violence. It is the presence of justice, wholeness, tranquility, harmony in relationships, and goodness for all. True peace, true shalom is transformative, restorative, and interactive. This transformation, restoration, and interaction is manifested in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Reflection Questions:

- The titles “Wonderful Counselor” and “Prince of Peace” contain political connotations. How did Jesus react and interact to the “politics” of his day? How do we, as followers of Jesus, react and interact to the “politics” of our day?
- We believe Jesus is truly and properly man and truly and properly God. What are some reasons you think some people will acknowledge Jesus as a wonderful person and a great teacher, but may struggle with seeing him as God, as “Mighty God?”





DAY TWENTY-NINE

Isaiah 11:1-9 & Matthew 2:1-12

Major Terence Hale

Merry Christmas!

When I read the words of Isaiah 11:9 I start to sing in my head, “All over the world, the Spirit is moving. All over the world, like the prophet said it would be. All over the world, there is a mighty revelation, of the glory of the Lord, as the water covers the sea”. If you know this song it will likely be stuck in your head now for the rest of Christmas day. It’s not really a Christmas song, so I hope you don’t mind.

In keeping with the chorus and Isaiah’s words, I want to impress on you the global nature of what we celebrate today. Indeed, Christmas is a global celebration, around the world there are very few places that are not marking the Christmas season in some way. But, beyond that I want to press in on the fact that what was accomplished by Christ’s coming is truly global; literally, figuratively, completely.

Isaiah called it out, and in Matthew 2 we see it played out. Magi, Gentiles from a far country show up to honour and mark Christ’s arrival. These are unlikely visitors, but they show up on purpose. They show us that the hope of Christmas, the Kingdom initiated, purposefully extends beyond our own confined realities to include the expected and unexpected, the great and the small, the accepted and unaccepted. Indeed, the first 11 verses of Isaiah 11 if taken seriously, cause our worlds to expand out and become ‘global’ at an alarming and unsettling rate. As this new Christ Kingdom establishes itself, we are made to be just a little be uncomfortable or even disturbed (Matthew 2:3).

I cannot help but stop and think that today as I celebrate with my family, open presents, and enjoy the glow of the fireplace and a thousand little lights reflecting off shiny Christmas tree ornaments, that all over the world the Spirit is moving. Right now, this is happening, it is not just something in the past, it is not just something that will be, but right now, because of the Christ Child, the Spirit is moving through creation, available and real to each of us. I think of this, and I am spurred toward action, caught up in what my part is to be in this move of the Spirit.


Reflection Questions:

- How does Isaiah 11:1-11 challenge your understanding of what God has called you to do?
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “[The Manger] is the beginning of a complete reversal, a new ordering of all things... we must join in the action that is taking place and be drawn into this reversal of all things ourselves... We cannot remove ourselves from the action.” What part is the Spirit asking you to play in this global move? Where do you fit into the action the Christ Child has initiated?

MY HEAD AND HEART SPACE

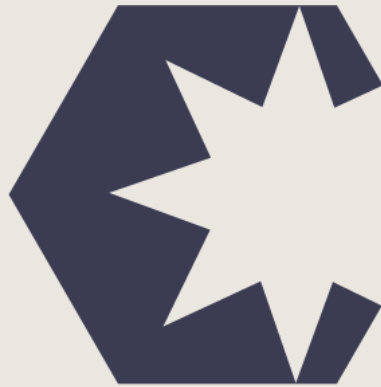
*use this space to journal your thoughts, emotions or anything that God is bringing
your attention to as you engage with this devotional material*

A grid of 20 rows and 20 columns of small dots, intended for journaling thoughts and emotions.



"THE ANGEL
SAID, "DON'T BE
AFRAID! LOOK!
I BRING GOOD
NEWS TO YOU
— *wonderful,
joyous* NEWS
FOR ALL
PEOPLE."

— LUKE 2:10 (CEB)



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