



# ADVENT

THE WORD GAVE LIFE TO EVERYTHING THAT  
WAS CREATED, AND HIS LIFE BROUGHT LIGHT  
TO EVERYONE. THE LIGHT SHINES IN THE  
DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS CAN NEVER  
EXTINGUISH IT.

JOHN 1:4-5, NLT

cru<sup>+</sup>



# WHAT DOES IT MEAN WHEN THE BIBLE DESCRIBES JESUS AS THE “LIGHT OF THE WORLD”?

## HOW WAS A BABY A PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION OF LIGHT, AND WHY IS THAT SIGNIFICANT TO US TODAY?

Light carries with it a sense of hope, safety and belonging. In a world tinted in darkness and pain, we need a savior whose light can break through even the most consuming shadows. We need a savior whose very existence breathes hope, safety and belonging into our lives. This is the light Jesus offers.

“The Word gave life to everything that was created, his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it ... The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world” (John 1:4-5,9; New Living Translation).

This Advent season, as we anticipate Christmas and remember the arrival of Jesus, come and see how the Light of the World changes everything.

Join us on a journey through the Gospel of John as we encounter who Jesus is, what He taught and what He accomplished during His life on earth. With this daily devotional, you'll read and reflect on key verses from each chapter in John, and you'll be invited to take one step closer to Jesus as we move toward Christmas Day.

**WHEREVER YOU NEED LIGHT MOST IN YOUR LIFE THIS ADVENT  
SEASON, WE PRAY THIS 23-DAY JOURNEY WILL REMIND YOU OF  
THE HOPE, SAFETY AND BELONGING FOUND IN JESUS - THE  
LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS. THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD HAS COME.**







# DAY 1

SUNDAY, DEC. 3

## KEY VERSES

“The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.”

— JOHN 1:4-5, NLT

“The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.”

— ISAIAH 9:2, NLT





## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 1:1-13

"I can't see a thing," said my husband, driving through a pitch black Italian countryside. We were on our honeymoon, and like any blissful newlyweds lost in conversation, we'd taken a wrong turn. The peaceful rolling hills, once illuminated by welcoming streetlights, were getting smaller in our rearview mirror. And before we knew it, our calm, leisurely outing turned into stress and silence.

If you've ever driven or walked down a road like this, you know this feeling all too well. The neverending darkness around you can feel overwhelming and intrusive, like it's pressing in on you. The only thing to do is blast your brights, and hope they shine enough to bring you home.

The experience of God's people has always been one of longing and looking for light to lead them where they should go.

At the beginning of time, God created light. Not only did he create light, he himself is light — that by which we see things. But, it wasn't long before Adam and Eve chose to sin and disobey God. And it changed everything. Instead of basking in the light, sin made them want to hide. The goodness of living in relationship with God was broken, and humans became intertwined with darkness, craving the way it helped them disappear.

### THANKFULLY, THAT WASN'T THE END OF THE STORY.

In the Old Testament, God regularly acts by means of his "Word." Simply put, what he says, happens. Seven hundred years before Jesus was born, God gave the prophet Isaiah the promise of a Messiah who would be a light for all nations, guiding them back to a restored relationship with him. As a "pillar of fire" (Exodus 13:21, English Standard Version) led the

Israelites through the desert at night, so a Savior was coming to lead the world out of death. The Savior would be the ultimate "light at the end of the tunnel."

Today, you benefit from not being left on a cliffhanger. John writes that the Word — Jesus — became human and made His home among us. Two thousand years ago, darkness was broken with a baby's cry in a lowly stable, and light filled every crack and crevice.

If you follow Jesus, you know that God has come, and will come again. But, you also still live in a world where evil is present. You experience suffering through disease and death, broken relationships, and seeing injustice or power abused.

But God is bringing forth a new creation, in which He says once more, as He did with creation, "Let there be light!"

During this Advent season, you are likely longing for some sort of flicker at the end of your tunnel. Whether it be a strained friendship or marriage, an unexpected job loss, or a season that feels riddled with responsibility and no rest in sight — life has no shortage of longing for better days.

But in the groans, John's words sum up the season of Advent and give hope to a yearning world: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:5, ESV).

We can be truly glad. The light has come. There is wonderful joy ahead.





## REFLECT:

WHAT LONGING CAN YOU INVITE JESUS INTO TODAY?

WHERE ARE YOU EXPERIENCING DARKNESS IN YOUR LIFE,  
YOUR RELATIONSHIPS, OR YOUR COMMUNITY?

WHERE DO YOU NEED JESUS' LIGHT TO BREAK THROUGH?

## PRAY:

*Jesus, you are the true light of the world. Help us see that the same light that came into the world 2,000 years ago, still shines in and through us today. When we despair, give us hope. And where there is darkness, lead us to light.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



FEELING LONELY, LOW OR EVEN DEPRESSED DURING THIS  
HOLIDAY SEASON?

Author and pastor Dane Ortland shares more about hope with FamilyLife's  
Real Life Loading... podcast host Shelby Abbott

---

Michelle LeMaster serves as a journalist for Cru®. As a born and bred lover of cities, Michelle currently resides in New York City with her husband, Seth, and their Goldendoodle, Ruby, who daily reminds her to (literally) stop and smell the roses.





THE LIGHT  
SHINES IN  
THE DARKNESS,  
AND THE  
DARKNESS  
HAS NOT  
OVERCOME IT.

JOHN 1:5, NIV

# DAY 2

MONDAY, DEC. 4

## KEY VERSES

“So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father’s one and only Son.”

— JOHN 1:14, NLT

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.”

— PHILIPPIANS 2:5-7, NIV







## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 1:14-51

Imagine this: You volunteer for a science experiment where you're zapped with a laser and transformed into a baby. One moment, you're an adult with independence and emotional intelligence. The next, you're completely helpless and dependent on another human for survival.

Humbling, right? No one in their right mind would voluntarily make such a switch. Even for one day, that transformation would place you in a terrible situation.

Though this scenario could never fully represent what it was like for Jesus to become human, it might help you imagine aspects of what it might have been like.

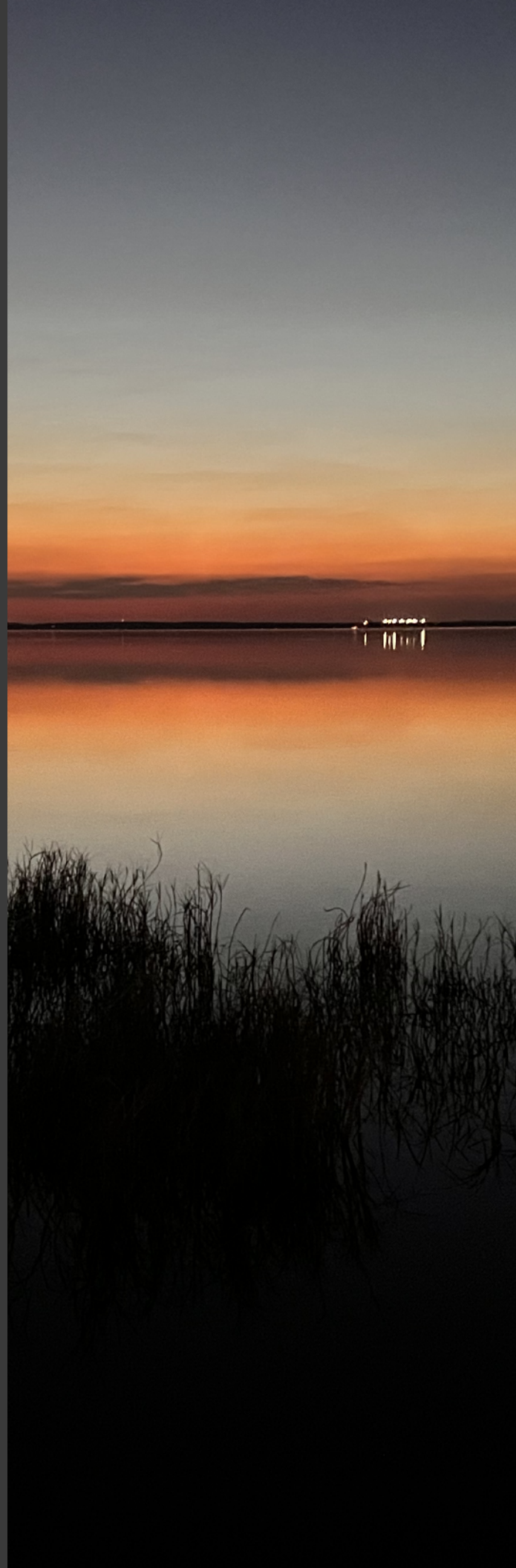
When he came to earth and became human, Jesus lowered Himself far below His position in heaven. He willingly limited the attributes of His deity when He took on human form. He laid down omnipresence (His presence everywhere) in return for a body with legs — legs that got sore, tired and dirty. You can imagine how a human body and experience also stifled His omnipotence (unlimited power) and omniscience (knowing everything). He momentarily gave up his home with God the Father in heaven to be laid in a manger for animals.

God became human. Not just any human, but the only sinless one to ever walk the face of the earth. And unlike any other human, Jesus' purpose in coming was completely sacrificial. He came to take on the penalty of sin for humanity by living perfectly and dying the death you and I deserve because of our sin.

Christians around the world commemorate Jesus' pinnacle sacrifice at Easter. We talk freely of how Jesus suffered and died to pay the price for our sins, and we revel in our share of victory in His resurrection. And this is fitting!

**BUT DO YOU EVER THINK  
ABOUT HOW MUCH JESUS MUST  
HAVE SACRIFICED WHEN HE  
“MADE HIMSELF NOTHING?”**

This Advent season, consider some of what it might have meant for Jesus to become Immanuel (God with us) in the flesh. Because He “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,” He came and lived like you. And because He did so “full of grace and truth,” not only does He understand the full range of your human experience, but He accomplished everything you couldn't, so that you might spend eternity with Him.



## REFLECT:

1. CONSIDER THE EXAMPLE OF BEING TRANSFORMED INTO A BABY. WHAT WOULD BE THE MOST HUMBLING LIMITATION YOU WOULD HAVE TO ENDURE? WHAT DO YOU THINK WAS THE MOST HUMBLING LIMITATION JESUS ENDURED ON EARTH?
2. WHY WAS IT IMPORTANT THAT JESUS CAME AS A BABY AND NOT AS A GROWN MAN? HOW DOES IT IMPACT YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD TO KNOW THAT JESUS WILLINGLY HUMBLING HIMSELF IN ORDER TO DIE IN YOUR PLACE?

## PRAY:

*Thank you, Jesus, that you are Immanuel, “God with us.” You did not have to come to earth as a human, but you chose to. You can sympathize with my life because you came to live on earth, too. Thank you for laying down everything to become one of us and for your sacrifice on the cross that gives me the gift of salvation.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



READ MORE ABOUT WHAT IT MEANS FOR JESUS TO BE IMMANUEL,  
“GOD WITH US.”

---

Elisabeth Thoresen is a staff member with Cru® at her alma mater, Virginia Tech, where she and her husband met. She is also part of the publishing team at Cru Press® and loves helping stories come to life through the written word.



# DAY 3

TUESDAY, DEC. 5

## KEY VERSES

“This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

— JOHN 2:11, NLT

“We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God’s throne.”

— HEBREWS 12:2, NLT



## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 2

When we hear the words of the Christmas carol, “Joy to the world the Lord has come,” we can think of the baby Jesus in swaddling clothes asleep in Bethlehem. But an event near the end of Jesus’s earthly life would paint the most powerful portrait of joy (Hebrews 12:1-2).

A few years prior to that event, recorded in John 2, Jesus performs His first public miracle, which happened at a wedding in Cana.

**INTERESTINGLY, OUT OF ALL THE MIRACLES JESUS COULD HAVE SELECTED FOR HIS INAUGURAL DEMONSTRATION OF POWER, HE CHOOSES ONE THAT DOES NOT MEET A DESPERATE NEED - AS MOST OF HIS LATER MIRACLES WOULD - BUT RATHER CREATES JOY.**

Jewish wedding feasts were marvelously festive occasions often lasting an entire week. They were full of joy, feasting, laughter and dancing.

The most important element of the wedding feast was the wine. The master of the banquet — to keep the wine flowing — would usually bring out the expensive wine first and let everyone drink until they were drunk. Then the master would bring out the lesser quality wine. At this particular wedding, the wine started running out earlier than expected. Mary, Jesus’s mother, suggested Jesus do something about it.

Jesus tells the servants to fill up six large stone jars with water and to take some to the master of the banquet. When the master tastes it, the water has been transformed into the best quality wine. The guests, overwhelmed with joy, claim that the master “saved the best wine for last!”

A few years later, during the Last Supper on the night Jesus is betrayed, Jesus tells His disciples that the wine represents the blood He would shed on the cross. In fact, He endured the cross knowing the joy that awaited Him and awaited us upon His resurrection. Jesus would ultimately bring the joy that results from the freedom from sin at the great cost of His own life.

The couple at the wedding likely did not have the resources to provide enough wine for their own wedding feast, but Jesus provided. Likewise, we cannot afford to pay for our own sins. There is nothing we possess and nothing we could ever do to earn our own salvation. But Jesus paid our sin debt with His own blood purchasing eternal life! Joy to the World! The Lord has come!



## REFLECT:

IN WHAT WAYS ARE YOU TRYING TO EARN GOD'S FORGIVENESS?

KNOWING THAT JESUS HAS PAID FOR THE FORGIVENESS THAT YOU CAN'T EARN, HOW MIGHT THIS BRING YOU NEW JOY?

## PRAY:

*Lord, we are so thankful for the incredible gift of grace that we have received as a result of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We acknowledge that we don't have the ability to pay for our own salvation but are thankful for this gift of grace. Help us to live with an awareness of that grace and a deep knowledge that the favor we have in You is not based on our performance but on Your mercy. Thank you for Your love.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



LEARN THE KEY TO BEING SATISFIED IN YOUR EXPERIENCE  
WITH GOD

---

Todd Tillinghast is currently serving as the National Team Leader for Cru® Panama in the Republic of Panama. He also serves as the Pastor of preaching and vision for La Comunidad Bible Church — a multi cultural, multigenerational congregation in Panama City, Panama. He has been married to his beautiful wife, Marielena for 23 years and has two sons, Juan Diego and Lucas.



# DAY 4

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 6

## KEY VERSE

“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.”

— JOHN 3:16, NLT



# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 3

Born into idol worship in rural Ghana, Daavi was distraught. A mysterious illness had come over her.

The gods have struck me! I'll never recover from this! I may have offended the gods and this illness is my punishment. All these thoughts kept running through her mind.

She searched the entire village seeking help. Daavi went from one fetish priest to the other, asking them to intervene between her and the angry gods. She roamed from one hospital to another. And yet, none could cure her illness. She had faithfully served these idols. Worshiping them and serving them. Pouring liquid offerings on the ground as a ceremonial sacrifice to the gods and following in the footsteps of her forefathers who handed down these gods to her and her siblings.

But not even their gods could aid her.

So much darkness surrounded her. She could find no relief from the torment in her mind and body.

What she really needed, just like Nicodemus in John chapter 3, was the only One who could truly intervene — the savior, Jesus. She needed light from the darkness she was born into.

John chapter 3 illuminates the Savior's redemption plan and love for humanity through the conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus Christ. Nicodemus, a religious leader, longed to be saved and yet didn't know how, even though he taught the law.

Nicodemus asks Jesus a personal question: "How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born!"

How desperate and helpless Nicodemus must have felt knowing the need to be saved and yet not knowing how.

Jesus answers, "Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'"

He then connects being born again to having eternal life, bought by Jesus. "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," Jesus says to Nicodemus. Jesus comes through for Nicodemus in his need.

### JESUS DID THE SAME FOR DAAVI.

Daavi's neighbor suggested she try going to church with her. Desperate to find a solution, Daavi agreed, even though the church was an unfamiliar place to her. She was carried to the local church, where she stayed for six months.

Indeed there, Daavi met Jesus.

She not only trusted Jesus for the forgiveness of her sins, but God healed her body too. The darkness that followed her, the sickness, pain and agony — all became things of the past! She has seen the light and freedom only Jesus can give. She has turned from idol worship and has since served Christ for the past 40 years. Forty dedicated years of loving Jesus. She shares to this day that Jesus Christ is all that we need in this life.

My grandmother, Daavi, is a proud recipient of the same unconditional love that Jesus talks about with Nicodemus. Jesus became the light in her darkness and has shown her love, which has shined to all the people in her life.



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.

JOHN 3:16, NLT

## REFLECT:

WHERE IN YOUR LIFE DO YOU DESIRE HIS LIGHT TO SHINE FOR YOU?

ARE YOU WILLING TO EMBRACE HIS LOVE?

## PRAY:

*Dear God, I trust in Your love for me. Thank You for coming to this world and sacrificing Yourself so that I can have a restored relationship with You. Help me to always see Your light and love in every difficulty I find myself.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW GOD PERSONALLY?

Explore more about what it looks like to be born again.

---

Comfort Arthur is a staff member with the Great Commission Movement (as Cru® is known) of Ghana. She is passionate, young and dynamic about using technology to solve problems, especially in the Christian sphere.



# DAY 5

THURSDAY, DEC. 7

## KEY VERSE



“Jesus replied, ‘Anyone who drinks this water will soon become thirsty again. But those who drink the water I give will never be thirsty again. It becomes a fresh, bubbling spring within them, giving them eternal life.’”

— JOHN 4:13-14, NLT



## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 4

Patched lips, dried mouth, feelings of weakness, headaches. These are some of the symptoms you can experience if you go without water for several hours. Have you ever felt really thirsty?

Everyone experiences a natural thirst and drinks water to satisfy this thirst. Water is an essential part of life on earth and necessary for existence. But what about spiritual thirst — the deepest longings of your soul? Many people today are restless, dissatisfied and feel empty on the inside. They try to satisfy their inner thirst with many things. Maybe you can relate. Could this type of thirst ever be satisfied?

In John 4, on His way to Galilee, Jesus passed through Samaria. He became weary and sat next to a well, in the heat of the day.

There, a Samaritan woman approached the well, and Jesus asked her for a drink of water. This was unusual because of the tradition at the time, Jews did not associate with Samaritans. But here Jesus, a Jewish man, was asking a Samaritan woman for a drink of water — a drink from the same cup from which she drank. The woman lived a questionable lifestyle and was despised and rejected because of it. She lived in shame. But this did not hinder Jesus from intentionally reaching out to her.

Instead, He broke down the social barrier. He displayed His love and grace and began a conversation that helped her to discover her spiritual needs and longings. He offered her “living water” that would become like a spring of water in her “welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14, NIV). She could drink from this water and never be thirsty again.

Living water here represents the source of spiritual sustenance, true satisfaction and eternal life. It sustains and nourishes our spirit and is only offered by Jesus.

The Samaritan woman's interaction with Jesus led to her personal transformation, as well as the transformation of everyone else in her village.

The amazing news is that you don't need to search any longer for something that can only temporarily satisfy the deepest longings of your soul.

Your thirst for true significance, love, value, acceptance and meaning can all be quenched by drinking the "living water" Jesus offers.

**ARE YOU THIRSTY? DRINK  
FROM THE LIVING WATER, AND  
YOU WILL NEVER BE THIRSTY  
AGAIN.**

## REFLECT:

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE DEEPEST LONGINGS IN YOUR SOUL? WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU TRIED TO MEET THESE LONGINGS?

WHERE CAN YOU INVITE JESUS TO MEET THESE LONGINGS?

## PRAY:

*Lord, I confess that I have not been coming to you to satisfy my deepest longings. I have been depending on other things to fill me. I come to You alone to satisfy my dry and thirsty soul with Your living water.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



You can help relieve the physical and spiritual thirst of people in the toughest places by partnering with Unto®, the humanitarian ministry of Cru®, to provide lifesaving humanitarian aid where it is most urgently needed.

---

Stacy Thomas serves with Cru's® campus ministry in Trinidad and Tobago. She loves to help young people to know Jesus and discover their calling. She enjoys spending time with family and sightseeing in different countries.

# DAY 6

FRIDAY, DEC. 8

## KEY VERSE

“Then Jesus said to him, ‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’”

— JOHN 5:8, NIV



# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 5

It's a Sabbath day and Jesus is on the move. He knows He will get in trouble with the religious leaders, and possibly risk His life, but He is willing to risk it all for one person.

The text does not mention if Jesus planned to perform a miracle that day. It also does not say why Jesus was drawn to this particular man at the pool of Bethesda when there were many other blind, lame and paralyzed people who were present there. Maybe because this man had been paralyzed for a very long time: 38 years.

Thirty eight years is a long time to carry a physical limitation, or any limitation. I am sure that, along with the physical paralysis, the man also experienced emotional, social and mental paralysis. His whole life was focused on one thing only: to get into the water when the angel visited it so he would be healed and walk again.

In his mind there was only one way to be healed from his ailment: jumping into the water when the angel visited it. We don't know how far he was from the pool, but it might as well have been a hundred miles away in his condition. The odds of him getting into the pool to be healed were pretty much close to zero.

A terrible past with no hope for a better future.

But out of nowhere, Jesus appears, walks directly up to him and asks him a very simple question: "Do you want to get well?"

Do you *really* want to be healed?

Sometimes we become so comfortable with our sorrow, pain or handicap that unconsciously we've made it part of our life—at times, even profiting from it. Jesus wanted to know if this man was ready to be released from that condition to start a completely new phase of life that

included assuming responsibility for every act, becoming fully accountable to God for all his actions.

Just like Jesus ordered the raging storm to quiet down (in Mark 4:35-41), He ordered the illness to leave this man's body. Jesus did His part. The man only had to get up, get his bed and walk. And he did!

**MIRACLES HAPPEN WHEN  
JESUS AND I PARTNER  
TOGETHER TO DO WHAT ONLY  
EACH PARTNER CAN DO.  
JESUS IS READY TO DO HIS  
PART. AM I READY TO  
RESPOND WITH A "YES!" AND  
DO MY PART?**



## REFLECT:

- HAVE YOU BECOME TOO COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR PAIN, SORROW, GUILT OR ANY OTHER EMOTIONAL, SPIRITUAL OR PHYSICAL HANDICAP?
- WHAT'S KEEPING YOU FROM TAKING UP YOUR BED AND WALKING?

## PRAY:

*Lord Jesus, help me grow the courage to respond with a “Yes!” and do my part of the miracle I so desperately need. Thank You for coming up to me today with your healing power.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



LEARN MORE ABOUT THE MIRACLES JESUS PERFORMED TO DEMONSTRATE HIS POWER OVER SICKNESS, SPIRITUAL FORCES, NATURE AND EVEN DEATH ITSELF.

---

Layo Leiva, second generation staff, has been with Cru® since 1978. He loves ministering to leaders and influencers with his wife Luchy. Currently, he serves as the Leader Strategies Facilitator for Latin America and the Caribbean.





GET UP AND WALK



# DAY 7

SATURDAY, DEC. 9

## KEY VERSE



Then Jesus took the loaves, gave thanks to God, and distributed them to the people. Afterward he did the same with the fish. And they all ate as much as they wanted. After everyone was full, Jesus told his disciples, “Now gather the leftovers, so that nothing is wasted.”

— JOHN 6:11-12, NLT



# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 6

One day Jesus and his disciples traveled across the Sea of Galilee. A large crowd followed because they heard about the people Jesus had healed. The blind could see and the lame could walk. Some wondered if He would perform another miracle. Others wanted to listen to Him teach.

As the crowds arrived, Jesus asked his disciples a question. "How will we feed all these people?" Jesus said this to test their faith. Would they believe he could meet this need?

Philip quickly said they couldn't possibly buy enough food to feed everyone, and he pointed out there were no markets close enough. In the meantime, Andrew found a boy with a lunch containing five loaves and two fish. His lunch was small, but it was a start.

The hungry crowd of 5,000 men with their families sat down on the grass. Taking the food into his hands Jesus, the Bread of Life, lifted the loaves and fish toward heaven in his outstretched arms.

After thanking His Father for providing the food, Jesus gave away loaf after loaf and fish after fish to everyone in the crowd. The food multiplied and everyone ate until they were full. When the meal ended, the disciples filled twelve baskets with leftovers.

Jesus had performed another miracle. The people were amazed, and they decided he must be a true prophet sent from God. They were ready to make Him their king. Instead, Jesus disappeared onto the mountain so He could be by Himself and pray.

### Up to the Minute

Jesus wants to show you that you can trust Him to meet your needs the same way he met the needs of the hungry crowd and strengthened

the faith of his disciples. He can turn your limited resources into His abundant provision.

Whatever your greatest need is, He can meet it and strengthen your faith. Name your need in prayer and trust Him to provide. When He brings people into your life who have needs, ask Him if he wants to use you to meet those needs even if you don't think you have enough.

**THANK GOD FOR THE  
WAYS HE HAS ALREADY  
MET YOUR NEEDS.  
PLAN TO BE GENEROUS.**

If you don't have what you need, see if there are resources God has placed near you. Andrew pointed Jesus to the boy with the five loaves and two fish even though they weren't enough to feed the crowd.

Bring your five loaves and two fish, or whatever you do have, to Jesus. Alone, they may not be enough to solve your problem, but you can invite Jesus to meet your needs His way. Watch for the miracle that comes when He takes your little bit and turns it into His abundance. Allow Jesus, the Bread of Life, to satisfy your hunger.



## REFLECT:

1. WHAT NEEDS ARE YOU TRYING TO MEET WITH YOUR OWN LIMITED RESOURCES? HOW CAN YOU TRUST GOD TO MULTIPLY WHAT YOU HAVE TO OFFER AND PROVIDE FOR YOUR NEEDS COMPLETELY?
2. THINK OF THE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE, WHERE MIGHT THEY NEED TO EXPERIENCE GOD'S ABUNDANT PROVISION? HOW CAN YOU TRUST GOD TO USE YOUR LIMITED RESOURCES TO HELP MEET THAT NEED AND STRENGTHEN THEIR FAITH?

## PRAY:

*Thank You, Jesus, for working in my life and in the lives of people around me. Show me how You can use my limited resources to meet their needs. Thank You for the generous ways You provide. Cause me to trust You with my whole heart.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



GOD IS GENEROUS. LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW YOU CAN BE GENEROUS WITH YOUR LIFE AND RESOURCES

---

Anne Marie Winz has been a staff member with Cru® for a long time. She enjoys drinking coffee, reading good books and talking with her girlfriends. She's married to the amazing Mark Winz.

# DAY 8

SUNDAY, DEC. 10

## KEY VERSE

“Therefore Jesus told them, ‘My time is not yet here; for you anytime will do.’”

— JOHN 7:6, NIV



## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 7

In the early verses of John 7, we learn that the Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus. Jesus' death is outlined in Bible prophecies, which say that the Son of Man will come and die for us. So, the plot of these Jewish leaders was an opportunity for the word of God to be fulfilled.

But why is time attached? Why couldn't His death happen in that moment? After all, isn't that why Jesus came?

Jesus' brothers even encouraged him to attend the festival in Judea where the Jewish leaders were. But Jesus responds to them, "My time is not yet here."

Jesus was not following man's timeline. Instead, He was following His Father's perfect plan.

One day, my mother instructed me to give my Aunty some money. She told me, "Give it to her on her birthday." Two days before my aunt's birthday, during our family Bible study, she gave her prayer request. She said, "I am trusting God for money." Based on the instruction I had from my mother, my Aunty's request was already answered by God. But she would receive the money on a specific day, not the day she asked for it.

**ARE YOU OR SOMEONE YOU  
KNOW WAITING ON GOD RIGHT  
NOW? HOW ARE YOU DOING IN  
THE MEANTIME?**

In those dark moments of waiting and praying for answers, we can experience great hope that there is a light within our darkness. If you have put your trust in Jesus, you can be confident that God is present with you in your waiting. The Bible tells us that we can wait patiently on God because of who God is.

The Psalms are an excellent example of this. Remember, even in Christ's own life, things happened in the Father's timing.

Will you wait for a time like Jesus waited for a time for His death? Though there were many opportunities for Him to be killed to bring salvation to the world, He waited.

**YOUR DARK MOMENTS MAY  
TEMPT YOU TO FIND ANSWERS  
OUTSIDE OF GOD'S PLAN, BUT  
GOD'S TIMING IS WORTH  
WAITING FOR.**





## REFLECT:

DO YOU SOMETIMES BELIEVE AS A CHILD OF GOD THAT ALL GOD'S PROMISES FOR YOU MUST COME TO PASS NOW? DO YOU SOMETIMES ASK, "WHY IS GOD DELAYING?"

## PRAY:

*Dear Jesus, as You waited patiently for Your death, help me to be patient with my desires and plans. Help me to accept there is time for everything, that You are in control, and that You know what is best for me. May my desires not push me to go against Your will as I await Your timing.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



FOR MORE READING ABOUT TRUSTING GOD WHILE WAITING, CHECK OUT THIS HELPFUL ARTICLE.

---

Matthew Garway Jr. serves as a missionary among university students in his home country Liberia with the Great Commission Movement (as Cru® is known there) of Liberia. His passion is to raise the next generation of Liberian leaders with true Christian values. He's married to Rose Mulbah-Garway, and they have a son Elpozuo (Thank God!).

# DAY 9

MONDAY, DEC. 11

## KEY VERSE

“Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow Me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life’”

— JOHN 8:12, NLT





## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 8

Jesus continued teaching in the Temple after the Feast of Booths, also called the Feast of Tabernacles. “I am the light of the world,” He said. “If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life” (John 8:12 NLT).

During the Feast of Booths, sometimes called the Feast of Tabernacles, the Israelites traveled to Jerusalem and lived outside for a week in booths, shelters they built themselves from branches. They remembered the Exodus when their ancestors left their lives as slaves in Egypt to travel to the Promised Land where they would be free to worship God.

At dusk, priests in the Temple courtyard lit four giant candelabras taller than the Temple

courtyard walls. Each candelabra had four bowls filled with oil. When the priests finished, 16 bowls lit up the city well beyond the Temple walls. The bright lights reminded the Jews that a pillar of fire led their ancestors through the wilderness at night.

In the background, musicians played their instruments — harps and lyres, flutes and trumpets, worshiping the Lord. Jews danced to the music, allowing the lights to remind them how the light of God’s glory used to fill the Temple.

As darkness descended, Jesus stood in the Temple courtyard and told everyone He was the light of the world. To anyone choosing to follow Him, He promised they wouldn’t have to find their way through the darkness of sin in a broken world by themselves.



Instead, He would be their light, leading them to a new life of freedom, knowing that their sins would be forgiven. His light would lead them into a new life.

The crowd listened to Him and considered His logic. They could die in the darkness of their sins or follow the light of Jesus, trusting Him to forgive them and provide the guidance they needed out of their darkness and into His light. Many of them trusted Him to forgive their sins that evening.

**TODAY YOU HAVE THE SAME CHOICE. YOU CAN CONTINUE LIVING IN THE DARKNESS OF SIN, COUNTING ON YOUR BEST EFFORTS TO GET YOU THROUGH YOUR LIFE AND THEN DIE IN YOUR SINS. OR, YOU CAN TRUST JESUS TO BE YOUR LIGHT. HE CAN FORGIVE YOU AND LEAD YOU INTO A NEW LIFE.**

Hear the words of Jesus. You can tell Him today that you are done walking in darkness of sin. Ask Him to forgive your sins. Surrender your life to Him, and thank Him that you can now walk in the light that He provides.



*For*

TER: ACCORDING TO  
A MIKTAM<sup>4</sup> OF DAVID;  
WHEN HE STROVE  
AIM AND WITH ARAM-  
OAB ON HIS RETURN  
TE THOUSAND OF  
OF SALT.

us, broken our

h, restore us.  
quake; you have

t totters.  
see hard things;  
to drink that

those who

m the bow:<sup>5</sup>  
*Selah*  
e delivered,  
hand and

6  
to Shechem  
iccoth.  
e;

1."7

ity?

our

s.

ri

Lead me to the rock  
that is higher than I,  
for you have been my refuge  
a strong tower against

1 Let me dwell in your tent  
Let me take refuge under  
your wings!

5 For you, O God, have heard  
you have given me the help  
who fear your name.

6 Prolong the life of the king  
may his years endure to a  
tions!

7 May he be enthroned forever  
appoint steadfast love and  
to watch over him!

8 So will I ever sing praises to you  
as I perform my vows day

*My Soul Waits for God Alone*

62 TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO  
JEDUTHUN. A PSALM OF DAVID

1 For God alone my soul waits in silence,  
from him comes my salvation and my hope.

2 He alone is my rock and my fortress;  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

3 How long will all of you attack and  
to batter him,

4 They only plan to thrust him down  
his high position.

They take pleasure in falsehood;  
They bless with their mouths,  
but inwardly they curse.

5 For God alone, O my soul, wait in silence,  
for my hope is from him.

6 He only is my rock and my salvation,  
my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

7 On God rests my salvation and my hope;  
my mighty rock, my refuge is God.

8 Trust in him at all times,  
pour out your heart before him.



## REFLECT:

1. HOW ARE YOU WALKING IN DARKNESS TODAY?
2. HOW CAN YOU TRUST JESUS TO LEAD YOU INTO HIS LIGHT AND LIFE?

## PRAY:

*Thank You for being the light of the world. Today I refuse to live any longer in the darkness of sin. Instead, I surrender my life to You, and I ask You to forgive my sins. Thank You that I can walk in the light You have so generously given me. Be the light in my world, and chase the darkness away.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



READ ABOUT ONE MAN'S JOURNEY TO JESUS AND HOW GOD CAN FIND US ANYWHERE.

---

Anne Marie Winz has been a staff member with Cru® for a long time. She enjoys drinking coffee, reading good books and talking with her girlfriends. She's married to the amazing Mark Winz.

# DAY 10

TUESDAY, DEC. 12

## KEY VERSES

“Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him.’”

— JOHN 9:3, NIV



“I am the light of the world.”

— JOHN 9:5, NLT

## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 9

Growing up, my family watched A Christmas Carol every Christmas. There is a moment in the movie when Bob Cratchet and his son, Tiny Tim, arrive home late from Church. Bob turns to his wife and says, "He hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember, upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see." (A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens)

Tiny Tim was small and frail, but full of faith. His hope was that his weakness would remind people of Christ.

In John chapter 9, Jesus heals a man blind from birth. But there is more to the story. Jesus also opens the eyes of his heart.

Throughout the chapter, the man describes Jesus in three different ways. Each time he moves one step closer to fully understanding who Jesus is.

First, he calls Jesus a man (v. 11). Then, he calls Him a prophet (v. 17). Finally, after seeing Jesus with his new eyes, he sees who He really is — God (v. 38).

In contrast, the Pharisees regress each time they speak about Jesus. They say He's not from God (v. 16). Then, they claim to know He is a sinner (v. 24). And finally, they don't even know where He comes from (vs 29). Each time they step further into darkness and unbelief.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world" (v. 5).

**WHEN CHRIST LEFT  
THE WORLD AND ASCENDED  
TO HEAVEN,**

**HE COMMISSIONED US  
TO BE A LIGHT FOR  
THE WORLD.**

**HE DIDN'T CHOOSE WHO  
WE MIGHT EXPECT.  
HE CHOSE A BLIND BEGGAR.  
HE CHOSE US.**

Tiny Tim was right.

I like to think that I'm humble like the blind man. If I'm honest, I'm more like the Pharisees. I often lean on my own strength and understanding. I need to be reminded that when we are weak, God gives us power. His power enables us to be a light to the world.

If you are feeling inadequate, tired, or powerless, remember that God says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9, NIV).



## REFLECT:

HOW DO YOU REFLECT GOD'S LIGHT TO THE WORLD?

WHAT AREAS IN YOUR LIFE ARE YOU RELYING ON YOUR OWN STRENGTH?

## PRAY:

*Father, thank You for shining Your light into my heart. "I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me." (2 Corinthians 12:9, ESV) Give me strength so I can be a light for the world.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



FOR MORE ENCOURAGEMENT ABOUT GOD'S STRENGTH IN THE MIDST OF OUR WEAKNESS, CHECK OUT THIS ARTICLE.

---

Jesse Madera has been on staff with Cru® for 10 years. He works as a writer and editor for Cru's publishing division, Cru Resources.





**"I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD."**

**JOHN 9:5, NIV**

# DAY 11

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 13

## KEY VERSE

“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep”

— JOHN 10:10-11, NLT





## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 10

Shepherds take care of their sheep, moving their flocks from field to field, making sure the sheep have enough to eat. They find quiet streams so the sheep can drink water in peace. When wild animals threaten the flock, the shepherd chases away the predators.

At night, shepherds lead their sheep into a community pen. Then they lay down and sleep at the entrance to protect their sheep from danger.

In the morning, shepherds, one by one, gently call their sheep by name. Each sheep recognizes the voice of its shepherd and follow him out of the pen and into the pasture. The sheep trust their shepherd.

In the Old Testament, King David, the youngest son in his family, spent many hours in the hills surrounding his home taking care of his family's herd.

David embraced his role wholeheartedly. He herded the sheep into fertile places so they would have enough to eat. He found peaceful streams so they could drink without feeling threatened. And whenever a wild animal came near, David took out his slingshot, loaded it up with a smooth stone, and chased away the predator.

Throughout his life, David relied on God to be his shepherd. Because the Lord was with him, David feared no evil. He trusted the Lord to guide him, especially through his darkest dangers, even when he faced death. The Lord blessed David beyond what his cup could hold.

When Jesus compared Himself to the good shepherd, His audience understood these things. Jesus had already promised those who trusted Him that He was the bread of life. He also promised to give them living water that would quench their thirsty soul.

He promised guidance by being the light of the world who would lead His followers out of the darkness. Now, by comparing Himself to a good shepherd, He promised to protect His sheep and provide for them. He even promised to voluntarily lay his life down for them.

Jesus said, "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me, for my Father has given them to me, and he is more powerful than anyone else. No one can snatch them from the Father's hand" (John 10:27-29, NLT).

**JESUS HAS PROMISED TO  
BE A GOOD SHEPHERD TO  
THOSE WHO FOLLOW HIM,  
INCLUDING YOU. HE GAVE  
HIS LIFE SO YOU COULD  
KNOW THAT YOUR SINS ARE  
FORGIVEN. YOU CAN KNOW  
HIS VOICE AND FOLLOW HIM.  
LISTEN FOR HIS STILL,  
QUIET VOICE, ESPECIALLY  
AS YOU READ SCRIPTURE.  
TRUST HIM TO GUIDE YOU TO  
THE PLACES HE WANTS YOU  
TO GO.**



JESUS SAID, "MY SHEEP  
LISTEN TO MY VOICE; I KNOW  
THEM, AND THEY FOLLOW ME."

JOHN 10:27, NLT



## REFLECT:

1. HOW DO YOU RESPOND WHEN YOU HEAR THE VOICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD?
2. ARE YOU FOLLOWING THE GOOD SHEPHERD, TRUSTING HIM TO MEET YOUR NEEDS?

## PRAY:

*Thank You, Jesus, for being my shepherd. Teach me to hear Your voice and to follow You. Keep me from following the voice of a stranger. Thank You for leading me into the places where You want me to go.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



**IN A WORLD FULL OF NOISE AND DISTRACTION, HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO US?**

Learn more about hearing from God.

---

Anne Marie Winz has been a staff member with Cru® for a long time. She enjoys drinking coffee, reading good books and talking with her girlfriends. She's married to the amazing Mark Winz.



# DAY 12

THURSDAY, DEC. 14

## KEY VERSE

Jesus told her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?”

— JOHN 11:25-26, NLT



# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 11

Jesus had three dear friends: Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Martha, the planner, cooked for Jesus and His friends whenever he visited them. Curious Mary listened to and learned from Jesus. Lazarus, their brother, often invited Him to their home.

When Lazarus became ill, the sisters sent for Jesus. Certainly, He could heal Lazarus.

After hearing the news, Jesus delayed leaving for two days. As the sisters waited impatiently for Jesus to arrive, Lazarus died. They were stunned, and grief's darkness descended into their lives.

Finally, Jesus and his disciples arrived. Martha saw Him first. Feeling the pain of Jesus' absence, she said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died." She truly believed Jesus could have healed Lazarus.

To comfort Martha, Jesus said, "Your brother will rise again."

Martha believed Jesus' words. "Yes," she said. "He will rise again, in the resurrection on the last day."

Challenging Martha to think in the present, Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in Me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in Me and believes in Me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"

Clinging desperately to her faith, she said, "Yes, Lord; I have always believed that You are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God."

Afterward, Mary met Jesus. "Lord, if only You had been here," she said, "my brother would not have died."

Jesus wept when He saw Martha and Mary and the crowd grieving for Lazarus. Some were touched. Others wondered why He waited. It seemed like He arrived too late.

In an awkward moment, Jesus said, "Roll the stone aside." The crowd watched and wondered. Lazarus had died. His life was finished.

Martha responded logically, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible."

**JESUS SAID TO HER, "DIDN'T I TELL YOU THAT YOU WOULD SEE THE GLORY OF GOD IF YOU BELIEVE?"**

Praying loudly enough for everyone to hear, Jesus thanked His Father for granting His request. Then he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" Lazarus walked out of the tomb, alive, wrapped in grave clothes.

To the shocked crowd, Jesus said, "Unwrap him and let him go." Many of the Jews believed Jesus was the Son of God.

Sometimes Jesus seems to show up at the right moment. Other times, He seems absent. Jesus could have met you at the bedside of a loved one and performed a miracle. He could have met you in a crisis and kept you from harm. He could have restored a broken relationship. Instead, He was absent.

Even when darkness descends, Jesus can give you hope. In Romans 8:28, the apostle Paul writes, "And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to His purpose for them" (NLT).

Invite Jesus to show you His goodness even when life hurts. Trust Him to be your resurrection and your life.

## REFLECT:

1. HOW ARE YOU WAITING FOR GOD TO SHOW YOU HIS GOODNESS TODAY?
2. HOW CAN YOU TRUST JESUS TO FILL YOU WITH HOPE EVEN AS YOU WAIT?

## PRAY:

*Jesus, thank You for being my resurrection and my life. Thank You that You are good and that You are working all of the events in my life together for good. Comfort my heart and cause me to trust You.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



**HOW CAN GOD MEET YOU IN YOUR GRIEF THIS SEASON?**  
Read one woman's journey to find hope in the midst of despair.

---

Anne Marie Winz has been a staff member with Cru® for a long time. She enjoys drinking coffee, reading good books and talking with her girlfriends. She's married to the amazing Mark Winz.

# DAY 13

FRIDAY, DEC. 15

## KEY VERSES

“Jesus replied, ‘Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial.’”

— JOHN 12:7, NLT





# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 12

Whenever Christmas comes around, many of us exchange gifts with our family, friends, or co-workers. Although I like to receive gifts, I have a hard time giving gifts to other people. It's not that I don't want to give, but I don't always know what to give because maybe I don't know them well. And many times, to avoid anxiety, I give a gift card or cash so they can buy whatever they want. Of course, I enjoy when I make someone happy by giving them "the right gift."

John chapter 12 tells the story of an excellent gift that was indeed given intentionally. This is the story of Mary, the sister of Lazarus and Martha, all who also appear in other Gospel accounts. In his Gospel, Luke contrasts the two sisters. Luke mentions that Martha was busy with everything she had to do, but Mary chose the best part: to be at the feet of Jesus and delight in Him, to listen to Him, and above all, to know Him (Luke 10:38-42.)

As the time of the Passover drew near, John tells us that in the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus — whom Jesus had raised from the dead (John 11) — they had supper in honor of Jesus. Jesus' disciples and possibly other guests attended.

**SUDDENLY MARY  
APPROACHES JESUS WITH  
A BOTTLE OF EXPENSIVE  
PERFUME AND ANOINTS  
JESUS' FEET. THE HOUSE  
FILLS WITH THE FRAGRANCE  
OF THIS PERFUME.**

Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray Jesus for money, hypocritically judges Mary by saying it would have been better to sell the perfume and give it to the poor.

But Jesus defends Mary and says, "Leave her alone. She did this in preparation for my burial" (John 12:7, NLT). These words show that Mary had paid attention to what Jesus said would happen to Him in less than a week. He would be crucified, and Mary knew it. Her gift was valuable to Jesus.

Earlier in Jesus' life, wise men from the east brought him gifts similar to the one Mary gave him (Matthew 2). By bringing him frankincense, gold, and myrrh, they implied that they knew whom they had come to visit. These were gifts of worship to the King of kings who had come to earth. In fact, some scholars believe that at the same time, some gifts symbolized the balm He would need at the moment of His death for the sins of mankind.

**JESUS GAVE US THE  
GREATEST GIFT OF ALL,  
HIMSELF.**



## REFLECT:

AS CHRISTMAS APPROACHES, HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW JESUS?  
WOULD YOU KNOW WHAT TO GIVE TO THE ONE WHO KNOWS YOU AND GAVE  
YOU "THE PERFECT GIFT" SO THAT YOU COULD KNOW HIM TO THE FULLEST?

## PRAY:

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

*As Christmas nears, we are reminded of the precious gift of salvation that You gave us through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Just as Mary offered her intentional act of anointing, may we offer gifts that bring honor and glory to Jesus, reflecting our devotion and commitment to Him. Guide us in discerning the best ways to demonstrate our love for the One who knows us intimately and has given us the ultimate gift. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



LEARN MORE IN THIS ARTICLE ABOUT HOW TO RECEIVE THE  
GIFT OF JESUS.

---

Marielena Tillinghast is the Global Church Movements National Leader in Cru® Panama. She and her husband are the lead pastors of La Comunidad Bible Church. Her mission in life is to communicate the grace and truth that we find in Christ and to inspire and equip others to find and fulfill the specific call that God has placed in their lives. Marielena has been married to her best friend, Todd, for 23 years, and they are blessed with two wonderful sons, Juan Diego (16) and Lucas (11).

# DAY 14

SATURDAY, DEC. 16

## KEY VERSE



After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, “Do you understand what I was doing? You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.

— JOHN 13:12-17, NLT

## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 13

Making provision for washing a guest's feet was an expected act of hospitality in Palestine at the time of Christ. It's likely that Jesus and the disciples had already washed their feet before they began the meal that Thursday evening. When Jesus stood up toward the end of the meal and took the position of a servant to wash their feet, they were shocked. Peter outright refused to participate until Jesus told him, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me" (John 13:8, NIV)

Fortunately for the disciples, Jesus explained why he did this. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."

At His last meal with them before His death on the cross, Jesus was shining a light on the disciples' persistent point of conflict with each other. They had often argued on the road about which of them was the greatest. Jesus never told them not to hope to be the greatest. He redefined what "the greatest" means. After washing their feet, He said, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."

What did He mean? The most esteemed should take the lowest place. The leader should humbly serve the follower. The one who deserves robes and crowns should clothe himself as a slave. The very next day, Jesus was stripped of his clothes and punished as a criminal. He was not forced to suffer as He did. Jesus volunteered. Nothing was taken from Him, He offered Himself up for our sin. His exchange of glory for shame is the perfect example of exchanging greatness for humility.

We, who have received so much, are likewise called to lay down our privilege and comfort for the sake of others. Jesus said if we know this, if we understand His example, we will be blessed as we follow Him. Jesus shined the light of His example to guide us onto our path to true greatness.





## REFLECT:

- WHOSE LIFE HAS INSPIRED YOU TO BE A SERVANT LEADER?
- HOW CAN YOU FOLLOW THEIR EXAMPLE?

## PRAY:

*Lord Jesus, thank You for showing me the path to true greatness. Help me today to see my opportunities to serve others and follow Your example. Let me excel in humbling myself. I love You and welcome Your light into my life. Amen.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



### HOW CAN I FOLLOW JESUS' EXAMPLE OF TRUE GREATNESS?

If you are an athlete or have one in your household, check out these resources from Athletes in Action® — Cru's® ministry to athletes — to grow as a Christ-centered sports leader.

---

Elizabeth Schenkel and her husband, Erick, have served on Cru® staff on three continents as well as in pastoral ministry in Massachusetts. They have five grown children and five grandchildren. She especially enjoys communing with God's creation on long walks in the north woods.

# DAY 15

SUNDAY, DEC. 17

## KEY VERSE

“No, we don’t know, Lord,” Thomas said. “We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?” Jesus told him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me”

— JOHN 14:5-6, NLT



# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 14

On Passover night, the disciples joined Jesus for what would be their last meal with him before He died. Jesus told His disciples that He was going away so He could prepare a place for them. "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in Me," He said.

For three years they had watched Jesus perform miracles, they had listened to Him teach the crowds and confound religious leaders. They had looked forward to standing beside Him as he ushered in His kingdom on earth where He would rule once and for all. And now He was leaving them?

Confused, Peter asked, "Lord, where are you going? Why can't we come?" Peter even offered to die with Jesus. That's when Jesus told Peter that he would deny Jesus three times that night.

Then Thomas, equally puzzled, said, "We don't know where You are going. How can we know the way?" Up to that point, the disciples had followed Jesus wherever He went. They knew the way because Jesus showed it to them.

**JESUS SAID "I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE. NO ONE CAN COME TO THE FATHER EXCEPT THROUGH ME."**

Jesus said He and the Father were the same. If they had seen Him, they had seen the Father, further solidifying Jesus' divine nature.

Jesus invited the disciples to trust Him instead of fearing for their future without Him. He promised to be their way, guiding them through the most painful parts of their lives, especially in the days to come. He promised to be the truth they would need to anchor their souls during troubled times.

He promised to be their life by giving them courage when they couldn't find the strength to keep going. He made these promises and told them no one can come to the Father except through Him.

They learned that Jesus would send a helper, the Holy Spirit, to live in them, regardless of where they were. When they didn't know what to do next, the Holy Spirit would guide them. When they were afraid, He would comfort them. Jesus promised they could ask for what they needed in His name and receive it.

**THE PROMISES JESUS MADE TO THE DISCIPLES THAT NIGHT ARE TRUE FOR YOU TODAY.**

Trust the Holy Spirit to be your way, leading you through the hardships you're facing. Thank Him for being your unchanging truth, and for being your source of life.

On days when it can be difficult to find your next breath, ask the Holy Spirit to show you the way through your troubles. Trust Him to show you something truthful that you can be thankful for. Give thanks to Him, even if you don't yet know the outcome. Allow Him to be your way, your truth and your life.



## REFLECT:

1. HOW CAN YOU TRUST THE HOLY SPIRIT TO BE YOUR WAY, TRUTH AND LIFE AS YOU FACE TODAY?
2. HAVE YOU TRUSTED JESUS TO LEAD YOU TO THE FATHER?

## PRAY:

*Thank You, Jesus, that when I don't know what's ahead of me, You do. Thank You for being my way to the Father, for showing me the truth, and for being my life. Cause me to trust You, even when life is hard.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



IS JESUS THE ONLY WAY TO GOD?  
Read more about what makes Christianity different.

---

Anne Marie Winz has been a staff member with Cru® for a long time. She enjoys drinking coffee, reading good books and talking with her girlfriends. She's married to the amazing Mark Winz.





JESUS TOLD HIM,  
“I AM THE WAY,  
THE TRUTH,  
AND THE LIFE.  
NO ONE CAN  
COME TO THE  
FATHER EXCEPT  
THROUGH ME”

JOHN 14:5-6, NLT



# DAY 16

MONDAY, DEC. 18

## KEY VERSE

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

— JOHN 15:1-2, NLT



# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 15

After dinner, Jesus and the disciples walked through a vineyard on their way to the Garden of Gethsemane. He said, "I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more."

Describing His relationship with His Father and His followers. Jesus explained how His Father, the master-gardener, cares for Jesus, the Son, who is the vine. He and His father prune the branches. Those who trust the Father stay connected to the vine. Apart from the vine, His followers can do nothing.

**AND THEN JESUS MADE  
AN INCREDIBLE PROMISE.  
HE SAID,  
"IF YOU ABIDE IN ME,  
AND MY WORDS ABIDE IN  
YOU, ASK WHATEVER  
YOU WISH, AND IT WILL  
BE DONE FOR YOU."**

Because the Father loved Jesus, and Jesus loved His followers, they could rest in His love, even in the midst of their chaotic lives. They could best demonstrate their love for Him by keeping His commandments in the same way that Jesus kept His Father's commandments and remained in His love. Jesus said, "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in his love."

His instructions were simple. He told them to love each other the same way He had loved them. Foreshadowing His own death, He told them the greatest love anyone could show

would be to lay down his life for his friends. He called them friends because they trusted Him and followed His instructions. All of this was part of remaining in Him.

He encouraged them to continue loving each other because the world would hate them. Even religious leaders would think that, in the name of God, they were doing the world a service by persecuting the followers of Christ. But Christ's followers were chosen out of the world. They could find peace by remaining in Jesus, the true vine.

Today, in a world that grows increasingly complicated and hostile toward people of faith, Jesus invites you to stay connected to the vine by trusting Him to meet your needs. Like the disciples, you, too, can remain in the vine. Trust Christ to live in you and through you. Love Him with all your heart, soul and mind. Trust Him to love others through you.

You can remind yourself of these truths by reading scripture on a regular basis.

**WHEN CHRIST'S WORDS  
REMAIN IN YOU, THEN YOU  
CAN ALLOW HIS WORDS TO  
CHANGE YOU FROM THE  
INSIDE OUT.**

You can also talk about these truths with your friends and family. As you remain in Jesus, love them the way Jesus loves you.



## REFLECT:

1. HOW CAN YOU REMAIN IN THE VINE AS YOU LIVE YOUR LIFE TODAY?
2. HOW WILL YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE NOT REMAINING IN THE VINE?

## PRAY:

*Thank You, Jesus, for being the true vine. Cause me to abide in You and to allow Your words to abide in me. Produce the fruit of the Spirit in my life. Help me to love others well.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



WHAT IS THE FRUIT THAT JESUS TALKS ABOUT IN JOHN 15?  
Read more about the Holy Spirit's work in our lives to produce fruit.

---

Anne Marie Winz has been a staff member with Cru® for a long time. She enjoys drinking coffee, reading good books and talking with her girlfriends. She's married to the amazing Mark Winz.



# DAY 17

TUESDAY, DEC. 19

## KEY VERSES

“I have told you these things so that you won’t abandon your faith.”

— JOHN 16:1, NLT

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.”

— JOHN 16:13, NLT

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.”

— JOHN 16:33, NLT



## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 16

John chapter 16 completes the last words of Jesus' farewell message, which he had begun in John chapter 13. In His words, Jesus focuses on encouraging his disciples and preparing them for what to expect — both in the coming days with His betrayal, death and resurrection and after He leaves earth to be with the Father in heaven.

Think of having a GPS. You can clearly see where you are going, what to expect, your different options to get there, and how long the route will take. Jesus' message is similar to a GPS for His followers. Jesus did not want them to be in the dark. He tells His disciples that He does not want them to fall away, so He took time to explain to them what to expect. He also told them what's next so they could experience peace during times of trouble.

Jesus also knew that His departure would cause His followers to experience real sadness and deep grief. If you have ever lost a loved one, you know the void that you feel. You know the sadness and grief. You feel the loss when you see that empty chair. You miss all the activities you did together.

Jesus' disciples must have felt similar emotions and heartache. The disciples had lived and traveled with Him. They had seen Him perform great wonders. They loved His teaching, and they experienced His grace, goodness and truth. Jesus called them "friends."

Thank God, He did not leave them in the dark too! He promised them "something better" — the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would come and guide them. Unlike our loved ones who cannot promise a replacement of themselves, Jesus did. And if you have chosen to follow Jesus, the same promise is for you, today, too.

I love the words by C.S. Lewis: "Life with God is no immunity from difficulties but peace in difficulties. Jesus promises us that following Him is not easy. But Jesus promises you His peace through it all and His presence through the Holy Spirit."



## REFLECT:

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES IT MAKE FOR YOU TO KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT,  
LIKE WHEN YOU ARE ATTENDING AN EVENT?

IN WHAT AREAS OF YOUR LIFE DO YOU NEED THE PEACE OF JESUS?

## PRAY:

*Jesus, thank you that you did not leave me in the dark. Thank you that I can fully know what to expect as I desire to follow your ways. Thank you for assuring me peace amidst trouble and please, Lord, help me each day.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



WHO IS THE HOLY SPIRIT AND WHAT DOES HE DO?

Explore more about Jesus' promise about the Holy Spirit here.

---

Gracious Chifamuna serves with Digital Strategies with Cru® in South Africa. She is a widow with four young kids and has started a ministry to help other grieving widows.

# DAY 18

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 20

## KEY VERSE

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me.”

— JOHN 17:20-21, NLT







## TODAY'S READING: JOHN 17

I had all the normal anxiety that comes from meeting your girlfriend's parents, but to make matters worse, our two families were like night and day. My family is small. Hers is huge. Mine spoke English, hers spoke Spanish. From money and religion to everything in between, we were just different.

When God adopts us into His family, we don't just gain a Father. We gain a family. Unfortunately, the first time I showed up to a Bible study at church to meet this family, it was just as terrifying as meeting my now in-laws for the first time.

On the surface, it can look like you have nothing in common with other believers, but it's an illusion.

Every believer on the planet, from every nation, every race, and every culture shares one very important quality. At some point, they recognized their sin and desperate need for a savior. They may be at different points in the journey, but they're all heading in the same direction. They're all trying to look like Jesus. Because of this, there is a unity to be had in the family of God that is unlike any other.

Jesus prayed for his believers to experience this unity. It might be scary, but we can't allow fear to keep us from surrounding ourselves with fellow believers. Christianity cannot thrive in isolation. We need to regularly go to church, attend small group studies, and develop discipleship relationships. We must be vulnerable enough that we allow ourselves to be known by the rest of the family.

But we can only experience it when we dare to show up. Will you?

## REFLECT:

DO YOU HAVE FRIENDS WHO HELP YOU GROW IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD? IF NOT, MAKE A COMMITMENT TO GO TO WHERE OTHER CHRISTIANS ARE TO DEVELOP THOSE RELATIONSHIPS.

## PRAY:

*Dear Lord, I confess that sometimes it is hard for me to reach out and get to know others in the body of Christ. It is easier for me to focus more on the things that separate us than what unites us – Jesus. Help me to recognize the image of Christ in them so we may have unity as we seek to build each other up in Christ. In Jesus' name, amen.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



READ MORE IN THIS ARTICLE ABOUT HOW GOD MADE US TO LIVE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS.

---

Carlos Santiago is a senior writer for FamilyLife® and has written and contributed to numerous articles, e-books, and devotionals. He was also a contributing author to *The Story of Us: A Couples Devotional* and *Drawn Together: A Couples Devotional*. He has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's degree in pastoral counseling. Carlos and his wife, Tanya, live in Orlando, Florida.

# DAY 19

THURSDAY, DEC. 21

## KEY VERSE

“You are a king, then!” said Pilate. Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”

— JOHN 18:37, NIV



# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 18

As we consider the significance of Christmas and the reasons that God sent His Son into this world, we should take into account the explanation of Jesus Himself: "to testify to the truth."

In John 18, Pilate immediately challenges Jesus' words, asking, "What is truth?" Pilate is not so different from our world today. Many seem confused when Christians say that we know the truth. It may be genuine confusion. In the face of the variety of religious or spiritual beliefs in the world, they still don't know why we need Jesus to have a restored relationship with God. Or maybe it's a convenient confusion: which people could use to hide from committing to following Jesus. Regardless of what Pilate's situation was, it didn't stop Jesus from declaring the truth about His identity. Jesus confidently says that those who love truth will listen to Him.

Jesus walked in the confidence and freedom that truth provides, even when that gave His enemies an opportunity to attack Him. In the beginning of chapter 18, Judas saw the opportunity to exploit the proximity he had with Jesus and led a group of soldiers to the place where the Master had met so often with His disciples.

**BUT WHEN THE SOLDIERS ASK ABOUT JESUS OF NAZARETH AND HEAR HIS FIRM AND DIRECT REPLY, THEY FALL TO THE GROUND. JESUS SPEAKS AND THE BETRAYER, TORCHES, LANTERNS AND WEAPONS HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO BOW BEFORE THE TRUTH: "I AM."**

Jesus' confidence is even more evident in contrast to that of one disciple. Peter relies on his sword, even going so far as to rip someone's ear off. And when his safety doesn't seem guaranteed by truth, Peter's answer is denial, "I am not."

As humans, we can understand Peter's fear. The disciple watches as Jesus' unwavering attachment to the truth is making His situation even more dangerous. But what would've happened to us (and to Peter) if Jesus had allowed Himself to be intimidated?

**FOR THOSE WHO DID NOT BELIEVE, HIS TESTIMONY TO THE TRUTH WAS THE REASON TO CONDEMN HIM TO DEATH. BUT HOW COULD HE, TO SAVE HIS OWN LIFE, DENY THE VERY REASON WHY HE WAS BORN? HE CHOSE INSTEAD TO DEFEAT DEATH BY FACING IT.**

Now, those who have believed, who have trusted in Jesus, find a restored relationship with God. He provides new life, which Christians now live to testify to the truth, as He did, even in the face of rejection or danger.





## REFLECT:

WHEN TALKING ABOUT JESUS, DO YOU FEEL TEMPTED TO BE VAGUE BEFORE SOMEONE WHO COULD REJECT YOU?

AS CHRISTMAS APPROACHES, ARE YOU WILLING TO BOLDLY TESTIFY TO THE TRUTH?

WHAT MIGHT HELP YOU GROW IN CONFIDENCE ABOUT THE TRUTH?

## PRAY:

*Lord, You said "I am," and in Your words we can rest, not fearing the rulers of this world. Help us to testify to You, confident that those who love the truth will listen.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



TALKING ABOUT JESUS WITH OTHERS CAN BE CHALLENGING.  
LEARN PRACTICAL WAYS TO MAKE SHARING YOUR FAITH EASIER.

---

Leonardo Marques serves in the Cru's® campus ministry and in communications in Cru Brasil. He and his wife, Carolina met while student leaders at the university and now have been missionaries for 15 years. They are parents of Cléo (9), Elis (7) and Davi (4).

# DAY 20

FRIDAY, DEC. 22

## KEY VERSES

“But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.”

— JOHN 19:33, NIV

“... he protects all his bones, not one of them will be broken.”

— PSALM 34:20, NIV

“We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

— 2 PETER 1:29, NIV



# TODAY'S READING: JOHN 19

Mel Gibson's 2004 movie "The Passion of the Christ" stunned the world. It shocked some, offended others, and deeply moved many.

Each year, at my church's men's retreat, they show the same clip from the film. Jesus is a bloody mess. Lacerations from His whipping cover His body. The hard spikes are punched through His hands and feet. Each blow brings guttural howls of pain. The cross, with our Savior affixed, is hauled upright and, with a thud, dropped in a posthole. His own weight threatens to rip His hands from the nails.

Crucifixion was the worst way to be executed. Once hung, the victims died slowly. As their strength gave out, they struggled to raise their bodies up just to breathe. After a few days, out of kindness, the executioners broke their legs to hasten death.

John 19 records Jesus' trial and crucifixion. In verse 33, we read the curious detail that Jesus didn't need his legs broken because He was already dead. What killed him?

The movie could only depict physical suffering. Deep within His soul, the pure Son of God bore the punishment for the sins of the world. On the cross, God's righteous anger came crashing down on the one person who did not deserve it. The One who had only known a loving connection to His Father experienced stunning, despairing separation from Him. Our sin killed Jesus.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that three hours of darkness descended on the land. Even the weather echoed the injustice of it all.

For us, the cross has become an encouraging and familiar symbol, but in Jesus' time, it was a well-known image of torture. It's easy for us to forget the darkness of that day.

I forget, too, until the men's retreat summons another stunning reminder.

The Latin for "cross" is crux. In English, "crux" means something that is "vital, decisive, a pivotal point." The Cross was the pivotal moment in God's story. It was a dark day but the light was rising, a light that can rise in our hearts too.

**"WE ALSO HAVE THE  
PROPHETIC MESSAGE AS  
SOMETHING COMPLETELY  
RELIABLE, AND YOU WILL  
DO WELL TO PAY ATTENTION  
TO IT, AS TO A LIGHT  
SHINING IN A DARK PLACE,  
UNTIL THE DAY DAWNS AND  
THE MORNING STAR RISES  
IN YOUR HEARTS."**

**- 2 PETER 1:19, NIV**



## REFLECT:

HOW DO THE PROPHETIC VERSES ABOUT THE COMING MESSIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT GIVE YOU CONFIDENCE IN JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOR?

IN THE MIDDLE OF DARKNESS AND TRAGEDY, GOD WAS AT WORK BRINGING LIGHT THAT SHINES IN OUR HEARTS. HOW DOES THIS COMFORT YOU IN YOUR CHALLENGES AND BROKENNESS?

## PRAY:

*Lord, thank You that from the very beginning, You had a plan to redeem us and include us in Your beloved family. You took what is uniquely ours (our sin) and gave us what is uniquely Yours (Your righteousness). May Your unbroken bones remind me that You shine in this dark, broken world. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



**WHY DID JESUS HAVE TO DIE?**

Explore more answers about the crucifixion.

---

During his 36 years on staff with Cru®, Duncan Parlett has been a campus minister, a designer, and, most recently, a Ministry Partner Development coach. He lives in Southern California with his beautiful wife, Kerrie. He loves language, being creative, and playing the bass guitar.



# DAY 21

SATURDAY, DEC. 23

## KEY VERSE



Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, “They have taken the Lord’s body out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”

— JOHN 20:1-2, NLT

# TODAY'S READING:

## JOHN 20

A dentist tells you, "This won't hurt." A mother says to a child, "Eating your carrots will make you strong like Superman." A cad tells a young lady, "I will love you forever." A wife tells her husband, "I'll be ready in 5 minutes" when she still has to shower, dry her hair, get dressed and do her makeup. All daily events in life, and all with the potential to be empty promises. We often don't believe them.

Jesus promised: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of his enemies. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead" (Matthew 17:22-23).

His disciples and followers then see the first part of this prophecy being fulfilled. He is betrayed by one of his disciples, and killed very publicly.

The story continues.

"Early on Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. She ran and found Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. She said, 'They have taken the Lord's body out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!'" (John 20: 1-2).

This announcement made a dark time even darker. Jesus was dead. They saw His brutal crucifixion with their own eyes. And His body was now also gone.

But Jesus said He would rise on the third day. Do the disciples remember that? And if they do, do they think it was an empty promise? If Jesus' resurrection was an empty promise, did that mean all of His other promises were also now empty?

At this point, the disciples still did not fully understand that Jesus is God. But Jesus doesn't

leave them in confusion. John 20:11-18 shows us that He fulfills His promise.

*Mary was standing outside the tomb crying, and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her.*

*"Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him."*

*She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?"*

*She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."*

*"Mary!" Jesus said.*

*She turned to him and cried out, "Rabboni!" (which is Hebrew for "Teacher").*

*"Don't cling to me," Jesus said, "for I haven't yet ascended to the Father. But go find my brothers and tell them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

**MARY MAGDALENE FOUND THE  
DISCIPLES AND TOLD THEM,  
"I HAVE SEEN THE LORD!"**

This Christmas, let us remember that the empty tomb is not an empty promise. Jesus' victorious resurrection is the fulfillment of His promise and the reason why He was born into this earth. Jesus, the Light, burst through the darkness of the grave. The Light has defeated sin and death. Praise God, the Light has come.





PROMISE FULFILLED.

## REFLECT:

DO YOU BELIEVE GOD'S PROMISES UNCONDITIONALLY? IF YOU SAID YES,  
DO YOU LIVE AS IF THEY ARE TRUE?

WHAT PROMISES OF GOD DO YOU STRUGGLE TO BELIEVE?

WHAT ARE THE DARK AREAS OF YOUR LIFE, COMMUNITY, OR COUNTRY WHERE  
YOU NEED JESUS TO SHINE?

## PRAY:

*Dear God, I praise Your Name during this very special time when we celebrate the beginning of Your sacrifice for us here on earth.*

*Thank You so much for coming to earth and for being born in a manger, in order to save us and to fulfill all the promises and prophecies about You. Forgive me for often forgetting Your promises and therefore despairing when things go wrong.*

*Help me to understand that no matter how dark things look, Your Light is also there. Help me to be Your messenger, sharing Your good news of hope and life with others.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



**DID JESUS REALLY RISE FROM THE DEAD?**

Learn more about the evidence for the resurrection here.

---

Elspeth Liebenberg is a South African who has served with CCC (Cru®) for 39 years, 12 of them in Moscow, Russia. She is the widow of Lieb Liebenberg and the mother of Saskia and Emma-Kate, mother-in-law to Dino and Andrew, and grandmother to Phoebe and Inessa. She loves reading and swimming.



# DAY 22

SUNDAY, DEC. 24

## KEY VERSE

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” He said to him, “Feed my lambs ...Tend my sheep ...Feed my sheep.”

— JOHN 21:15-17, ESV



# TODAY'S READING: JOHN 21

Before Jesus' crucifixion, Peter had declared that even if others would abandon Jesus, he would not (Matthew 26:33-35). But Peter failed to prove his love and loyalty to Jesus.

After Jesus's victorious resurrection, we see another interaction between Jesus and Peter in John 21. After breakfast, Jesus singled Peter out and asked him three times, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Maybe this was to remind Peter of the three times he had denied Him (John 18:17, 25-27; Luke 22:54-62). At the same time, in this dialogue, Jesus is restoring Peter even though he failed. Jesus desires Peter's love and then He gives Peter the responsibility to lead and care for people.

**THE QUESTIONS JESUS  
ASKED PETER ARE FOR YOU  
TODAY TOO. DO YOU TRULY  
LOVE CHRIST MORE THAN ALL  
OTHER PEOPLE OR THINGS?**

Through His own life example, Jesus has demonstrated that true love is a personal choice and a gift freely given. It is the giving of oneself to another person for their sake without expectation of return favor. True love is selfless and is directed wholly to the other person for their own good and benefit. Jesus said He came not to be served but to serve as an expression of His love for the people. He, in fact, laid down His life for His enemies (Romans 5:8).

In asking Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these others?" Jesus was challenging Peter's love for Him. The real test of your love for Jesus is your love for others and obedience to His commands (John 14:21).

Serving the Lord by serving the people that He

Serving the Lord by serving the people that He brings your way is true proof of your loving Him. This is authentic evidence that you are indeed His disciple (John 13:35).

**AS FOLLOWERS OF  
JESUS CHRIST, YOU ARE  
CALLED TO LOVE GOD  
WHOLEHEARTEDLY AND  
LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR  
AS YOURSELF BY CARING  
FOR THEM, MINISTERING  
TO THEM, AND DOING  
GOOD TO AND FOR THEM,  
EVEN WHEN THEY HAVE NOT  
ASKED OR DESERVE IT.**

On our own we cannot do these things, so Jesus has given us His Spirit — the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17, 26). When we voluntarily submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will be able to live and love and serve others just as Jesus did.



## REFLECT:

IF JESUS WERE TO ASK YOU IF YOU LOVE HIM, HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

ARE THERE PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE WHO FEEL HARD TO LOVE?

IN WHAT WAYS WOULD YOU LIKE THE HOLY SPIRIT TO HELP YOU LOVE THE PEOPLE THAT GOD BRINGS INTO YOUR LIFE?

## PRAY:

*Lord Jesus, You have shown me love that no one else could. Thank You for forgiving me all my sin and making me a child of God. Help me by the power of the Holy Spirit to show Your love to others by serving them willingly and sacrificially without expecting a return favor from them, just as You did for me.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:



### WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO LOVE LIKE JESUS?

Author Paul Miller speaks with hosts of FamilyLife Today® and unpacks his methods of truly seeing others and acting in ways that matter.

---

Dr. Dickson Obwoya serves as the Africa Region Representative on the Global Prayer Council of Cru®. Dickson is married to Joy, and they have 7 children and 10 grandchildren. They have been on Cru staff since 1991. They served for 14 years in various capacities at the regional office of Cru that covered Southern & Eastern Africa. Dickson gives leadership to the field ministry of Cru in Northern Uganda and also helps to coordinate felt-needs strategies in the country.

# DAY 23

MONDAY, DEC. 25

## KEY VERSES

“And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.”

— REVELATION 22:5, ESV

“You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”

— MATTHEW 5:14-16, NLT





# TODAY'S READING:

## LUKE 2:1-14

Growing up, there were few joys I gravitated towards more than Christmas lights. Every year, December would roll around, and I knew it was a matter of time before our lifeless street was adorned and turned into a green, red, blue, and gold symphony of illumination. My 7-year-old self could hardly contain the excitement.

Looking back, it's no mystery why I marveled at the sparkle.

You can't help but be drawn to light. In the midst of darkness, light is a hopeful promise that there is something radiant, waiting to be found. You can't create darkness where there is light, but you can certainly make light out of darkness. Darkness is always at the mercy of light.

Light can't help but change things. A lightbulb opens up a room, helping you find the earring you thought was lost. Sunlight signals the start of a day, and awakens your body each morning.

**AND ON CHRISTMAS DAY,  
YOU ARE INVITED TO  
CELEBRATE THAT JESUS,  
THE LIGHT OF LIFE,  
OVERCAME NOT  
ONLY THE EXTERNAL  
DARKNESS OF DEATH AND  
SUFFERING, BUT HELPS  
YOU WALK THROUGH THE  
WORLD TODAY.**

As the pillar of light led the Israelites through the desert at night, so Jesus leads you through the darkness of your own despair, pain, uncertainty, and loss. He invites you to cast all

your cares on Him and trust Him with where to step next. And as you walk in the light of Jesus, a wonderfully obvious thing happens — you begin to reflect light more and more

When Jesus teaches that His followers are a city on a hill, I can't help but picture my bright little street on Christmas Eve. The twinkles bring a comforting glow, as they pierce through the night sky. And because of the brightness, others can see my street shining from far away.

Following Christ can have that same effect, because the change Jesus causes in us beams out noticeably. With great hope, you can tell this groaning world that the story doesn't end with darkness. The last book of the Bible reveals the ultimate ending:

**"AND NIGHT WILL BE NO  
MORE. THEY WILL NEED NO  
LIGHT OF LAMP OR SUN,  
FOR THE LORD GOD WILL BE  
THEIR LIGHT, AND THEY WILL  
REIGN FOREVER AND EVER"  
-REVELATION 22:5, ESV**

So, until the day that His presence quite literally lights our path, let's join Him in lighting the path for others.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS!  
THE LIGHT HAS COME.**



## REFLECT:

WHAT IS A PLACE IN YOUR LIFE THAT YOU LONG TO SEE JESUS SHINE LIGHT INTO? HOW COULD YOU SHINE JESUS' LIGHT MORE INTO THE DARKNESS OF THE WORLD?

## PRAY:

*Lord, thank You for Your light. Because of the Word — Jesus in the flesh — I am not alone in my journey. Help me to remember that the same God who spoke light into existence has spoken light over me. Please break into the dark, seemingly impossible places in my life. Help me to remember that You have overcome the darkness. And as I encounter You, help me to be a light for others — always pointing them to Your goodness and truth.*

## A DEEPER DIVE:

THIS HOLIDAY SEASON, IS THERE SOMEONE YOU WANT TO POINT TO JESUS? WOULD YOU LIKE HELP STARTING OR HAVING THAT CONVERSATION?

We have a recommendation for you: GodTools® is a free app by Cru® that can help you bring the hope of Christ to the people in your life, one conversation at a time.

Your neighbors, friends and family benefit by hearing the life-giving gospel and seeing the light of Christ shine out through your actions. We hope you try GodTools and find ways to engage with those around you about the message of Jesus.



USE THIS QR CODE TO LEARN HOW TO TAKE YOUR CONVERSATIONS DEEPER THIS CHRISTMAS SEASON.

---

Michelle LeMaster serves as a journalist for Cru®. As a born and bred lover of cities, Michelle currently resides in New York City with her husband, Seth, and their Goldendoodle, Ruby, who daily reminds her to (literally) stop and smell the roses.





THE LIGHT HAS COME.



© 2023 CRU. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

[HTTPS://WWW.CRU.ORG/](https://www.cru.org/)

This vpdf may be printed and/or photocopied for ministry use. Please contact Cru® for any other permission requests.

Scripture quotations marked “ESV” are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

“ESV,” the “English Standard Version,” the “Global Study Bible,” and the ESV logo are registered trademarks of Crossway, registered in the United States of America. Use of any of these trademarks requires the prior permission of Crossway.

Scripture quotations marked “NIV” are from the Holy Bible, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide. NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION® and NIV® are registered trademarks of Biblica, Inc. Use of either trademark for the offering of goods or services requires the prior written consent of Biblica US, Inc.

Scripture quotations marked “NLT” are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.