

Advent 2019

Part 1 - Generosity

Part 2 - Reconciliation

Part 3 - Relationship

Part 4 - Restoration





Thank you for choosing to spend this Advent season with us! This December, we are exploring the deeper meaning of Christmas that makes it so worth celebrating.

because our coming King entered the world on Christmas Day.

We pray that as you reflect on God's beautiful plan over the 24 days leading up to Christmas, your heart will be drawn into His presence, your soul will be refreshed, and you will be led to celebrate Christmas in a new way this year.

Through generosity, reconciliation, relationship and restoration, God's plan to bring us to Himself is possible. He will make all things right again — in us and the world — through His precious Son.

Peace on Earth and in our hearts is possible. Good will toward each other can happen because of who we celebrate at Christmas — because God moved forward His plan to invite us into relationship with Him.

Through generosity, reconciliation, relationship and restoration, God's plan to bring us to Himself is possible. He will make all things right again ...

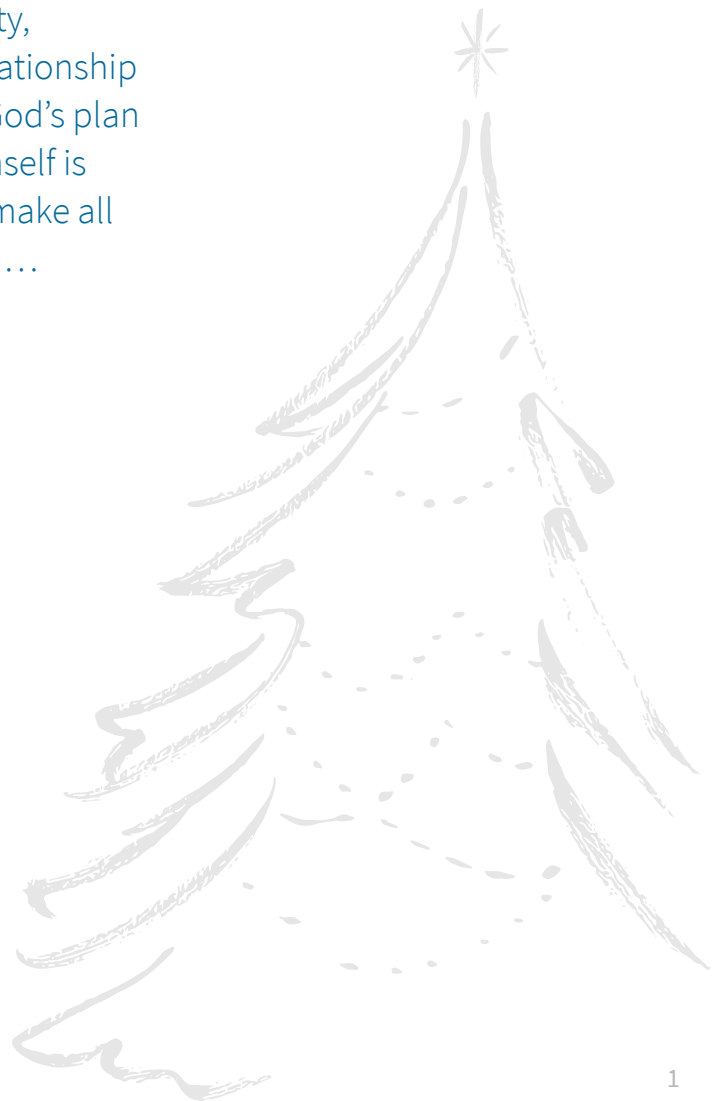
Through that relationship, you can live out your true purpose — what you were made for.

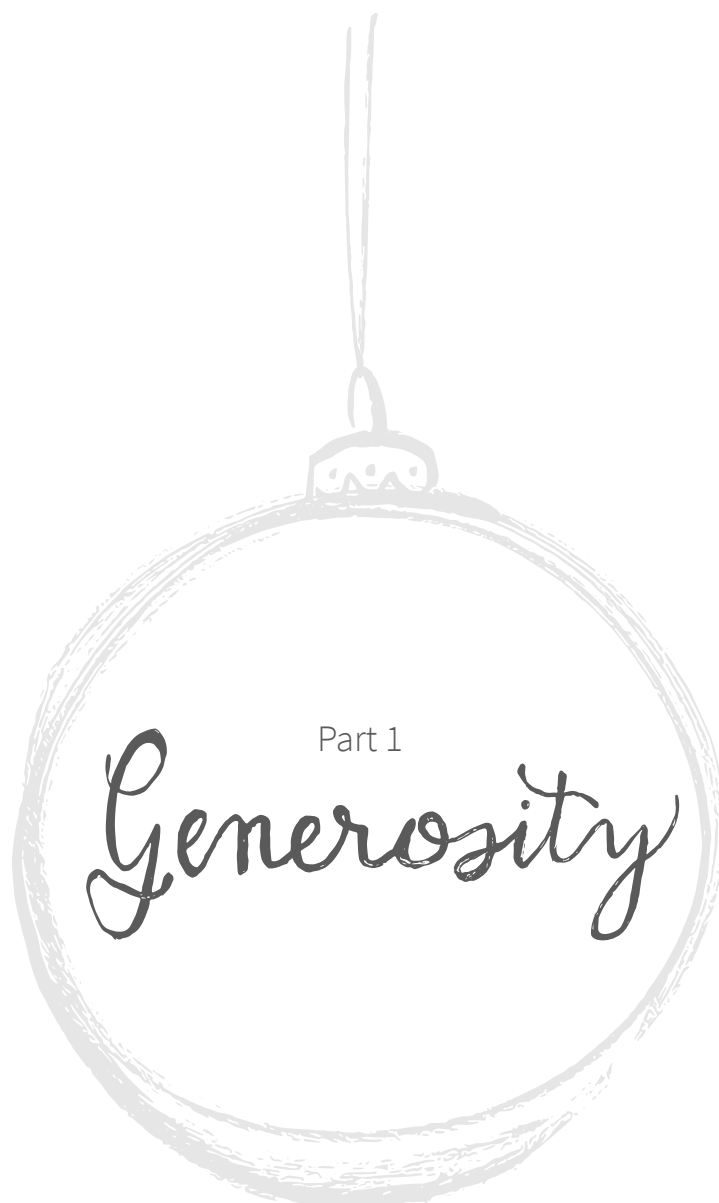
Through that relationship, an abundant life is possible, even amid sorrow and pain.

Through that relationship, you can experience reconciliation, forgiveness and redemption.

All the pain you've experienced can be redeemed and used to bring honor to God. You can comfort others with the comfort you've received from God

For tips for reading Scripture this Advent season, [check out our video on studying the Bible.](#)





Day: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

December 1st

God's Generous Love for Us

“For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through Him.” (John 3:16-17, New Living Translation)

The scent of pine floats through the house from the decorated Christmas tree secured in the corner of the living room. Four excited children, ages 3 to 9, gaze at the presents underneath. Christmas gifts in all shapes and sizes are covered with striped foil paper tied up with curly-cued ribbons; gift bags in red and green print and a few brown boxes are stacked nearby. Opening the gifts, they enthusiastically say to each other, “Thank you so much! This is just what I needed!” Loving generosity flows.

I replayed this old home video twice. I was surprised at the kids’ words, which adults rarely say; maybe we’re never getting just what we needed? Shopping for what people really need is a challenge that few excel at. Wouldn’t it be great to give a gift and find out it’s exactly what someone needs most?

Wouldn’t it be exciting to open a Christmas gift and realize it’s exactly what you need?

What needs do you have this Christmas? Relationships? Freedom from pain? Peace?

God knows exactly what you need even before you realize it. God has given you a gift. God shows His ultimate generosity by giving you His Son, Jesus Christ, to be your Savior. He is just what we needed.

God has given you a gift. God shows His ultimate generosity by giving you His Son, Jesus Christ, to be your Savior.



Pray and Reflect

Reflect on the generosity of God in how He has formed you and revealed His presence and purpose to you.

Each Sunday of this devotional, we'll give you a new passage of Scripture to reflect on throughout the week. This week, keep 1 John 4:14 in mind: "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Savior of the world" (New International Version).

Author Bio: Jan Stewart serves as a journalist with Cru. She has had an interest in creative writing ever since her high school newspaper column days. She hopes to inspire hearts toward Christ.



December 2nd

Generous in How He Formed Us

So God created human beings in His own image. In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. (Genesis 1:27, New Living Translation)

Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart. (Ecclesiastes 3:11, NLT)

Do you consider it a gift to be made in the image of God? For a long time, this was a truth that sat on the surface of my heart but was hard to understand.

God, in His kindness and generosity, created us as His image-bearers and gave us dreams, purpose, personality, skills and even our ethnic and cultural backgrounds to use in the advancement of His kingdom here on earth.

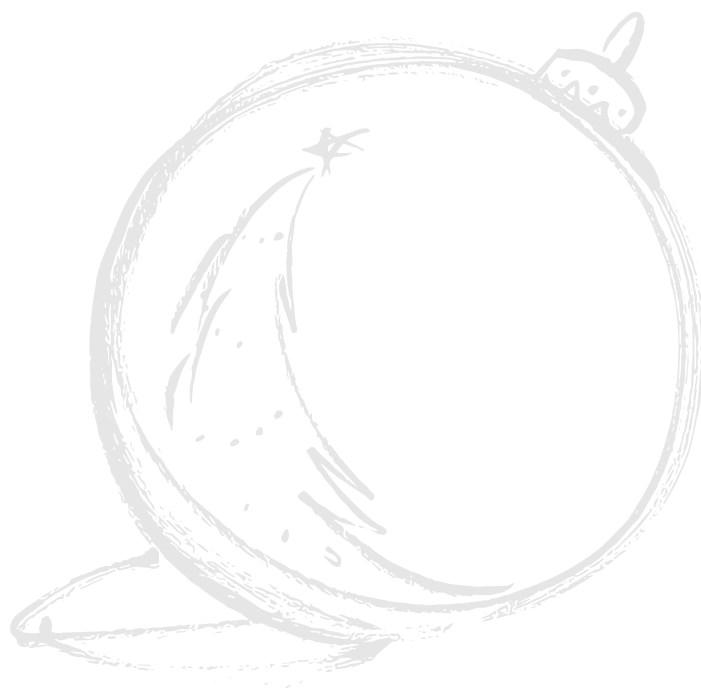
We are called to reflect God's image back to Him. In other words, we are called to look increasingly like Christ. Part of sharing God's image is the ability to reflect His character:

- Holiness
- Love
- Goodness
- Justice
- Mercy
- Faithfulness
- Patience
- Truthfulness
- Wisdom

Pray and Reflect

As you think of ways you can reflect Him, which of these characteristics seem hardest to live out? How could growing in these areas affect your relationship with God and others positively?

You are not able to practice reflecting the character of God on your own. You need the Holy Spirit's guidance to live out your calling to reflect His image. What are some ways you've been trying to live these things out on your own?



Take a moment and praise God for His character and for so graciously allowing us to partake in His nature (2 Peter 1:3-4).

Spend time thanking God for His generosity in creating you uniquely: your dreams, purpose, personality, skills and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Pray the Holy Spirit would make you sensitive to His presence and show you areas where you are not reflecting these characteristics.

“Because of His glory and excellence, He has given us great and precious promises.”

2 Peter 1:4, NLT

Author Bio: Aftyn Williams is a Michigan State University graduate serving with Cru as an intern in Orlando, Florida. She’s passionate about connecting people with real, relevant content that challenges the way we think about how God’s Word relates to the world around us.



December 3rd

Generous in Proximity Part 1 — Like Sardines

“From one man He created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and He determined their boundaries. His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward Him and find Him — though He is not far from any one of us.”
(Acts 17:26-27, New Living Translation)

Games like Marco Polo, ghost-in-the-graveyard, sardines and hide-and-seek shaped my childhood. Growing up in the late '80s without cable or internet, we played a lot of interactive games with the 23 kids who lived on our cul-de-sac.

While I was always willing to play any game the group suggested, my favorite was sardines.

Sardines is similar to hide-and-seek, but the difference is that just one person hides, and everyone has to look for them. Once you find the person hiding, you quietly join them and wait for everyone else to find you. In the end, everyone ends up looking like a bunch of sardines trying to fit into one hiding spot centered

around one person. I love how this simple childhood game can paint a picture of God's heart for us to seek Him and dwell with Him.

God created every person for a purpose: Himself. In fact, He created every culture to reflect Him and give Him glory! He knows the parts of our cultures that mirror His image beautifully, and He knows the parts that have been tainted by sin, causing us to seek value and love from creation rather than the Creator.

We often get blinded by our own brokenness, pain and disappointment, keeping us from seeing Him.

The truth is, “He is not far from any one of us.” He is not far from you.

His purpose is for you to seek after Him, feel your way toward Him and find Him. God's

invitation to you is simple: seek and you will find Him when you seek Him with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

“We need never shout across the spaces to an absent God. He is nearer than our own soul, closer than our most secret thoughts.” — A.W. Tozer

Pray and Reflect

Where has life prevented you from seeing God’s heart for you to seek Him and sit with Him?

What steps can you take today to seek the Lord and find Him?

Author Bio: Mary Louise has been on staff with Cru since 2011. She has served in ministry in West Africa, South Asia, Central America and most recently metro Detroit. She’s passionate about equipping leaders in evangelism, discipleship and movement building.



December 4th

Generous in Proximity Part 2 — Taking Off Your Training Wheels

After the death of Moses the LORD's servant, the LORD spoke to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' assistant. He said, "Moses My servant is dead. Therefore, the time has come for you to lead these people, the Israelites, across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. I promise you what I promised Moses: 'Wherever you set foot, you will be on land I have given you — from the Negev wilderness in the south to the Lebanon mountains in the north, from the Euphrates River in the east to the Mediterranean Sea in the west, including all the land of the Hittites.' No one will be able to stand against you as long as you live. For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you.

"Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. Study this

Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. This is My command — be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." (Joshua 1:1-9, New Living Translation)

"Don't be afraid," I assured my son as he wobbled down the sidewalk. "I'm right here and won't let you go."

I had just taken the training wheels off his bicycle. He was shaky and scared of what might happen. But with me clutching his seat and encouraging him, his confidence grew.

As long as I held on to my son's bike and he trusted me by listening to my instructions, he stayed steady and rode smoothly. But the moment he tried to take over and work against me, he lost his balance and crashed.

In these verses, the training wheels had just come off for Joshua and the people of Israel. Moses, their leader for more than 40 years after leaving Egypt, had just died, and God named Joshua their new leader. The burden of responsibility likely weighed heavily on him. How could he do this without Moses?

To reassure Joshua, God promised to be with him just like he was with Moses. Joshua only needed to “be strong and courageous” and trust God by being “careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave.”

This is true in your relationship with God too. Just like He promised His presence to Joshua, Hebrews 13:5 says to you, “I will never fail you. I will never abandon you” (New Living Translation). You are not alone, and you can have confidence that He will fulfill His promises to keep you and watch over you, even when life and its circumstances are overwhelming. He only asks that you trust Him.

Pray and Reflect

Take a moment to consider all the ways God has been present with you. Commit yourself to trust Him and His promises.

Author Bio: Ben McGuire serves as an International Sending Coordinator and a Theological Development Coordinator with Cru. He lives outside of Raleigh, North Carolina, with his wife Jill and their three children, Reece, Wyatt and Claire. You can follow his blog at [A Legacy in Words](#).



December 5th

Generous in Proximity Part 3 — Who Is Your Plus One?

“The LORD Himself will give you the sign. Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel (which means ‘God is with us’).” (Isaiah 7:14, New Living Translation)

“If you love Me, obey My commandments. And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it isn’t looking for Him and doesn’t recognize Him. But you know Him, because He lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans — I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see Me, but you will see Me. Since I live, you also will live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you. Those who accept My commandments and obey them are the ones who love Me. And because they love Me, My Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal Myself to each of them.” (John 14:15-21, New Living Translation)

The enemy of God,
Satan, wants us to
think we are alone.
Jesus, Immanuel,
came to be with us.

way up my body, the anxiety gripped my stomach, quickened my heartbeat and tightened my chest with every breath I took.

“No one here is like me. I don’t belong. I am alone.”

With.

It is what we all long for. It is the longing built deeply into our souls by the Master Architect. We spend most of our lives trying to find easy fillers to satisfy us. These temporary substitutes don’t do the trick, the fears always creep back in.

In this season when we are supposed to be celebrating the God who came to us, to be with us, why do we struggle with the deep heartache of being alone?

A quick scan confirmed the fears I had been fighting since I put this event in my holiday calendar. Like a boa constrictor making its

The enemy of God, Satan, wants us to think we are alone. Jesus, Immanuel, came to be with us.
The enemy looks for every opportunity to condemn. Jesus represents us as our Advocate.
The enemy brings death. Jesus brings life.

Faith is living in the light of truth when it doesn't feel true. When you don't have a friend at your side walking into the next event, rather than looking for evidence to prove the lies that you are alone, take a deep breath. Center your heart on Immanuel who didn't just come to you — He came to be *with* you, to advocate for you. This is the reason we celebrate this season and every season.

Pray and Reflect:

How do you see God working to be with you in your current season of life?

Author Bio: From basketball games in Lubbock, Texas, with her guns up to walking the streets of St. Petersburg, Russia, in the snow, Cheryl Boyd has been around the world with the message of Jesus. Born and raised in Dallas, she has returned to live near her family while serving with Cru. Cheryl focuses on the digital strategies that will bring the love of Jesus to the remaining ends of the earth.



December 6th

Generous in Purpose

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on Me, because the Lord has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion — to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. (Isaiah 61:1-4, New International Version)

It has been said, with good reason, that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. While Jesus' life, ministry and death on the cross serve to reconcile us to God, the reconciliation shouldn't stop there.

Various passages point to harmony between people of different races (Ephesians 2:11-22), persuasions (1 Corinthians 8) and cultures (Revelation 7:9-10). This

reunion includes people of different socioeconomic statuses as well (James 2:1-7).

There's something about the Christmas season that reminds people what it means to share what God has blessed them with, which is why this time of year is full of campaigns to send shoeboxes of gifts overseas and toy drives at every Saturday festivity. But what would it mean to truly be reconciled to your neighbor, to proclaim the good news of Jesus' love and forgiveness to the poor and freedom for the captives?

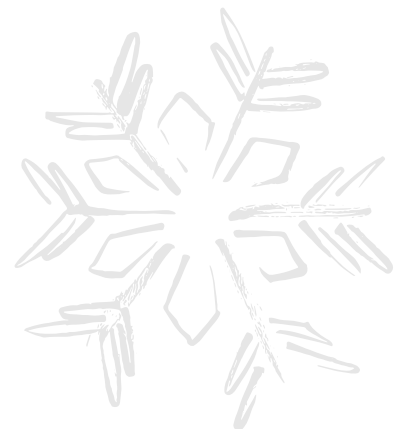


Pray and Reflect

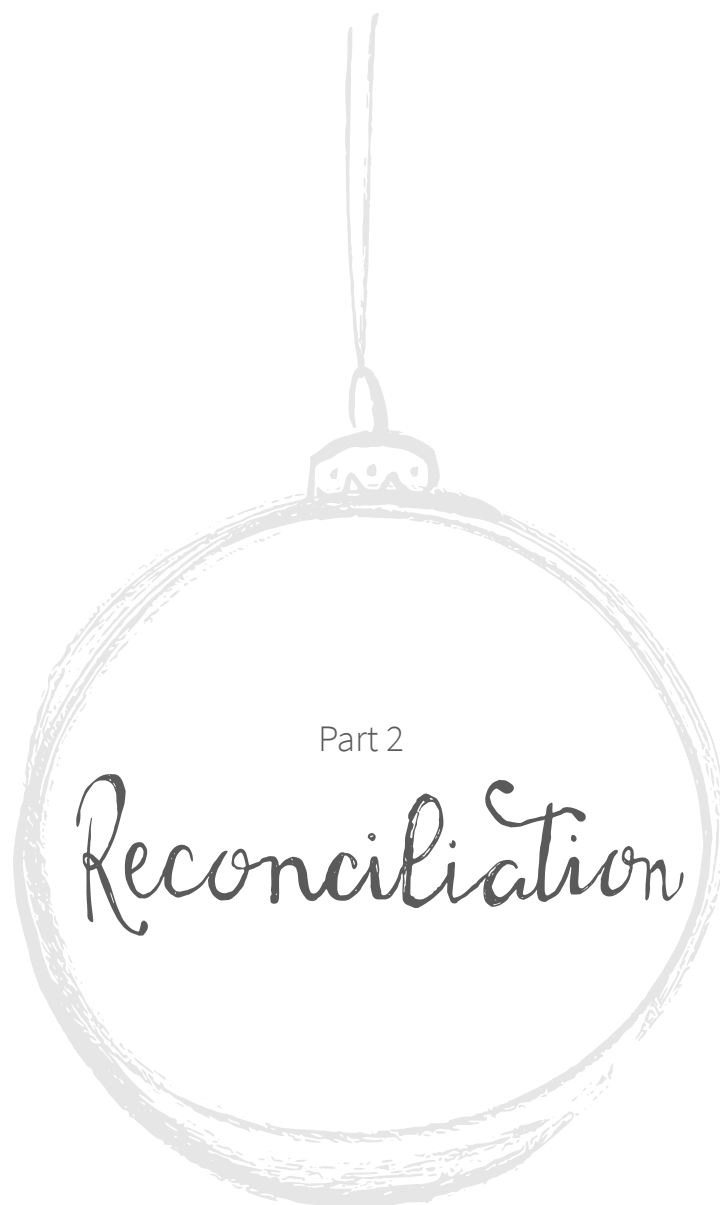
The next time someone in the street asks you for money, what would it look like to take it a step further? Asking their name? Spending time with them picking out items from a convenience store shelf? Listening to their story. Sharing your own? Giving generously? Remember the line from the Christmas classic, “O, Holy Night”: “Chains will He break, for the slave, he is your brother.”

Pray for opportunities to partner with Him in breaking chains this holiday season.

Author Bio: Elliott Dodge is a writer for Cru Storylines and Cru’s other digital publications. He loves traveling, reading, and playing video and board games. He loves these things all the more when he can do them with his wife and baby daughter.



Preparing Your Heart for Christmas



Day: 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

December 8th

From Generosity to Reconciliation

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation:

that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He

has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21, New International Version)

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation."

2 Corinthians 5:18, NIV

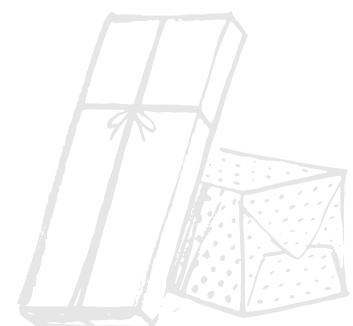
What is this "all" the verse refers to? Verse 17 says if you are in Christ, you are a new creation, and this is made possible through Jesus, who reconciled us to God (v. 18).

So the gifts you receive through Jesus are:

- Being made new. The Message Bible paraphrases this as "getting a fresh start." I know I badly need a fresh start and for Him to rid me of my sin.
- That you are reconciled to God. The Message Bible explains this by saying, "God put the wrong on Him [Jesus] who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Your relationship with God that was broken by sin is made right through Jesus.

Wow! God's generosity flowed through Jesus so we can be reconciled to God. We can be new people, no longer overwhelmed by our sin.

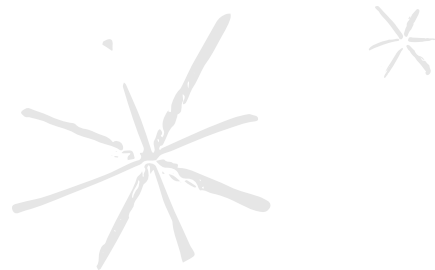
In this Christmas season with the heightened focus on generosity, a phrase from 2 Corinthians 5:18 catches my attention: "All this is from God."



Pray and Reflect

This week, reflect on 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 and think about God's generosity that led you to be reconciled to Him. Thank Him for His generosity and think about ways you can tell others about these great gifts.

Author Bio: Marie Dell hails from South Africa and is currently exploring the Sunshine State, Florida, while she and her husband serve as global representatives at Cru's headquarters. She is passionate about Jesus, cats, travel, knitting and her two teenage children.



December 9th

Reconciled to God Part 1 — Restoring Your Focus

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. (Romans 5:1-2, New Living Translation)

The definition of reconciliation is "to restore friendly relations between." When Christ reconciled us to God, He gave us the privilege and opportunity to be friends with God.

How amazing is that?

Because of what Jesus did for you while you were still broken and rebelling against Him, you can now have peace with God and be reconciled to Him. Nobody deserves that, but He moves toward people in love.

Romans 5:11 says, "So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God because our Lord Jesus Christ has made us friends of God" (NLT).

You can have peace with God because of Jesus. More than that, He gave you the opportunity to be a friend of God. What an intimate and personal description.

Jesus laid down His own life to pay the price for your rebellion so you might have full reconciliation to God. You can have a peace-filled, loving selfless, relationship with God. You can be God's friend.

I love what verse 2 says: "We confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory." One day, we will be made whole, fully at peace with Him in His presence. What a hopeful reminder as you prepare your heart for Christmas.

Jesus not only created peace between you and God with the offering of friendship, He also gives you the privilege to share His glory in confidence and joy. "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11, New International Version).

Because of the love Jesus showed us when we were broken and out of line, when we allow His love to overflow to others, God's glory is shown. We can step toward people in love even when they've done nothing to deserve it.

If you have placed your trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you are fully reconciled to God. His love for you is powerful. His love is transformational. As you experience more closeness and connection with Him through the benefits of what Christ has done for you, His love will transform your heart.

Pray and Reflect

Thank Jesus for His selfless love and how He stepped toward you when you were still broken and sinful. Ask Him to bring this truth to mind every day during this Advent season. Ask Him to show you if there is anyone in your life to step toward in love.

Author Bio: Alisa Sanborn serves as a social media strategist with Cru in Orlando, Florida. She loves anything sports-related and is passionate about traveling and learning about other cultures. She hopes to bring the good news of Christ's love and forgiveness to people across the world through digital strategies.



December 10th

Reconciled to God Part 2 — Anticipation

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation — if you continue in your faith,

established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (Colossians 1:15-23, New International Version)

If you have placed your trust in Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, then grace, truth, faith and salvation are foundational concepts shaping your life. But underlying these ideas is something very physical: the flesh and bones of an actual man.

Picture the three magi or the shepherds we know from the Christmas story. Imagine them being told that after a specified date, they would be living according to a new and better set of religious doctrines.

Now imagine their facial expressions when they discovered that God was about to be born into the world as a baby boy.

The spiritual truth of the gospel would have no substance without the physical reality on which it is founded.

Advent is a season of anticipation. It is the time of year when we think about awaiting the most unprecedented event in human history: the creator of all things joining humankind in real time. But it's not just what happened that should blow our minds, it's also why it happened.

Pray and Reflect

Spend a few minutes today thinking about the flaws in your character that God no longer sees because of what Jesus did for you. Write them down on a piece of paper, then tear it up and throw it away.

“But now He has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Colossians 1:22, NIV).

Ask God to refresh your experience of Christmas, the season centered around the day that started the peace process between you and God.

The moment you place your faith and trust in Christ’s death on the cross as a payment for your sins, you are reconciled to the only person who knows you completely and yet loves you without any conditions. His birth is an integral part of that moment. The spiritual truth of the gospel would have no substance without the physical reality on which it is founded.

Author Bio: Ross McCall lives in the United Kingdom, where he works as a writer, editor and content strategist. He served as a staff member with Cru for 14 years. His passion is writing about God in ways accessible to those who don’t know Him. Contact Ross at Ross.McCall@cru.org.

So how can you cultivate a sense of wonder about the arrival of Jesus, the boy who would reconcile you to God? How can you experience genuine anticipation this Advent?



December 11th

Reconciled to Each Other Part 1 — Choosing Forgiveness

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. (Colossians 3:13, New International Version)

Christmastime can bring up different emotions for me. I remember Christmases as a child fondly. It all seemed magical, and I still feel joy and happiness when I think of those times. As an adult, I now recognize the hurts and grievances between family members that create tension during the holidays. What I didn't see as a child I understand now: Sometimes Christmas can feel strained.

Another translation of Colossians 3:13 says, "Make allowance for each other's faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (Colossians 3:13, New Living Translation).

Jesus is the only one who modeled perfectly how to forgive completely and tolerate the weaknesses of others. He loved without measure and gave the gift of forgiveness in the ultimate sacrifice, dying on the cross so you and I could be in relationship with Him.

This Christmas, what would it look like for you to treat others the same way Jesus did: quick to forgive, quick to bear with, quick to show compassion, quick to believe the best?

I want to be a person who lives this way. This Christmas, I want to emulate Jesus to my family.

Pray and Reflect

Thank God for sending His Son so you can be reconciled to Him.

Have you been hurt by someone? Pray Jesus would give you eyes to see them as He does, as His beloved child. Ask God to give you the gift of forgiveness for this person.

Author Bio: Chelsea Kight lives in the Pacific Northwest. She loves being outside, reading and asking good questions. She serves with Cru in the Spokane area and is passionate about helping young women grow in their faith.

December 12th

Reconciled to Each Other Part 2 — Offering Peace

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:14, New International Version)

Many Christmas cards and decorations have the word “Peace” on them. Peace is a nice concept, but it’s not very popular right now. It’s much easier to spew hostility and insults; those things often feel more satisfying in the moment.

God calls you to live differently than the people around you do. To be “holy” means to be set apart. Leviticus 20:26 says, “You are to be holy to Me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be My own” (New International Version).

Making “every effort to live in peace with everyone” is truly countercultural and will set you apart from the people around you. It may not be popular to seek to be reconciled to those with whom you disagree on social or political issues, but God doesn’t call you to be popular; He calls you to be holy.

Only God is perfectly holy, so as you strive to be holy, you must strive to be more like God. An important part of being like God is being reconciled to others, because your whole relationship with God is based on Him reconciling you to Himself.

Pray and Reflect

Think about the people in your life. Are you at peace with everyone, or is there someone you are treating with hostility or contempt? Are you involved in any personal conflicts?

What is one step you can take this week to bring peace to one of your relationships and reflect God’s desire to reconcile Himself with people?

Author Bio: Faith Eng is a freelance writer who lives in Rochester, New York. She and her husband are foster and adoptive parents. Prior to becoming a freelance writer, she was a missionary with Cru for nine years.

December 13th

Forgiven to Forgive

Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (Ephesians 4:32, New International Version)

“So watch yourselves. If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.” (Luke 17:3, NIV)

Have you ever had a relationship with someone that felt impossible? Maybe you’ve thought, “They don’t want a relationship with me” or “I don’t want a friendship with them because they hurt me.” That’s definitely happened to me.

In Ephesians 4, Paul uses a word picture: Every follower of Christ, joined together, makes up the “body of Christ.” Paul urges us to stay in unity with each other.

We can’t stay in unity if we are unforgiving. I struggle with that, and there are times when I don’t want to forgive. But God sent Jesus to forgive us. Jesus died on the cross so we can have a new life. If God can forgive us for our constant failures, how can we not forgive others?

When you forgive someone, there’s a feeling of relief and freedom. We can feel weighed down and trapped when we’re not forgiving.

Now you’re probably thinking, “How am I supposed to just forgive someone who hurt me?” Well, you can’t do it alone. You need the Holy Spirit’s power and strength to help you — all you have to do is ask for help and guidance. There will be days that are harder than others. But as you continue to trust and depend on the Spirit moment by moment, you can know that He is working in you.

Pray and Reflect

Take time today to thank God for forgiving you.

Is there someone in your life who has hurt you whom you haven’t forgiven? Try talking to them about it, and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance.

Author Bio: Summer Darland serves as a social media strategist with Cru in Orlando, Florida. She loves to share her story in the hope that it will help others. Creating beautiful things and being around dogs are some of her favorite hobbies.

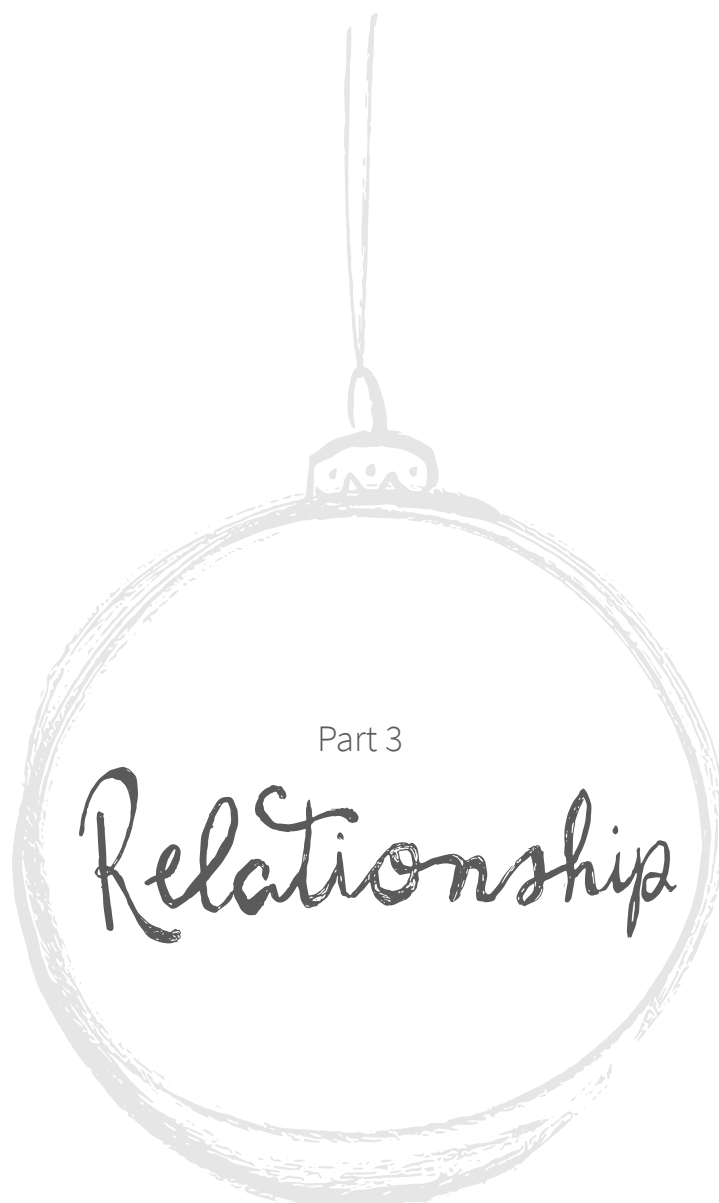
December 14th

Preparing Your Heart for Christmas

Take time today to be alone. Look back at this week; pray and process what God has shown you.

Write down two or three answers to these questions in a journal:

- What images do the words “reconcile,” “reconciliation” and “forgiveness” bring to mind? Are they good or bad images?
- Think about a time at Christmas when you experienced reconciliation in one of your relationships. Is there someone you need to be reconciled to this holiday season?
- Though none of the verses this week are taken directly from the Christmas story, how do you see them foreshadowing Jesus’ birth or the need for a coming King and Savior?
- Is there any area in your life in which you need to confess sin and turn back to God?



Day: 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

December 15th

Reconciled for Relationship

But to all who believed Him and accepted Him, He gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn — not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. (John 1:12-13, New Living Translation)

But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. Because you are His sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, “Abba, Father.” So you are no longer a slave, but God’s child; and since you are His child, God has made you also an heir. (Galatians 4:4-7, New International Version)

We’ve been reconciled for relationship — for “the right to become children of God.”

Before Jesus came, you were a slave — a slave to sin and a slave to the law. The law was a temporary system, which held back the wrath of God for our sins — but it did not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4).

You may still find yourself working to follow certain “rules” of the Christian life — simply trying to avoid God’s anger instead of enjoying a relationship with Him.

You may try to do enough good things for God to try and cover the “rule-breaking” you’ve done (what the Bible calls sin).

You may cower in fear, scared that God will strike you down at any moment. You may even plan to sin and ask for forgiveness after it’s carried out. But you see, this kind of system of hoping our good is greater than our bad can’t remove the problem of sin or allow a healthy relationship with God.

Enter Jesus.

When Jesus died on the cross, He condemned sin and removed the separation between you and God, so sin no longer has to separate you from God. He invites you to be a part of His family, to become His child.

Instead of vain attempts to earn God’s love and avoid His anger, you can now have a true and close

relationship with Jesus in which you experience His love and holiness firsthand.

Because of God's great love, you can trust Him and desire to obey Him. Because of His love, you are transformed into His image — becoming His child. You are not a mere creation of God, but a reflection of His character: one who looks like Him in spirit, mind and deed.

A true child indeed.

Pray and Reflect

This week, reflect on John 8:34-36: "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed'" (NIV).

Author Bio: Kylah Kerry serves as a web content specialist with Cru. She grew up in Elkhart, Indiana, and studied Creative Writing at Florida State University. Through her writing, she hopes to bring recognition to the love, power and truth of Jesus Christ.



December 16th

The Shepherd and Sheep

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away. Then the wolf attacks the flock and scatters it. The man runs away because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep.

“I am the good shepherd; I know My sheep and My sheep know Me — just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father — and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to My voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. The reason My Father loves Me is that I lay down My life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of My own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from My Father.”
(John 10:11-18, New International Version)

If you do an image search for “sheep” you’ll see endless pages of cute and cuddly animals. When you see them in nativity scenes, if you’re anything like me, you think they add a certain snuggly charm.

But anyone who has been around domesticated livestock will tell you the reality is far more messy, noisy and fragrant than pictures and figurines communicate. Even the shepherds at the scene of Jesus’ birth would have carried a certain pungency as they came to worship the King.

As you think about the birth of Christ, it is striking that “in the fullness of time” God chose to announce His Messiah — the One chosen to save His people — to shepherds first. I’m sure Mary would have preferred some cleaner guests to greet her newborn child.

Yet God chose precisely such an entrance into this world. It wasn’t without reason.

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.”

John 10:11, NIV

The New Testament repeatedly refers to Jesus as a shepherd and to us as sheep. “When He saw the crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matthew 9:36, NIV).

Jesus Himself went even further with the imagery, saying, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep” (John 10:11, NIV).

In Christ we see a reversal: the shepherd taking the place of his sheep; Christ dying for our sins. The sheep and shepherd in our nativity scenes point forward from Christmas to Good Friday, when the Good Shepherd chose to become a sacrificial lamb on our behalf.

Jesus was clean, pure and holy. We are smelly, straying, and foul sheep. Yet because of His great love for us, He laid down His life, taking on the reeking mess of our sin.

You will probably see a nativity scene this Christmas. The manger will likely catch your eye, but don’t overlook the sheep, the shepherds, and the glimpse they give of what will come.

Author Bio: Aaron Robertson works with Cru Inner City in Minneapolis, MN. He is husband to Erica and father to Miriam, Aubrey, Christian and Benji. He is also a brother, son, Christ-follower, neighbor, gardener, now-getting-pudgy-former-athlete and baked-goods-enthusiast. Those last two might be related.



December 17th

The Father and Child

But to all who believed Him and accepted Him,
He gave the right to become children of God.
(John 1:12, New Living Translation)

“I will be a Father to you, and you will be My
sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.”
(2 Corinthians 6:18, New International Version)

When God sent His Son into the world as a baby, He
wasn’t just sending the perfect envoy. It began the
adoption process to bring us into His family. And He
was giving us Himself in the fullest way He could.

“See what great
love the Father has
lavished on us, that
we should be called
children of God!”

1 John 3:1, NIV

called children of God! And that is what we are!”
(1 John 3:1, New International Version).

When Jesus was born into a humble, human family
that first Christmas, God bestowed a gift on all of us.
He gave us the opportunity to experience a father-
child relationship unlike any other.

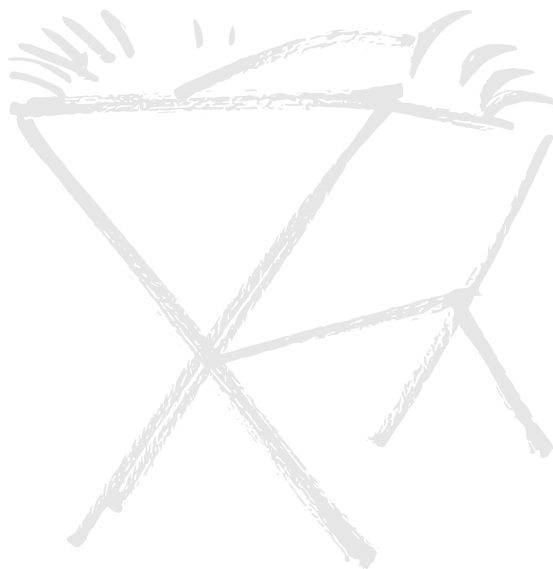
As the ultimate Father,
God only gives gifts one
way — extravagantly.

“See what great love the
Father has lavished on
us, that we should be

Many of us have mixed experiences of having or
becoming fathers. It’s not an easy task at the best of
times. But when God gives us His Fatherly love and
we accept it, we experience what childhood is really
meant to be.

Childhood, as God intends it, is about being secure
in who you are and who you belong to. You are
always aware of the family you’re a part of.

Jesus was born into a perilous environment, and
the life that lay ahead of Him was full of dangers. Yet
His birth offers us a picture of a moment of peace
and security.



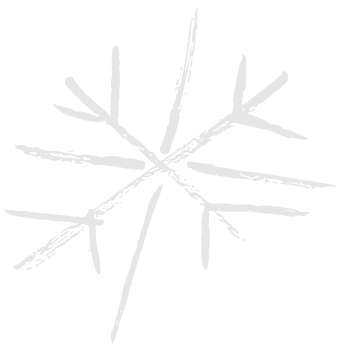
Pray and Reflect

How secure do you feel in the love of your Heavenly Father? Are you able to confidently think of yourself as God's child?

Take time today to think about your experience of father-child relationships and how that influences the way you relate to God.

Ask God to remove any thoughts that hinder you from experiencing the way He lavishes His love on you.

Author Bio: Ross McCall lives in the United Kingdom, where he works as a writer, editor and content strategist. He served as a staff member with Cru for 14 years. His passion is writing about God in ways accessible to those who don't know Him. Contact Ross at Ross.McCall@cru.org.



December 18th

The Mother and Child

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones God’s messengers! How often I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings, but you wouldn’t let Me.” (Luke 13:34, New Living Translation)

I remember the little voices from the backseat calling, “MOM! Stop the car!”

The urgency in their words struck panic in me, “What! What’s wrong?”

“Look! Don’t you see it? We’ve got to save it!”

And then I saw it too. A small, dark green-blackish blob in the middle of the road. A turtle that had lost its way, it’s very life hanging in the balance on that busy suburban road.

We pulled over and scooped it up — but cautiously because, you know, disease and all. The turtle extended its neck, snapping in resistance at the little fingers that were trying to save it.

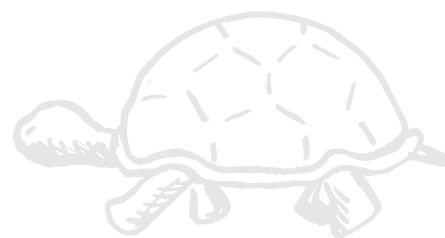
I love the heart of a child to be pricked with compassion for such a small — and some might say insignificant — creature.

Oh, for such a nurturing heart to see even the least of these, to enter a hostile environment and to pluck the undeserving to safety.

The gift of Christmas is the Father sending His Son into a hostile world to bring us safely into His hands.

Such is the heart of Jesus. When Jesus cries out for Jerusalem, He’s crying out for you and me. He chose that city as His dwelling place

(2 Chronicles 6:6), and the New Testament declares our hearts to be the new dwelling place of God (John 14:23). The gift of Christmas is the Father sending His Son into a hostile world to bring us safely into His hands.



Pray and Reflect

Thank Jesus that He wants to gather and protect you. Pray that God will lift your eyes to those for whom you can do the same.

Could you take a step of faith today and invite those in your life into a discipleship relationship?

Learn how you can do this today.

Author Bio: Carrie Runn lives in Austin, Texas — the official city of the best breakfast tacos and barbecue. She loves making theology practical and God's Word accessible.



December 19th

Friends

“This is My commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn’t confide in his slaves. Now you are My friends, since I have told you everything the Father told Me. You didn’t choose Me. I chose you. I appointed you to go and produce lasting fruit, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask for, using My name. This is My command: Love each other.” (John 15:12-17, New Living Translation)

“Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

John 15:12-13, NLT

I don’t usually think about Jesus as a friend, let alone as my friend.

The truth is, He is the best friend anyone could ever have. He showed His love for you by taking your sin, guilt, and shame and giving you an eternal relationship with Him instead. What a magnificent trade!

Pray and Reflect

This Advent season, what would it look like to grow in your friendship with Jesus? Challenge

yourself to intentionally spend time with Him every day, to tell Him your worries, your fears, the best parts of your day, your hopes, your dreams. If Jesus became the best friend you have always needed, how different would your life look? How would you treat others?

If Jesus became the best friend you have always needed, how different would your life look?

Spend time processing these questions with someone you trust or with the Lord. Thank Him and praise Him for being the ultimate best friend.

“Love each other in the same way I have loved you.” What beautiful, meaningful words. Jesus spoke these words to His best friends 2,000 years ago, and He speaks them to you too.

Do you ever think about Jesus being a friend? A buddy? Someone to laugh and joke with? Someone to play a pickup game of softball with? The person you want to have a Netflix marathon with? Honestly,

Brainstorm how you've grown in friendships with people in the past, and pick one or two things you want to utilize to grow in your friendship with Jesus this month.

Author Bio: Chelsea Kight lives in the Pacific Northwest. She loves being outside, reading and asking good questions. She serves with Cru in the Spokane area and is passionate about helping young women grow in their faith.



December 20th

Siblings

God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that He should make Jesus, through His suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation.

Personally, I think about being a child of God — having God as my Heavenly Father. I also think about Christians being my spiritual family. The aspect I don't often think about, but the Bible speaks of, is Jesus as my brother.

So now Jesus and the ones He makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters. ...

It was necessary for Him to be made in every respect like us, His brothers and sisters, so that He could be our merciful and faithful

High Priest before God. Then He could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people. Since He Himself has gone through suffering and testing, He is able to help us when we are being tested. (Hebrews 2:10-11, 17-18, New Living Translation)

When you think of the phrase “family of God,” what comes to mind?

“So now Jesus and the ones He makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters.”

Hebrews 2:11, NLT

Advent is a time to reflect on what it means for God to have sent His Son into the world. He did

this to make a way for people to become His children. When you accepted Jesus' sacrifice on your behalf, you became a child of God. He is now your Heavenly Father.

Hebrews 2:11 says, “So now Jesus and the ones He makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters” (NLT). Jesus welcomes you into His family and calls you His sibling.

Like a good big brother, Jesus protects you. He's there for you during difficult times. He's your role model. He supports you and helps you grow and mature. He loves you, and He sacrificed Himself for you.

Whether you have wonderful siblings, have been hurt by your siblings, or don't have any siblings at all, you can take comfort in knowing that you have the best big brother ever in Jesus.

Pray and Reflect

What does it mean to you to have Jesus as your brother?

Pray for your siblings. If you don't have siblings, pray for people who have had a similar role in your life.

Author Bio: Faith Eng is a freelance writer who lives in Rochester, New York. She and her husband are foster and adoptive parents. Prior to becoming a freelance writer, she was a missionary with Cru for nine years.



Preparing Your Heart for Christmas

- Is there any area of your life that you need to bring into the light with a trusted friend? Someone who can encourage you and point you to Jesus?



Day: 22 23 24 25

December 22nd

From Relationship to Restoration

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on and forevermore. (Isaiah 9:6-7, New American Standard Bible)

For years of my life, I was hiding from others. I was struggling with overeating and viewing pornography. I was obsessed with the approval of people and couldn't take criticism.

I lived in shame, believing that I not only did wrong things but was wrong at the core of my being. I hid who I was and hid my struggles for fear that others would confirm my beliefs about myself — that I was truly not enough and could not be loved.

Maybe your tendency has been to hide from others as well. Have you found yourself trying to get it all together so that one day you can finally be worthy of love and acceptance?

This is the nature of man-made religion: attempting to receive acceptance through performance. One of the greatest tragedies of this mindset is that you end up earning praise for a false self, not for who you really are.

But Jesus offers us another way. Jesus invites us to be reconciled not only with the King but also with His kingdom — a kingdom of relationship, acceptance and spiritual family, of peace and justice, of being fully known — flaws and all — and fully embraced by His people.

This kingdom is ruled by One who is good.

To the anxious, He is the Prince of Peace. To the fatherless, He is the Eternal Father. To the wounded, He is the Wonderful Counselor. What beauty, healing and freedom you can experience because of the King who came for you.

Jesus invites us to be reconciled not only with the King but also with His kingdom—a kingdom of relationship, acceptance and spiritual family ...

Pray and Reflect

Take time throughout this week to pray and reflect on Luke 1:68: “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has come to His people and redeemed them” (New International Version).

Author Bio: Ben Bennett works for Cru’s Josh McDowell Ministry as an author, a speaker and the director of Uprising, a new national initiative helping youth overcome wounds and struggles to live a thriving life.



December 23rd

A Year of Jubilee

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised Him.

He went to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue, as was His custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on Me, because He has anointed Me to proclaim good news to the poor.

“He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Then He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Him. He began by saying to them, “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:14-21, New International Version)

You may not read this passage and realize the significance of what Jesus is saying immediately. At first glance, it might seem like Jesus just read some stuff on a scroll and sat down.

“He has sent Me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

Luke 4:14-21, NIV

What’s the big deal?

To the people of this time this was BIG news. This was the very beginning of Jesus’ ministry, and He was already proclaiming that something called “the year of the Lord’s

favor” had arrived. But what did that mean to the people He read this to? And what does this mean for us?

There’s another fancy way of saying “year of the Lord’s favor”: the word “Jubilee.” Jubilee is a custom in Old Testament days in which, every 50 years, slaves would be set free, debts would be forgiven, property would be returned to its original owner, and all Israelites would rest from labor for an entire year.

Can you see the parallel between this old Hebrew tradition of Jubilee and what Jesus is claiming in this passage?

Jesus came to proclaim the year of the Lord, the year of Jubilee. He set us free from our enslavement to sin, forgiving our eternal debt and returning us — or reconciling us — to Himself. Because of this, we are able to rest in what Jesus did — for us and in our place — on the cross. We no longer labor to try and gain His favor! This is the good news of the gospel.

Pray and Reflect

Think about how Jesus fulfilled the text He read from Isaiah 61:1. Ask yourself how the gospel is good news for you today. What has Jesus freed you from?

Praise the Lord for delivering on His promises! Thank the Lord for the favor He's shown us by setting us free and reconciling us to Himself. Pray for a heart of gratitude as you approach Christmas, thanking the Lord for His faithfulness and goodness toward you.

Author Bio: Aftyn Williams is a Michigan State University graduate serving with Cru as an intern in Orlando, Florida. She's passionate about connecting people with real, relevant content that challenges the way we think about how God's Word relates to the world around us.



December 24th

God With Us

This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, to whom she was engaged, was a righteous man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly.

As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. “Joseph, son of David,” the angel said,

“Do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name Him Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.” All of this occurred to fulfill the Lord’s message through His prophet:

“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

“Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel, which means ‘God is with us.’”

Matthew 1:23, NLT

When Joseph woke up, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded and took Mary as his wife. But he did not have sexual relations with her until her son was born. And Joseph named Him Jesus. (Matthew 1:18-25, New Living Translation)

All of history had been building to the climax of this holy night.

Even before the perfect fellowship in the garden Eden was poisoned by the sinful choices of Adam and Eve, God the Father had a plan to bring us

back to Himself. His Son, Jesus, would be born and would give His life for the sinful choices of those in the garden and for you and me. And at the perfect time, He sent Jesus — Immanuel, God with us.

You’ve already read the phrase “God with us” during this advent season, but what does it really mean? This simple, three-word sentence says more than you may realize.

God. The almighty, infinite God chose to act outside of the intricate laws of the universe He had set in motion. By His power, a virgin conceived. Centuries of prophecies were miraculously fulfilled. God Himself was born in a stable.

With. Through faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins, the fellowship of Eden — the fellowship between God and humans — is restored. God tells us, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will be with you in trouble, in fire, in flood. No one can snatch you out of My hand. Nothing can separate you from My love.”

Us. While we were sinners — foolish, deceived, unfaithful — He came to make us His own. He did not hold our sins against us but washed them away with His blood through His death on the cross. Now we call out the good news: “Jesus came to save you. God loves you!”

Reflect and Pray

Pray this today: “Lord, thank You for changing my life with Your love. Thank You that, because of my faith in Jesus, I will live with You forever. This holiday season, reveal who I can share this good news with. I will go _____ (day) at _____ (time). I love You.”

Reflect on 2 Timothy 1:9: “He has saved us and called us to a holy life — not because of anything we have done but because of His own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time” (New International Version).

Author Bio: Judy Neibling is a writer and editor in Orlando, Florida. Wife to Ed and mother of three adult children, she loves books, nature and music. She enjoys making up Scripture songs to help memorize God’s Word.

God With Us. O holy night!



December 25th

CELEBRATE!

Then his father, Zechariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit and gave this prophecy:

“Praise the Lord,
the God of Israel,
because He has
visited and redeemed
His people.”

Luke 1:68, NLT

“Praise the Lord,
the God of Israel,
because He
has visited and
redeemed His
people. He has sent
us a mighty Savior

from the royal line of His servant David, just as He promised through His holy prophets long ago. Now we will be saved from our enemies and from all who hate us. He has been merciful to our ancestors by remembering His sacred covenant — the covenant He swore with an oath to our ancestor Abraham. We have been rescued from our enemies so we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.

“And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell His people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven

is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.”

John grew up and became strong in spirit. And he lived in the wilderness until he began his public ministry to Israel. (Luke 1:67-80, New Living Translation)

Merry Christmas!

Today is the day you’ve been waiting for all month long; the day that God entered human history and placed Himself at the center of the story; the day He put on flesh and allowed Himself to be born in a humble manger; the day His plan to bring people into a relationship with Him was realized.

And not just people in general, but you. You were on His heart and mind when He came to earth. You are His prized possession, because He loves you (1 Peter 2:9-10). He wanted to have a relationship with you.

Let that sink in for a moment.

In Luke 1:68-79, Zechariah made a prophecy about Jesus before He was born. You can feel the

anticipation Zechariah felt in this passage. He couldn't wait to meet this baby! He was so eager to experience restoration and renewal. He knew Jesus was going to change the world.

What an amazing God we serve! Let us celebrate Him today above all else.

Pray and Reflect

Before the busyness of today begins, find a quiet space to praise God for who He is. Thank Jesus for His immeasurable love, and meditate on the verses in this passage that mean the most to you.

Author Bio: Chelsea Kight lives in the Pacific Northwest and loves being outside, reading and asking good questions. She serves with Cru in the Spokane area and is passionate about helping young women grow in their faith.

