



Advent 2021 Devotional

Making *Jesus* Your Solid Foundation:

An Advent Journey Through Luke



What has this year felt like for you? For many, 2021 has been a year of recovery. Others continue to reel from the ripple effects of loss and pain. Wherever you are today, it's likely that you long to move forward.

Forward movement is only possible when your foundation — what you've built your life on — is sure. And for many, the last two years have tested the strength of that foundation.

Advent — the season leading up to Christmas — is a perfect time to reflect on that foundation of your life. What is your life built upon? Or perhaps more precisely, Who is your life built upon?

During Advent, we look forward to celebrating Christ's coming at Christmas.

Because He is both the substance and the object of our faith, He alone makes life structurally sound. He alone is the One we celebrate at Christmas. He is the One we anticipate and the One who brings reason, purpose and hope into our moments of waiting.

We invite you to focus your attention on Jesus Christ during this Advent season. In addition to following along in your PDF copy of the daily devotional, you can refresh your view of Jesus by reading one chapter in the Gospel of Luke every day of December up to Christmas.

Then, on Christmas morning, may the gifts under a tree, carols echoing in your heart and love shared with others express the overflow of an ever-deepening affection for the One who loved you first. He came to rescue you from the power of reigning sin. He's a real person in real history. He's Jesus.



week 1

Day: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Nov. 28 | Day 1

*For to us a child is born,
 to us a son is given;
 and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
 and his name shall be called
 Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
 Of the increase of his government and of peace
 there will be no end,
 on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 to establish it and to uphold it
 with justice and with righteousness
 from this time forth and forevermore.*

*The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.
 (Isaiah 9:6-7, English Standard Version)*

*And the Word became flesh.
 (John 1:14, ESV)*

“When will they get here?” said an eager-eyed 8-year-old. “I can’t stand it any longer.” If you’ve ever waited for out-of-town grandparents to arrive, you understand the urgency of this situation. Seconds feel like minutes, minutes like hours, and so on. Grandparents often arrive bearing gifts and affection, and sometimes they even harbor a secret stash of candy. Children around the globe agree: they’re worth the wait.

The experience of God’s people has always been one of waiting and expectation.

From the very beginning, when Adam and Eve introduced sin into the world and God promised to send a rescuer to save people from the ravaging effects of that sin, the redemption countdown began.

By the time the prophet Isaiah wrote the words in the verses above, God’s people had grown accustomed to waiting. Ever since God had clearly designated Abraham’s family as the line through which He would send a Redeemer, His people had watched for this Messiah, always hoping that His arrival would be right around the corner.

Over centuries, the promise passed through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and David. In dark days, when prophets called God’s people to return to Him and hold on to hope, a flicker of light signaled that the Messiah was not far off. But then, suddenly, after Malachi, God became quiet. Had He given up on these defiant, wayward people? Had they strayed beyond God’s reach?

Today, we have the benefit of hindsight. We know that after 400 years, God broke this silence first by

sending John the Baptist to prepare the way. Then He split the silence wide open with another baby — a baby who wouldn't just patch up a broken world but would restore it completely.

We know about Jesus, the Messiah, and about how the story ends. But knowing about the story isn't enough. We want to know the Author of the story — to build our lives upon a foundation that cannot be shaken.

During this Advent season, you are likely waiting for something: an “all-clear” test result from a doctor, a phone call from an estranged loved one, or an answer to your prayers. As with God's people through the ages, your human experience is also defined by weary waiting.

Isaiah's words were spoken to desperately longing people on the brink of losing hope. They offer you an equal hope in One who not only has already come and gone but who will come again:

Wonderful Counselor

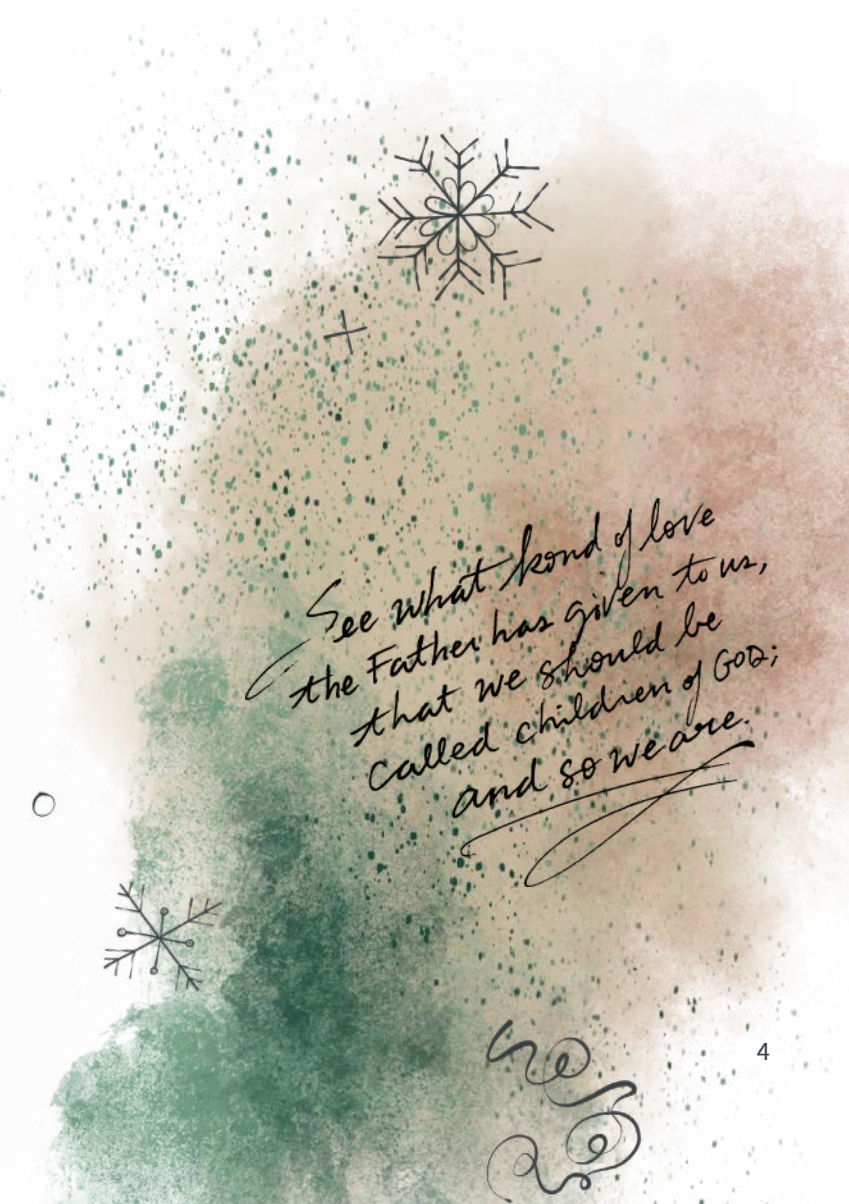
Mighty God

Everlasting Father

Prince of Peace

Now, that's a description of someone truly worth waiting for.

Melissa Long serves as a writer for Cru® and the lead writer/ editor for this devotional series. Originally from Lookout Mountain, Georgia, Melissa appreciates the deep quiet of forested mountains. She currently resides on the edge of a mysterious swamp in Florida with her husband Philip, two lively teenagers and a devoted but slightly deranged cat named Maple.



Nov. 29 | Day 2

*For he grew up before him like a young plant,
 and like a root out of dry ground;
 he had no form or majesty that we should look at
 him,
 and no beauty that we should desire him.
 (Isaiah 53:2, English Standard Version)*

*"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you
 about these things for the churches. I am the root
 and the descendant of David, the bright morning
 star."
 (Revelation 22:16, ESV)*

*Surely he has borne our griefs
 and carried our sorrows;
 yet we esteemed him stricken,
 smitten by God, and afflicted.
 But he was pierced for our transgressions;
 he was crushed for our iniquities;
 upon him was the chastisement that brought us
 peace,
 and with his wounds we are healed.
 (Isaiah 53:4-5, ESV)*

*When he was reviled, he did not revile in return;
 when he suffered, he did not threaten, but
 continued entrusting himself to him who judges
 justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on*

*the tree, that we might die to sin and live to
 righteousness. By his wounds you have been
 healed.
 (1 Peter 2:23-25, ESV)*

“Why does Jesus always have to be so... handsome?”
 my husband asked as we watched a scene from
 Jesus’ life play out on the TV screen. “I mean, what’s
 with the white teeth, luscious locks and bulging
 biceps?”

Along with my husband, you may wonder at the way
 Jesus is often portrayed by Hollywood — especially
 since Scripture makes it pretty clear that crowds
 didn’t gather by the thousands to gawk at Jesus’
 designer tunics and shapely nose.

Shakespeare’s insight, “All that glitters is not gold,”
 wisely hints at the danger of pursuing what appears
 attractive. But as humans, we’re mesmerized — and
 then often disappointed — by empty promises
 offered in flashy packaging.

Isaiah unwrapped the reality of what God’s Messiah
 would experience and what He would be like:
 unmajestic, stricken, smitten, afflicted, pierced,
 crushed, reviled, not especially attractive. Whoever
 this Messiah would be, He’d be recognized not as a

charming hero but as a suffering servant — maybe even an outcast.

Many people, including both members of the religious elite and commoners, missed the ways Jesus lined up with these prophetic descriptions of the Messiah. Perhaps they expected someone who looked and behaved more like a king. Or maybe they wanted someone who would play by their rules and bring the kind of political order that wouldn't interrupt the status quo. As the prophet predicted, they wouldn't simply find Him undesirable. They would reject Him completely.

While these prophecies point directly to Christ and His coming in history, they can also prompt present-day reflection. What keeps you from desiring and pursuing Jesus?

As you make your way through the Gospel of Luke this December, may your desire for Christ grow. May you see through the superficial “glitter” that distracts you as you delight in the One who offers His wounds for your healing.

He may not have been much to look at when He came the first time, but you can be sure that meeting the “bright and morning star” in the flesh one day will be more breathtaking than you could ever imagine.

Pray and Respond

Jesus, most days, I'm distracted from what really matters — sometimes by superficial things and other times by things that feel weighty. Show me the areas in my life where I'm satisfied with the status quo, and help me desire not only You but also the ways You wish to change me from the inside out.

Look at more examples of how the prophet Isaiah's predictions were fulfilled in Jesus hundreds of years after they were made:

Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23

Isaiah 9:6 and Luke 2:11-12

Isaiah 42:3 and Matthew 12:20

Isaiah 53:9 and Matthew 27:57-60

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Nov. 30 | Day 3

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught.

(Luke 1:1-4, New International Version)

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (John 20:30-31, English Standard Version)

Why is it that family stories so often grow into unchecked tall tales?



My family boasts of a 12-fingered great-great-grandmother who played the piano like Mozart. There's also a tale of a mother whose baby was

snatched out of her arms in the Wild West. According to my family lore, though the child was safely returned in exchange for food, the mother caught the first train out of Nebraska and never looked back. These stories help us feel connected to a shared past, but it's difficult to know what's fact and what's fiction — because nobody took the time to write the real history down.

In the introduction to his account of Jesus' earthly ministry, Luke states his reasons for writing. He wants to give Theophilus, who is likely a Gentile Christian, a reliable record of everything that serves as the foundation for his faith. Because of Luke's care, many of the particulars of Christ's birth, life and earthly ministry are recorded in great detail. Read the other three Gospels — Matthew, Mark and John — and you'll notice significant overlap with Luke's account. These accounts are a vital part of our spiritual "family history."

Because Luke took the time and effort to write down everything he learned from the apostle Paul and other eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life, even now, 2,000 years later, we can be certain that these stories are reliable accounts of real people and actual events. And what Luke may have only intended for Theophilus, you have access to today. Thousand-year-old prophecies fulfilled and eyewitness accounts of Jesus’ actions and teachings — all investigated by a careful student — serve us well.

And unlike your odd family stories passed down through the generations, these are stories you can take to the bank. They’re written “so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

Join us in meeting Jesus again — or for the first time — as you read through the Book of Luke, one chapter a day, starting tomorrow and ending on Christmas Eve. You won’t be disappointed with what Luke wrote down for you.

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Learn more about the history and reliability of the Bible [here](#) .

Day 4

DEC

1

LUKE

But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John. He will be a joy and delight to you, and many will rejoice because of his birth.”
 (Luke 1:13-14, New International Version)

Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 3:1, English Standard Version)

Read: Luke 1

By the time of the events in Luke 1, God’s people had been waiting for a message from Him for over 400 difficult years. The final words the Lord spoke to them in Malachi were full of warning — but also came with a promise of the Messiah to come. This promise, as well as stories of God’s faithfulness, gave the people hope in their waiting. The Messiah would come in an unexpected way, but before He arrived, someone else would come (Malachi 3:1).

Zechariah and Elizabeth had prayed for a child for many years. Finally, confirmation came that

God had heard their prayer. But in their waiting, Zechariah grew weary. He allowed circumstances to distract him from God’s promise.

But Zechariah’s lack of patience did not stop the Lord from fulfilling His promise. God provided for the couple in a way they did not expect by blessing them with the great honor of becoming an integral part of His redemptive plan. Their son, John, would make way for and help prepare people’s hearts for the Messiah’s arrival.

As much as I would love to relate to Mary and her joyful, faith-filled response to the angel in Luke 1:38, I often lean more toward Zechariah’s response of unbelief. Cynicism steals my belief that God desires good things for me as I wait. Instead of waiting with joyful expectancy, I can allow doubt to rob my joy and my ability to receive the good that the Lord is offering.

The coming of the Messiah invites you to place your hope and trust in the Lord because He is good and faithful. He may not always answer in the way you prefer, but you can be sure that He hears and answers your prayers in ways that ultimately work together for your good and His glory.

Reflect and Pray

In seasons of waiting, what misconceptions of God keep you from believing that He's still working in the world and in you?

What do you know about God that allows you to wait on Him well?

Ask the Lord to help you meditate on these truths and strengthen you.

Brandie Alvarez was born and raised in Southern California. She currently works with the ministry of Destino®, a Christ-centered movement aimed to empower and raise up a generation of Hispanic and Latino students. She enjoys traveling, finding new coffee shops and going to the beach.



Wonderful Counselor
Mighty God
Everlasting PRINCE
FATHER OF PEACE



Day 5

DEC

2

LUKE

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”
(Luke 2:10-14, New International Version)

**Come, thou long-expected Jesus, born to set thy people free;
from our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in thee.**

Israel’s strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
(“Come Thou Long Expected Jesus,” by Charles Wesley)

Read: Luke 2

In Luke 2, the angels don’t merely announce the birth of Jesus. They trumpet it!

The Book of Psalms shows us how, like the angels in Luke 2, people expressed themselves musically in Old Testament times. They sang worship songs to God. They played instruments and danced in worship.

In Psalm 98:1 (NIV), the Psalmist says, “Sing to the LORD a new song.” Participation is not limited to professional musicians; everyone is invited to praise God through music.

With the invitation to “Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp!” (Psalm 150:3, English Standard Version), you can imagine a dynamic variety of musical expressions. The horn’s blast pierced the air, calling others far and wide to join a chorus of worship. The soothing lullabies of the harp touched the tender places of the human heart. Cradled in the arm of an amateur, the lyre provided a casual tune for friends, family and neighbors.

The Psalms also mention drums, tambourines and dancing, which reveals that rhythm is just as valuable as melody and, more importantly, that God designed people — in His image — to express their worship audibly, creatively and joyfully.

As the angel declared to the shepherds, Jesus' arrival is good news!

After years of waiting for the Messiah to come, God fulfilled His promise, and it was “good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” You are part of “all the people.” When the angels announced Jesus' birth to the shepherds, they were announcing it to you as well. What joy! This is what you've been waiting for — Jesus, God with us, the longing of every human heart.

Reflect and Pray

As you contemplate the lyrics to today's hymn, uncurl your hands, and unclench your jaw. Exhale your worries and your striving and allow God's love to envelop you. Try dusting off an old instrument. Press your fingers into keys or strings and let the sound wash over you. Warm up your vocal cords and feel the reverberations in your chest as you sing.

Dance.

Smile.

Clap.

Waking up your human expression can revive the way God designed you to worship Him. With a genuine heart, praise God for His faithfulness to keep His promises. Thank Him that the longings of your heart can be satisfied in Jesus.

Keri Armentrout is the author of “Like Jesus: Following God in the Digital Age.” She and her husband, Karl, have served with the campus ministry of Cru® for 20 years.

Day 6

DEC

3

LUKE

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

(Luke 3:15-17, English Standard Version)

Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep."

(John 10:22-26, New International Version)

Read: Luke 3

Call out, "Getachew!" in a random crowd in Ethiopia, and chances are that many heads will turn your way. Like Jones or Smith in the United States, Getachew is a common last name in Ethiopia.

A few years ago, my brother, Philip, waited in a busy airport in Nairobi, Kenya, for an Ethiopian delegate to arrive. He held a sign with the name "Getachew" written on it.

"Abraham Getachew?" Philip inquired of the first gentleman who responded to the placard in his hands.

Moments later, the two men were hurtling down a busy road, pleased at the successful connection and happy to have avoided the evening traffic. The light atmosphere turned heavy as Philip answered an incoming phone call. "Where are you?" a displeased voice asked. "Getachew has been waiting for you at the airport for half an hour!" Recognizing his mistake, Philip looked wearily at his passenger and replied, "It seems I got the wrong Getachew!"

The ultimate case of identity confusion took place in the New Testament. Because he taught and

baptized them, people often mistook John the Baptist for the promised Messiah — and vice versa (see Matthew 16:13-16). But John was very clear that, while he baptized with water, the Messiah who was coming would baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:19-28).

Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit and filled with the Holy Spirit from birth (Luke 1:35). When He was baptized with water, the heavens opened to remove all doubt that He was the Messiah, the One that God’s people had been waiting for. Christ would immerse, cleanse and empower in the Holy Spirit all who received Him.

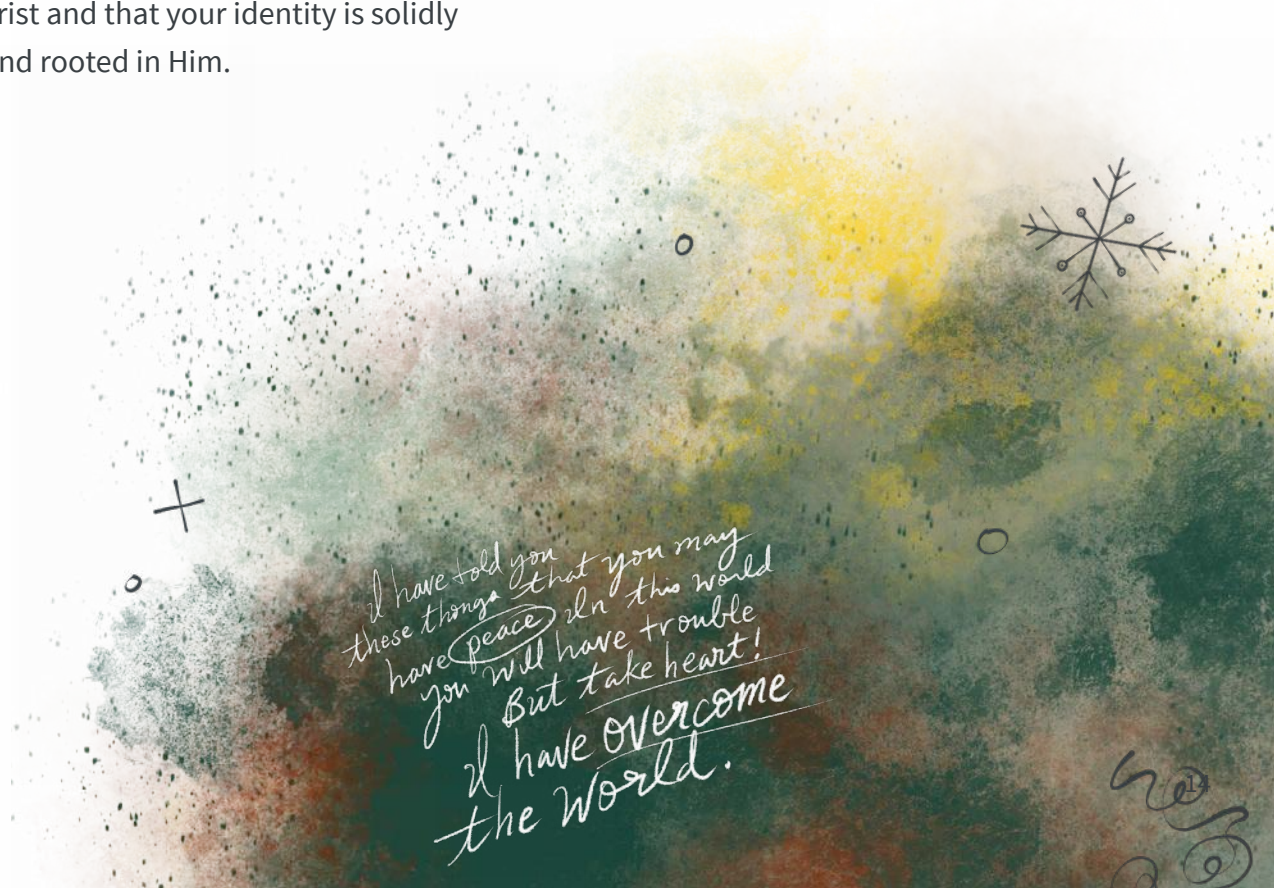
Christmas reminds us that Christ the Messiah has come! By turning from sin and receiving Him, you too can experience the baptism of the Holy Spirit, which Christ gives. The Holy Spirit guarantees that you belong to Christ and that your identity is solidly defined by Him and rooted in Him.

Reflect

How do you notice the Holy Spirit working in your life today?

For more on the Holy Spirit’s work in the lives of those who trust Christ for their salvation, take a look at [this resource](#).

Grace Balusi is a missionary from Kenya who is currently serving in Lilongwe, Malawi, with her husband Robert and their three children. She enjoys working with people in Human Resources and Leadership Development with Life Ministry Malawi. Grace loves reading, writing and anything chocolate.



Day 7

DEC

4

LUKE

*And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry.
(Luke 4:1-2, English Standard Version)*

*With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.
(Psalm 119:10-11, ESV)*

*No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.
(Romans 4:20-21, ESV)*

Read: Luke 4

In Luke 3, Jesus experienced a significant highlight: His baptism and the affirmation of His Father. This poignant moment could have launched Him directly into public ministry. Instead, in Luke 4, we find the Spirit leading Him away from crowds into the wilderness for 40 days of fasting and preparation.

While it takes us only a moment to read these words, Jesus spent more than a month living them out. To compound the challenge of this pause in momentum, He had already waited 30 years to begin His public ministry.

The devil, knowing Jesus' ultimate objective of salvation, came while Jesus was weak and hungry to tempt Him to disobey God.

In times when I sense God asking me to pause, my vision of the big picture can grow blurry. I can become easily frustrated when I experience delay, and I can be tempted to doubt what I am waiting for and why.

I once stood in a checkout line, holding an item I had specifically driven to the store to buy. As the line moved slowly, I began doubting the purchase. Did I really want to spend this much money? Did I really need the item? Uncertainty flooded my brain as I inched closer to the cashier. If a short period of waiting could throw my carefully made decision into question, how much more must Jesus have doubted His own purpose when weak with fasting and tempted by Satan to take the easy way out?

But Jesus knew that Satan's easy way was not God's way, and He was prepared. He responded to each of the enemy's lies with truth from Scripture that helped Him choose obedience to God's clear purpose for Him.

This extended period of wilderness testing wouldn't be the last time He'd face and withstand gut-wrenching temptation. With each day of His earthly ministry, Jesus inched closer to the cross, where the temptation to find a way out would be a matter of life and death — for Him and us.

When you grow weary in your waiting, you can turn to Scripture for confidence in God's purposes. As you seek to walk in obedience, your steady footing is found not in your own strength but in Jesus' unwavering perseverance on your behalf.

Reflect

In what ways are you currently tempted to take the easy way out or to doubt while you are in the middle of waiting?

What passage of Scripture can you cling to for confidence to wait on God without wavering in obedience?

Samantha Barnes works with Cru® at the University of Arkansas. When she's not hanging out with college students or cheering for the Razorbacks, she and her husband, Eric, enjoy taking their son and their border collie on outdoor adventures.



Day: 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

Day 8

DEC

5

LUKE

And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

(Luke 5:31-32, English Standard Version)

For he satisfies the longing soul, and the hungry soul he fills with good things.

(Psalm 107:9, ESV)

Read: Luke 5

My fiancé and his parents watched expectantly as I opened my beautifully wrapped Christmas gift. Inside, I discovered a faded, tattered soap resembling Santa Claus. Puzzled, I looked at my fiancé for a clue about how to respond. His crooked smile and crinkled eyes drew me into the family joke — a gift wrapped repeatedly year after year and passed around among family members. It communicated acceptance and welcome, which was the exact opposite of what it seemed to say at first.

Much of what the Gospels tell us about the early years of Jesus’ ministry reveals His upside-down kingdom. From birth to death, Jesus didn’t fit the image of what people thought of as a Messiah. In fact, He often did the exact opposite of what was expected.

In Luke 5, that pattern was evident in the events and Jesus’ conversations with those around Him: He instructed Peter, James and John to cast their nets on “the other side” at a time when fish didn’t normally bite.

- He reached out to touch a leprous man, which was forbidden by the Jewish ceremonial law.
- He withdrew from the acclaim of the crowds.
- He offered forgiveness of sin to a paralyzed man before healing him of his physical distress and limitations.
- He called Levi, a loathed tax collector, to become one of His followers.
- He accompanied Levi to a great feast in his home, to which other tax collectors were invited.

Everything Jesus did to introduce His kingdom was unexpected. People responded eagerly when He performed miracles. But the physical healings give a picture of a deeper purpose: more than meeting the physical needs of people, He was concerned for the needs of their souls.

When criticized by the religious leaders for hanging out with “sinners,” His reply disclosed the real reason for His coming to earth: to save people who

are soul-sick and who acknowledge their need for a savior (Luke 5:31).

The author of Psalm 63 speaks about this soul-sickness as a thirst for God “in a dry and weary land where there is no water” (v. 1). Once he meets God in His sanctuary, the Psalmist affirms that his soul is satisfied (v. 5).

Entering Jesus’ kingdom means letting go of your preconceived ideas of becoming good enough to become part of God’s family and acknowledging your need for a savior. Only then can He heal the soul-sickness that separates you from a relationship with Him.

In His upside-down kingdom, you are welcomed and accepted as part of His family, not because you deserve it but because you recognize your need and ask for His healing.

Janet Beal has been a Cru® staff member for almost 60 years, serving most of that time in Latin America. She is currently part of the leadership development and human resources team for the region. She delights in mentoring young women leaders, hanging out with her family, cross-stitching and reading voraciously.



Day 9

DEC

6

LUKE

“But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.”
(Luke 6:27-31, New International Version)

See, I am doing a new thing!

Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?

*I am making a way in the wilderness
 and streams in the wasteland.*

(Isaiah 43:19, NIV)

Read: Luke 6

The human will is a powerful force. Some people can be motivated to put down 26.2 miles in a marathon, making the sacrifices needed in training to support their bodies with nutrition, rest and recovery. But the human will can also be pushed in a different direction. Because your will is impacted by sin, you won't always choose to respond with lovingkindness when you experience pain from and friction with others.

When I was five years old, Toni was my very first best friend. She and I were like two peas in a pod when we got along, but we could fight like cats and dogs when we didn't!

One minute, we'd be dancing together near the playground, and the next minute we'd be fighting, often over the silliest things. One time, I almost threw my jelly shoe at her during a squabble, but a teacher got to me first.

While the shoe didn't fly that day, I was learning small lessons early on about how to respond when someone hurt me. My human will wanted to fight. And without the restraint of wiser adults, my best friend and I would have gone at it.

In Luke 6:27-31, Jesus speaks to those who desire to listen, providing guidance for how to handle relational conflicts — especially with people who don't have good intentions for you. In verses 27-28, He teaches, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

Saying these words is easier than doing them. But that's the blessing of the gospel: God invites you to

lean into His power. He supernaturally helps you participate in the restoration of your relationships in how you respond when others treat you unkindly.

The hurtful ways people often treat each other reveal how sin deeply permeates the world. Our remedy is the Savior, Immanuel, “God with us.” Jesus came to the earth to redeem and restore our relationships: how people connect personally with God and with one another.

The time you spend connecting with God during Advent can help you recognize the longing you continue to hold in your heart for His return. As you wait on Him, Jesus can show you how to treat others with kindness and respect — the way you desire to be treated too.

Pray and Reflect

As you long for restored relationships, how does Jesus show you the way to be a redemptive player in His plan to make all things new?

Ask God to help you see the relationships in your life that need His healing touch of restoration and reconciliation. Trust Him for the faith to take your next steps forward.

Melody Copenny serves as an editor-in-chief and journalist with Cru®. She’s an Atlanta, Georgia, native and University of Georgia graduate with a bachelor’s degree in magazine journalism. She enjoys the intersection of creativity, theology and popular culture in her writing projects.



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Day 10

DEC

7

LUKE

As he drew near to the gate of the town, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, and a considerable crowd from the town was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." Then he came up and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. (Luke 7:12-15, English Standard Version, emphasis added)

*"Your Father knows what you need before you ask him."
(Matthew 6:8, ESV)*

*When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things."
(Mark 6:34, ESV)*

Read: Luke 7

If you've lived for very long, you've likely experienced a traumatic moment, when time seems to slow down as your heart is gripped with grief or

worry. You realize that you're holding your breath, and you have to remind yourself to inhale and exhale. Only when your new reality sinks in do you allow yourself to weep.

As a human living in a fallen world, you're familiar with tragedy. Unexpected illness, broken relationships or the loss of one you love will remind you how vulnerable you are. This is the state in which the Lord finds a grieving mother in Luke 7 as she walks in the procession of her only son's funeral.

While anyone today can sympathize with the agony of losing a child, in Jesus' time, this woman could anticipate further suffering in the aftermath of her loss. As a widow who was now also childless, she had no one left to provide for her needs. Not only was her family gone, but so was her assurance that tomorrow she'd have a home and food.

But as we see time and again in the life of Jesus, He is moved with compassion in response to suffering. He sees a desperate soul, and He acts. After comforting the mother, Jesus crosses sacred religious barriers by approaching the dead stranger. And then He raises him to life.

This chapter is full of examples of a compassionate Lord who grants real people exactly what they need when they need it. In the preceding passage, Jesus heals the servant of a Roman leader who humbly asks for mercy (Luke 7:1-10); in the passage immediately following, John the Baptist needs reassurance of his faith in Christ, and Jesus sends strengthening words (Luke 7:18-35).

And at the end of the chapter, a sinful woman washes Jesus' feet with her tears and anoints them with her prized perfume. All the while, an indignant Pharisee named Simon looks on in self-important disapproval (Luke 7:36-50). Jesus forgives the woman's sins, acknowledging her faith and love. But more than that, He also lovingly confronts Simon.

In "**The Jesus Storybook Bible**," Sally Lloyd Jones paraphrases what Jesus says to Simon: "You look down on this woman because you don't look up to God. She is sinful on the outside — but you are sinful on the inside" (p. 285). It can be tempting to feel, in reading through the New Testament, that Jesus loves the "sinners" and is simply frustrated with the religious elite. But Jesus gives the Pharisees what they need too: a call to humility and the truth that they need God's mercy as desperately as anyone else.

So, in those moments when the world feels like it has stopped spinning, no matter who you are, you can look to God, and He will see you and lovingly give you just what you need.

Reflect and Pray

Have you experienced a "world-stopping" moment lately? Or are you in a place where life is good — and maybe it's harder to see that God is the One meeting your daily needs? Whatever the case, pray that the God of compassion would help you connect with His merciful heart and open your eyes to the good gifts He is pleased to give.

Rebecca Kelsall has a B.A. in multimedia journalism and works for Cru telling stories of all the great things God does. Originally from New Mexico, she lives in Saint Cloud, Florida, with her New-Englander husband and their dachshund-beagle, Belle. Her hobbies include reading, writing fiction and spoiling her 10 nieces and nephews.

Day 11

DEC

8

LUKE

One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and set out. As they sailed, he fell asleep. A squall came down on the lake, so that the boat was being swamped, and they were in great danger.

The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!”

He got up and rebuked the wind and the raging waters; the storm subsided, and all was calm. “Where is your faith?” he asked his disciples.

In fear and amazement they asked one another, “Who is this? He commands even the winds and the water, and they obey him.” (Luke 8:22-25, New International Version)

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20, NIV)

Watch: The Story I'll Tell - Maverick City Music

Read: Luke 8

“Master, Master, we are perishing!”

Theirs was a cry of survival in the middle of an extraordinary storm. These men knew the sea. Many had made their living fishing on this lake, so a storm that elicited a response of such terror must have been a powerful one.

Jesus had led them into this storm, and now He was asleep? I’d be yelling at Him to wake up too. These disciples had given up everything to follow Him. They must have trusted Him. But when the storm threatened their lives, questions and fear set in.

Yet Jesus’ response to His disciples spoke both to their fear and to His power. He wanted them to know that He had power over the storm. But perhaps more importantly, they needed to experience His presence with them in the storm. Even when they thought death was imminent, they were not alone.

“Where is your faith?” Jesus asked in the hush of a quieted squall.

He was asking, “Is your faith rooted in your circumstances or rooted in Me?” He was there all along, and He was the one who told them to get in the boat. After all they had experienced while following Jesus, they still did not fully comprehend

who He was and what it meant to follow Him. They didn't know that the presence of Jesus in their lives changed everything.

As with the disciples, life circumstances may bring your deepest fears and questions about Jesus to the surface. "Where is your faith?" you may sense the Holy Spirit asking. "Don't you know who is with you in the most brutal storms of your life?"

I've wrestled with this question when sinking under the weight of a terrifying tragedy. Eight years ago, my husband and I buried two newborn daughters, just 14 months apart from one another. The oppressive darkness of death, the grief over my children and the panic that I would never experience the joy of motherhood threatened to paralyze me. How could Jesus possibly redeem this broken part of my story?

Throughout that darkest night of my soul, Jesus reminded me that He was not only right beside me, but He held power over death itself. He knew the number of hours both of my daughters would live outside of my womb (Psalm 139:16). And because Jesus rose from the dead, I am joyfully confident that I will see my girls again.

Jesus has not left your side. He is neither surprised by the storms you encounter nor put off by the questions your suffering has brought to the surface.

How will you trust the God who is with you in the storms of your life?

Pray and Reflect

Thank God that He is with you in the darkest nights of the soul, even when you can't feel His presence.

How can knowing that Jesus, who holds power over all of life and death, is with you help you look at your circumstances differently?

Lindsey Dennis is a staff member with the campus ministry of Cru®, serving students who intern at Walt Disney World. She is a wife and mother and loves to write and speak. You can read about her journey with Jesus through tragedy in "Buried Dreams: From Devastating Loss to Unimaginable Joy."

Day 12

DEC

9

LUKE

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”
(Luke 9:24, New International Version)

Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (John 20:29, NIV)

Read: Luke 9

Everything costs something.

Friendships cost time. Education costs money and effort. Children demand everything: money, time, emotional energy and sleep. So why do you stretch yourself? You sacrifice because you believe the reward is worth the cost.

Friendships give meaning to your life and help you understand yourself. Education brings financial stability and fulfilling work. Children reward you too; they bring pleasure throughout your life. You sacrifice because you recognize the reward is worth the sacrifice.

But why would you risk your life for Jesus? Why jeopardize your personal priorities and dreams to “take up your cross” and “lose your life?” You risk

because you are convinced the reward is worth the cost.

Jesus spoke about both the cost and the reward when He said, “Whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

So you have to ask, “What do I lose and what do I gain from following Jesus?”

Jesus predicted that one area of loss will involve your reputation. As you follow Jesus, you will likely suffer rejection from some of those you love. But the reward will be simply astonishing. The apostle Paul echoes the prophet Isaiah when he says, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, New Living Translation).

Peter, James and John caught a glimpse of Jesus’ future glorious kingdom when He revealed His splendor before their very eyes. His face was changed and His clothing became as bright as a flash of lightning (Luke 9:29, 32, NIV). For a moment, Jesus allowed them to see beyond normal human perception to what “no eye has seen”: His glory.

Are there clues that point to this unimaginable reward for you? Perhaps you need only to look at how Jesus served others during His earthly ministry to get a sense of what He offers. He fed those who had no means of feeding themselves. He healed people of diseases and demon possession. He welcomed children, who had no power or influence. He sought out the lowly, forgotten and despised. He judged fairly.

And He taught that His earthly ministry was just a foretaste of the ultimate restoration He came to set in motion.

In John 20:29, Jesus promised that those who have not seen Him and yet believe will be blessed.

Trusting that God always delivers on His promises, can you safely say that He is worth your life?

Jane Fox works with Bridges International™, welcoming international students at Kansas State University and introducing them to Jesus Christ. She also serves with the National Bridges Innovation Team.



Day 13

DEC

10

LUKE

But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.” (Luke 10:41-42, English Standard Version)

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4, ESV)

Read: Luke 10

Have you ever felt distracted or overwhelmed by having too much to do? Many people have, which is why the story of Mary and Martha is so relatable (see verses 38-42 for the full context).

Our busy culture says that you should be an expert multitasker: get good grades in school, spend time with your family, find a hobby, go to church, keep a clean house and much more. But in God’s kingdom, it’s not about doing many things; instead, one thing is best. Mary understands this. While her sister runs around cleaning, cooking and preparing, Mary sits at Jesus’ feet. She listens to Him, honors Him and soaks up everything He has to say.

Preparing for a party looks like cleaning and decorating. And all of that work can distract you from the joy of simply being present with your friends. But preparing for Jesus looks like sitting in His presence and learning from Him. It’s a different kind of preparation that still requires intentional effort and discipline. But the focus is not on what you do to keep busy or how you can look like a good Christian; it’s simply about being with Jesus.

Mary and Martha waited on the Lord in different ways. One was focused on doing and one was focused on being. Jesus tells the sisters that Mary chose the better option by sitting at His feet and listening to Him teach.

What does it look like for you to wait on Jesus?

In the Psalms, David describes how he waited upon the Lord. He wrote, “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple” (Psalm 27:4, ESV). To gaze upon the beauty of the Lord is to focus on His goodness, celebrate His faithfulness, worship Him for who He is and continue to learn more about Him. This

waiting is not about doing things for Jesus or to impress others. It's about enjoying your relationship with Jesus. You can do this by reading the Bible, worshiping God through music, enjoying His creation and talking to Him in prayer.

Reflect and Pray

What distracts you from focusing on Jesus?

What needs to change in how you wait on Jesus?
Are you too busy "doing" to spend time in His presence?

What would help you make the changes you need?

Jesus, I know that being with You is the most important thing. Help me to not get caught up in busyness that distracts me from my relationship with You. Teach me, instead, to sit at Your feet to worship You and learn from You. Thank You that You have already accomplished all of the work necessary for me to have a relationship with You. Show me what it looks like to prepare well for You.

Kailene Lewis is a Cru® staff member in Indianapolis, Indiana. She was involved with Cru as a student at Boise State University, served for a year in Moscow, Russia, and now serves college students as part of the Indy Metro team. One of her favorite parts about serving with Cru is coming alongside students as they grow in their faith. She also enjoys the opportunity to travel and experience different cultures.

Day 14

DEC

11

LUKE

*And he said to them, “When you pray, say:
“Father, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come.”
(Luke 11:2, English Standard Version)*

*and on earth and under the earth, and every
tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the
glory of God the Father.*

Read: Luke 11

When Jesus came to earth, He preached the good news that the kingdom of God was at hand. When He entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, He presented Himself as the ruler of that kingdom. But He was rejected by the Jewish leaders and condemned to death by the Roman governor. After this rejection, Jesus completed His redemptive work. Hebrews 10:12-13 (ESV) tells us, “But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, and since then has been waiting until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.” The apostle Paul described this another way in Philippians 2:8-11 (ESV):

And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven

As these verses state, Jesus is coming again. And He will not be refused this time. As conquering king, He is coming in all His power and glory to establish the kingdom of God.

Then everyone will know that He is the king of the universe and will acknowledge that fact publicly in submission to His authority.

We wait and long for His glorious return — for His kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Lynn Maynard is a lawyer who works with Faith and Law Around the Globe® (FLAG), the Cru® outreach to legal professionals around the world. Before joining Cru, she served in the Navy JAG Corps for almost six years, practiced criminal defense and family law for 10 years, then went to Dallas Seminary to earn a Th.M. She has been a Cru staff member for over 20 years.



Day: 15 16 17 18 19 20 21

Day 15

DEC

12

LUKE

“And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.”

(Luke 12:29-31, English Standard Version)

And he said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!”

(Luke 12:22-24, ESV)

Read: Luke 12

In the Christmas movie “Jingle All the Way,” two fathers of young sons experience desperate holiday circumstances. Both are in hot pursuit of the popular toy of the moment. The first, who is wealthy enough to buy the prize, races from store to store, battling crowds, only to find that the toy is sold out. The second doesn’t have enough money to buy the toy. He schemes and plots ways to steal

the robot to delight his son on Christmas morning. Each man, in his urgency, completely neglects the most important thing: his family.

Where do you see yourself in this chaotic holiday scene? Perhaps you have plenty but feel anxious about the best use of your wealth. Or maybe you’re on the opposite side, without access to the good things you dream of that would make life better. Either way, persistent Christmas marketing just adds to the stress of the season.

And yet the time leading up to Christmas is a perfect time to examine your foundation — where you’re investing your time, energy and resources and why. It’s a time to recalibrate, like consulting a GPS navigation device to show you where you’ve strayed off course.

In Luke 12, Jesus invites us to reorient by focusing on our relationship with Him. Ravens, by their God-given instinct, look for nesting materials, for food, and for shelter. And they are fed. Lilies send down roots, drink water and spread open to the sunshine. And they are beautiful. They function as God designed. Their natural relationship with their Creator is one of dependence, peace and growth. How much relief might our movie heroes have

experienced if they had realized that they have a heavenly Father who cares deeply for the small details of life that really matter?

What “most important thing” might you be neglecting in your busyness or worry?

Reflect

“For all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things will be added to you” (Luke 12:30-31, ESV). What is one area of your life where you sense God inviting you to “seek His kingdom” and rest in Him during this Advent season?

Dan Ryder works with Cru® in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He and his wife, Andrea, have three children. They enjoy watching movies, having friends over for meals and playing with their two French bulldogs.



Day 16

DEC

13

LUKE

*“Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”
(Luke 13:3, English Standard Version)*

*“Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”
(Acts 3:19-20, ESV)*

*“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. **As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.** I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”
(John 15:1-5, ESV)*

Today's Reading: Luke 13

Jesus taught that a life of repentance is not optional, but necessary if you want to experience the abundant life He promises not only in eternity to come but here on earth as well. A life of repentance

begins when you first confess your need for Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but it continues on as an important part of your relationship with Him.

When you trust Him for your salvation, Jesus is with you. His Word shows you what it looks like to connect to Him, and His Spirit guides and convicts you in that process. When you mess up, He doesn't condemn you or get angry. Instead, He lovingly calls you to turn away from your sin and move toward Him.

Sometimes, it may feel difficult or even painful to repent. It often requires surrendering things that seem satisfying in the moment. You may instinctively withhold forgiveness from someone who hurt you or indulgently pursue an intimate relationship outside of marriage because these things feel right at the time. Though it may feel like a loss to give things up, submitting in obedience to God's Word frees you from guilt and shame. Likewise, it brings joy as you experience the reality that obedience pleases God and is in your best interest.

Your motivation to repent is bound up in your relationship with Jesus. The sooner you choose to repent, the sooner Jesus will free you from guilt and shame. Then you can enjoy His loving forgiveness, which brings peace and joy.

When you abide in Christ — when He is the place you go for comfort — you will begin to want to repent often. You'll long for deeper fellowship with Him, which is your ultimate source of peace, joy and purpose.

Pray and Reflect

In what area of your life is Christ urging you to turn away from sin and move toward Him so that you can live an abundant life in fellowship with Him?

Heavenly Father, thank You for nudging me to repent so that I can turn from my sin and be forgiven. Thank You for reminding me that my greatest peace and joy come from abiding in You, not from going my own way. Today I repent of _____. Thank You for forgiving me when I have failed and fallen. Take my life and use it for Your glory. Amen.

Holly Melton joined Cru® as a staff member in 1999 and is a speaker, writer and ministry coach. She is passionate about training the body of Christ in evangelism and discipleship. You can learn more about her resources and Bible studies at HollyMelton.org.

Day 17

DEC

14

LUKE

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”
(Luke 14:7-11, New International Version)

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God ... began to wash the disciples’ feet.
(John 13:3, 5, English Standard Version)

Read: Luke 14

I crashed a wedding once.

Technically speaking, it wasn’t completely out of line, since I tagged along with friends who were invited. But that didn’t stop me from wanting to keep a low profile.

The wedding was beautiful, but the reception dinner was exquisite. Each table, covered with crisp white linens and set with fresh green salads, hinted at an elaborate feast to come. One lone table stood in the center of the room. Reserved for the bridal party, it was set apart from the rest by towering centerpieces and candlelight. When we struggled to find enough empty seats, I grew worried that there wouldn’t be a place for me at all. “What if we just sit here?” I joked, motioning to the seats of honor.

Can you imagine if I had taken my place there? Picture the look on the face of the bride, groom and, most importantly, the mother of the bride upon finding an uninvited stranger sitting in their place of honor.

In Luke 14, Jesus watched those invited to the house of a prominent Pharisee jockey for the most impressive seats at the table. They all wanted to be first. It’s possible that many believed they deserved the best seat in the house.

Instead of praising them for seeking their own interest, Jesus painted a picture of the ultimate glory of humility. Jesus consistently proclaimed a kingdom much different than the one that those waiting on the Messiah expected: one where “the last will be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16, ESV).

From His birth in a lowly manger to His death on a criminal’s cross, Jesus demonstrated this “inverted” kingdom. At His last supper, Jesus chose not to be served but to serve (see Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45), washing the feet of each of His disciples — even the one who would betray Him.

In both His words and actions, Jesus called His disciples to live out and enjoy the benefits of His “upside-down” kingdom. And He calls you today to do the same.

Pray

Jesus, thank You for demonstrating a life of humility, from birth to death. Like the Pharisees and the disciples, I also strive for “places of honor.” Remind me that the ways of Your kingdom are different from the world’s ways. I don’t have to elevate myself, because You’ve already given me a place of honor at Your table. As I wait with patience this Advent season, help me to also “wait on” others, placing them above myself, not for attention but as an act of love and obedience to You.

Tracy Pierson lives and works with the inner city ministry of Cru in Chattanooga, Tennessee. She shepherds ministry leaders, artists and community leaders to work toward unity and the good of the city. She has only ever crashed one wedding — and one Halloween party.



Wonderful Counselor
Mighty God
Everlasting PRINCE
FATHER OF PEACE



Day 18

DEC

15

LUKE

And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.

“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’” And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called

your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.”

(Luke 15:11-24, English Standard Version)

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.

(1 John 3:1, ESV)

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.

For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

(Psalm 103:10-14, ESV)

Today's Reading: Luke 15

“Maybe we should call Coach,” someone blurted out. In hindsight, that would have been the responsible thing to do, but at age nineteen, I wouldn’t describe my friends or myself as responsible. Fun, yes. But certainly not responsible.

You see, we were running late to our game. To make matters worse, we still had to cross a border and drive another ninety minutes — through the middle of standstill traffic.

Beyond being responsible, calling Coach would have been the rational thing to do. Instead, my friends and I turned up the music like that would get us there faster.

We didn’t realize the seriousness of our inaction until after we had arrived during the fourth inning of a seven-inning baseball game. Somehow, we failed to recognize the gravity of the fact that our car contained three of the team’s key players: the starting pitcher, shortstop and center fielder. Our tardiness left our team severely shorthanded. For a coach who loves to win, this was a nightmare.

Racing to the dugout, we expected to be yelled at, maybe even suspended. But our coach didn’t yell. He didn’t acknowledge us directly at all. For the final three innings, we sat on the bench and listened to him say things to our teammates like, “Nice try. At least you arrived on time!” The indirect scolding

was worse than anything we had imagined. We felt so ashamed.

I think back on this scene from the past and chuckle at my immaturity. But more importantly, I rejoice! I rejoice because the way God responds to my rebellion and negligence is so radically different from what I experienced with my coach!

Rather than embarrassing or disengaging from His children in their rebellion and failure, God is portrayed as a father who anxiously waits for his son’s return. And instead of feeling disgusted by all the son has squandered, you can imagine that the father’s heart skips a beat, with mixed relief and delight at the sight of his boy. In Jesus’ words, “His father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him.”

What about you? Does the picture you paint of God more closely resemble the father in Jesus’ story or my coach?

Whether you have ignored your responsibility or have actively run away from God, Jesus’ message is clear: “You can come back home!” The Father is waiting for you. His shoes are already tied, and He’s ready to run to you at the first glimpse of your rolling in — even if you’re four innings late.

Respond and Pray

How does this passage challenge your view of the Father?

In what ways do you resemble the son in Jesus' story? Take a breath and confess this to God, knowing that He's celebrating your steps toward Him and that He's excited to welcome you back home!

Thomas Rodrigues serves with Cru® in Buffalo, New York, but he was born and raised in Montreal, Québec. Some of his favorite things about being a Cru staff member include summer and spring break missions, teaching, and doing the hard work of evangelism. In his free time, he loves watching sports, staying active, drinking good coffee and relaxing on lazy Saturday mornings.



Day 19

DEC

16

LUKE

“There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man’s table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s side.

The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’

But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able.’”
(Luke 16:19-26, English Standard Version)

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33, ESV)

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21, ESV)

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. (2 Corinthians 9:7, ESV)

Read: Luke 16

While teaching His disciples and the crowds, Jesus told the story of a poor man who lay in the dirt in front of the gate at a rich man’s house. He begged for food while dogs licked the sores on his body. When he died, angels carried him to Abraham’s side.

The rich owner who dressed in purple, a color worn by aristocracy, and ate opulent meals, also died. He was buried and went to Hades, a place of torment and anguish.

In eternity, Lazarus was relieved of his suffering. The rich man, suffering in Hades, was cut off from any source of comfort and any chance to use his resources to help others.

Jesus taught His followers that their actions in this life have an impact in eternity. Some would call this having an eternal perspective. When you respond to Jesus' generous gift of salvation by being generous with others here on Earth, you not only aid those who need your help, you store up an eternal treasure that's kept for you in heaven.

Reflect and Respond

One mark of a true Christ-follower is generosity. Those who give understand that God is in charge of their lives. With a thankful heart, they cheerfully share what has been generously given to them.

Each of us can show generosity in three ways: with our time, talent and treasure. As you prepare for Christmas, how will you be generous? Consider sharing your time or talent with a neighbor who needs your help. Think about sharing your treasure with someone doing good work to help others.

Anne Marie Winz has followed Christ for the past 50 years. She's married to Mark, has two adult children, and enjoys teaching, coffee and birding.

Day 20

DEC

17

LUKE

“Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.”
(Luke 17:33, English Standard Version)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.
(Philippians 2:5-8, ESV)

Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith ... for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
(Hebrews 12:2, ESV)

“These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”
(John 15:11, ESV)

Read: Luke 17

It was December, and I was officially angry. My young children were 8,000 miles away from their

grandparents, we’d just gotten kicked out of our home city in East Asia, and we were living out of suitcases in a stranger’s bare-bones apartment.

“I just want my Christmas tree!” I moaned in my heart those first December days. It stood decorated in our old apartment, sparkling for no one. Meanwhile, we were camped in this barren apartment wishing for our twinkling lights, Christmas tree candles and speakers piping our Christmas playlist throughout the season.

I knew that Christmas is much more than lights, frosted pine smells and jingling bells, and yet I wanted them desperately. I was clawing for my culture’s external trappings of the season. Blocked from them by circumstances outside of my control, I was miserable.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus repeated some version of the idea that clinging to your life leads to losing it but that losing your life actually saves it. It’s counterintuitive, but the more you grip your life and fight for control, the closer you are to losing what matters most. When you relax into the Spirit’s will for your life, you are free to live — and enjoy — the abundant life Jesus means you to have. It’s the good life according to God.

I was so busy being angry about my Christmas tree, I was missing the real joy of Christmas. Christmas, when Jesus left His glorious heavenly home to be born in a very temporary housing situation — a manger. Christmas, when He chose not to grasp His equality with God but instead became fully human, showing us the meaning of an abundant life. Though the thrust of His humble life was to serve and to suffer, the Bible says Jesus came for His joy and for ours.

I was forced, that Christmas, to lose the smells and bells. Yet when I brought my anger to Him, I gained intimacy with the Jesus who was born in a manger and lived a distinctly unflashy life. Jesus, who lived the good life, full of suffering and joy.

When I brought my slice of suffering to Jesus, He shared a heaping measure of His joy with me.

Laura Way is a writer for FamilyLife®. She lives in Orlando, Florida, with her husband and two vibrant school-aged daughters. She loves coffee, good conversation, learning how to be more fully human in Jesus, and helping others do the same.



Day 21

DEC

18

LUKE

“For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”
(Luke 18:14, English Standard Version)

“Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”
(Luke 18:17, ESV)

And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.
(Hebrews 11:6, ESV)

Read: Luke 18

My seven-year-old is a model of persistence. When he wants my or my wife’s attention, he’s unashamed to ask, no matter the setting. Middle of a conversation? No problem. Important work call? Minor inconvenience. Going to the bathroom? Please.

He’s equally unashamed to request help, whether for tying his shoes or opening the milk carton or a number of other simple tasks someone his age should probably have mastered. But unlike adults, he’s not embarrassed by his inability. He simply accepts it as part of reality.

Luke 18 presents a study in contrasts, summarized in the verses above. Several people — the Pharisee in verses 11-12, a rich young ruler in verses 18-23, and the listeners who “trusted in themselves” in verse 9 — exalt themselves. They believe their actions and abilities earn God’s acceptance and blessing. Jesus makes clear that they will be humbled.

On the other hand, several others humble themselves. The widow in verses 3-5 is unashamed to ask the judge over and over for help. The tax collector in verse 13 is gripped by his sinfulness and need for mercy. The blind beggar in verses 35-43 is dogged in his pursuit of Jesus’ help.

Each of these people displays some of what Jesus means by His statement about receiving the kingdom of God like a child. The reality is that, no matter how accomplished or capable you might be, you cannot stand before God on your own merits. Your sins and faults and imperfections are still present.

Faith like a child, in part, means accepting this reality and going to Jesus unashamed and unembarrassed — to cry, “Have mercy on me”; to continually rely on Him instead of yourself as your foundation for righteousness.

And unlike the reluctant judge in verses 2-6 (and unlike my wife and I in the face of our son's persistence), God eagerly listens to our pleas. He delights in showering mercy on His children. Like the tax collector, those who know their need and the ability of Jesus to meet it go home justified, secure and exalted as beloved children of God.

Jason Weimer served in Cru's campus ministry for 14 years, helping lead ministries in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Melbourne, Australia. He currently serves as the associate publisher for Cru Press, the publishing division of Cru. He lives with his family in Orlando, Florida, and enjoys writing, reading and all sorts of games and sports.

Reflect and Respond

Which category of people — those who trust in themselves or those with childlike faith — do you typically fall into? What is one way you can humble yourself and trust in God's mercy and help through Jesus today?



Day: 22 23 24 25 26 27

Day 22

DEC

19

LUKE

Jesus entered Jericho and made his way through the town. There was a man there named Zacchaeus. He was the chief tax collector in the region, and he had become very rich. He tried to get a look at Jesus, but he was too short to see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree beside the road, for Jesus was going to pass that way.

When Jesus came by, he looked up at Zacchaeus and called him by name. “Zacchaeus!” he said. “Quick, come down! I must be a guest in your home today.”

Zacchaeus quickly climbed down and took Jesus to his house in great excitement and joy. But the people were displeased. “He has gone to be the guest of a notorious sinner,” they grumbled.

Meanwhile, Zacchaeus stood before the Lord and said, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, Lord, and if I have cheated people on their taxes, I will give them back four times as much!”

Jesus responded, “Salvation has come to this home today, for this man has shown himself to be a true son of Abraham. For the Son of Man

came to seek and save those who are lost.” (Luke 19:1-10, New Living Translation)

*“The LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”
(1 Samuel 16:7, ESV)*

*“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you. ... Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience.”
(Colossians 3:5, 12 ESV)*

Read: Luke 19

This month, we’ve remembered Christ’s first coming as an infant on Christmas Day and His coming into our lives personally. Both points in time have changed the course of history.

As a follower of Christ, you have an even greater hope to look to, long for and anticipate. Jesus Christ, who died for our sins and rose again, is coming back someday to make all things new.

The Bible calls Christians “pilgrims” or “sojourners” in this world, meaning it is not their permanent

home. While you are here, you are to wage war against sin and be the light of Christ to a broken world. But in the end there will be only joy and peace in the presence of the true King.

Join us during this last week of Advent to read about the hope that is promised when Jesus returns and to celebrate Christmas with that hope in mind.

Reflect and Pray

How did Jesus' welcome change Zacchaeus' identity? What does belonging to Jesus mean for the way you think about yourself and **your identity**?

Lord Jesus, sometimes I feel like Zacchaeus — eager to meet You, but treated like an outsider. Thank You for receiving me and transforming my life. Help me to be aware of others whom I may overlook because of the way they look or behave. Thank You that you don't excuse sin, but You also look beyond behavior and appearances to the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). As I think about Your dinner with Zacchaeus, I take a moment to imagine You sitting here beside me and all the others joining us at the table.

Courtnee White has served with Cru® for 22 years at Jesus Film Project® and campus ministries in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. She and her husband, Dave, have three children and live in northeast Ohio. They currently lead a team of prayer catalysts for the campus ministry.



Wonderful Counselor
Mighty God
Everlasting PRINCE
OF PEACE
FATHER



Day 23

DEC

20

LUKE

And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, "Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation."

(Luke 20:45-47, English Standard Version)

*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.
("Joy to the World," by Isaac Watts)*

Read: Luke 20

During His public ministry, Jesus spent a lot of time in the temple. Standing in a place where others could overhear Him, Jesus warned the disciples to beware of the religious leaders.

They dressed themselves up so they could look important. They loved being greeted in the marketplace because it made them feel important. They helped themselves to the best seats in the

synagogue and at the feasts so everyone could see just how important they were.

They prayed long prayers so others would know how religious they were, and yet, they took advantage of widows. In their quest to appear perfect, were they true to themselves and to the faith they professed?

Jesus didn't mince words. In passages like Luke 11:37-54, He called them hypocrites. Instead of loving and serving others, they made sure others served them. Jesus promised they would be punished.

Part of being authentic is self-awareness. Very few of us would identify as hypocrites, and yet we want others to think more highly of us. Sometimes we forget to care enough about what God thinks of us.

As you prepare for Christmas, remember that Jesus loves you just the way you are. He's not asking you to clean up your act. You can bring your real self to Him, just as you are. He knows all about your thoughts and actions.

His love for you includes the parts of you that hurt and the parts that aren't yet what you wish they were. He offers forgiveness and hope when you

exchange your sin for His forgiveness. Allow His grace to lay the firm foundation for your life.

Anne Marie Winz has followed Christ for 50 years. She's married to Mark, has two adult children, and enjoys teaching, drinking coffee, and birding.

Reflect

As you prepare for Christmas, how can you turn your eyes toward Jesus? How can you face Him honestly and care more about what He thinks of you than what others think about you?

Day 24

DEC

21

LUKE

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, “Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”

(Luke 21:1-4, English Standard Version)

“Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation.”

(Mark 12:38-40, ESV)

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

(Philippians 2:5-8, ESV)

Listen or Watch: How Emptiness Sings by Christina Wells

Read: Luke 21

At the start of Luke 21, Jesus has just wrapped up some ugly interactions with the Sadducees, who have been trying to trick Him into committing blasphemy. Jesus concludes with a warning about the hypocrisy of the religious elite.

Now Jesus sits across from the temple treasury, people watching.

Perhaps Jesus feels sad as He recognizes the irony of where He sits and in what He observes. This is His temple, His house and His treasury. He watches as the rich drop large chunks of money into His coffer. Amid all the bustling activity in His house, Jesus sees so little faith. But He continues to search.

Jesus calls His disciples over to tell them about what He observes. People back then, like people today, would have thought the widow was crazy to give everything she had to live on. But Jesus says that God’s heart warms as what amounts to meager pennies hits the bottom of the temple treasury.

The contrast between this scene and the preceding one with the Sadducees couldn't be starker. And lest we move too quickly to simple lessons, like "It's the thought that counts," it helps to see the social structure of Jesus' day and how it relates to our own.

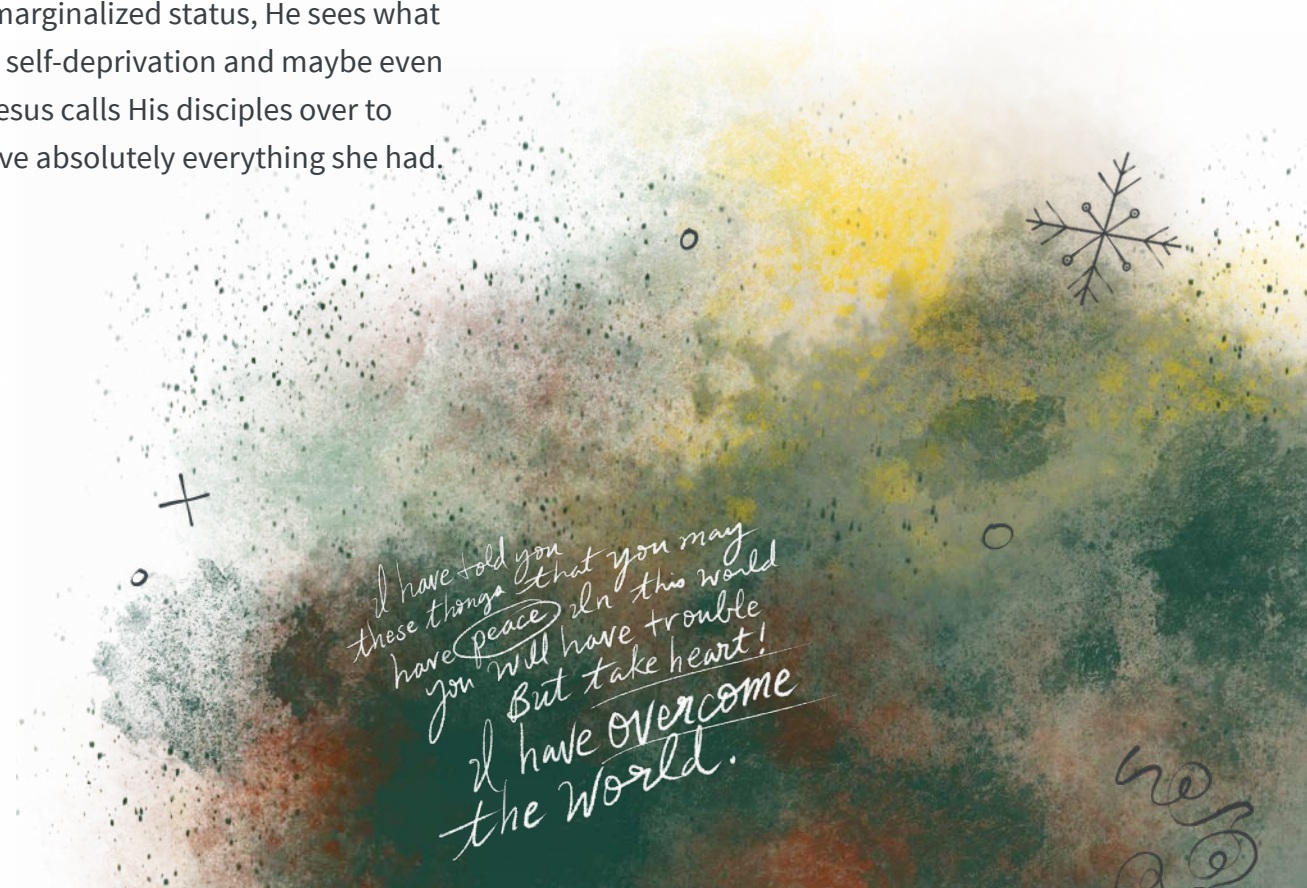
The religious, the wealthy and the well-connected were at the top of the heap, while people like the widow were at the bottom. As Jesus mentions elsewhere, the predominant cultural thinking was that if you were poor, you must have done something wrong to deserve your lot in life. And if you were rich, well, you must have done something right to deserve God's blessing. While few of us will admit it, we often think this way.

Jesus, in His upside-down, topsy-turvy way, rips the curtain away to reveal what's really going on. Alongside knowing the widow's entire backstory and her socially marginalized status, He sees what the gift costs her: self-deprivation and maybe even pain. Excitedly, Jesus calls His disciples over to show how she gave absolutely everything she had.

And honestly, someone who is truly generous like the widow must be a little crazy after all. Who gives without saving any for themselves? Who seeks to please God with all they have?

Yup, it's Jesus. In this scene, we see the mysterious interplay of God's kingdom and the faithful. Jesus gazes in wonder at a widow who empties her pockets with a faith that reflects who He is: One who emptied Himself completely for rich and poor alike.

Philip Long is a writer, knifsmith and illustrator who homeschooled two teens through the Covid-19 quarantine.



Day 25

DEC

22

LUKE

“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.” Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.”

(Luke 22:31-34, English Standard Version)

And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, “Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.” And he went out and wept bitterly.

(Luke 22:61-62, ESV)

Read: Luke 22

I woke with dried tears around my eyes like sleep dust. My ankle throbbed beneath the covers, reminding me of yesterday’s news: my injury was serious. Despair set in. I thought I was getting better, but now recovery felt entirely out of sight. Soon, shame set in. I wasn’t handling the waiting well; my circumstances were dictating my life. I told myself that I should trust Jesus and ask Him for peace,

knowing that He is in control and has my best intentions in mind. But like my recovery, He felt out of reach.

I wonder how Peter felt when he looked Jesus in the eyes after denying Him — not once but three times, and just hours after Jesus had foretold it. Peter had propped himself up as Jesus’ “ride-or-die” companion. He swore his loyalty to Jesus, boldly proclaiming he was ready to follow Him anywhere, into anything, including intense suffering.

In verses 61-62, Jesus helps Peter see the bitter truth about himself: Peter would follow, but instead of clinging to Jesus, he would abandon Him.

Peter remembered this prophecy in the moment, but did Peter recall the grace-filled encouragement that came before it? Jesus had prefaced His warning with reassurance in v. 32. In the same conversation, Jesus revealed that Peter would fail miserably and that he would recover. Jesus’ prayers would preserve Peter’s faith, and Peter’s recovery would come with the godly purpose of strengthening his brothers.

Likewise, when you mess up, Jesus isn’t surprised or distant. He saw your failure coming. He intervened for you, both in prayer and on the cross, so that you,

like Peter, will reach the other side of failure — for His glory and your good.

Reflect and Respond

What is one failure or disappointment in your life for which you struggle to imagine recovery or restoration?

Reflect on how Jesus had the foresight to see your struggle coming and also has the foresight and power to provide a way of recovery. Imagine what that way could be. Experience God's grace in revealing to you the truth about yourself and your

circumstances. Surrender to Him, trusting that He will give you the grace you need now and that He will carry you through and give you purpose on the other side of disappointment or failure.

Chealsia Smedley lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia, where she works with the campus ministry of Cru®. She revels in speaking her second language, Slovene — blunders included. She earned a degree in magazine journalism from Ohio University and strives to write stories that explore her passions for truth and connection.

Day 26

DEC

23

LUKE

Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals — one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. ...

One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!” But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”
(Luke 23:32-34, 39-43, NIV)

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins. ... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus.
(Ephesians 2:1, 4-6 NIV)

Read: Luke 23

After two years of cancer treatment for my husband, I feel I can relate to the first criminal who questioned Jesus’ power to change his reality as they hung side by side dying on crosses. “Aren’t you the Messiah?” he asked. “Save us!”

I’d like to think that when life gets tough, I will be strong and confident in the Lord. But after the last two years, I realize how weak and fearful I am. I need a Savior every day to forgive me and strengthen me.

Jesus did not deserve to be crucified alongside criminals. He had done nothing wrong. The second criminal recognized Jesus as God who was willing to die to take on Himself the wrongs of sinful humanity. This criminal cried out for forgiveness, asking the Lord to remember him. By all human standards, he didn’t deserve Jesus’ forgiveness. However, this request was all Jesus needed to assure the thief that they would meet each other again that very day — in paradise.

Unable to grasp the extent of your own sin, you may struggle to comprehend the seriousness of what Jesus suffered for your sake. No one deserves Jesus’

sacrifice any more than the thief on the cross did. In fact, we have all earned quite the opposite. As Ephesians 2:3 (NIV) says, “Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.”

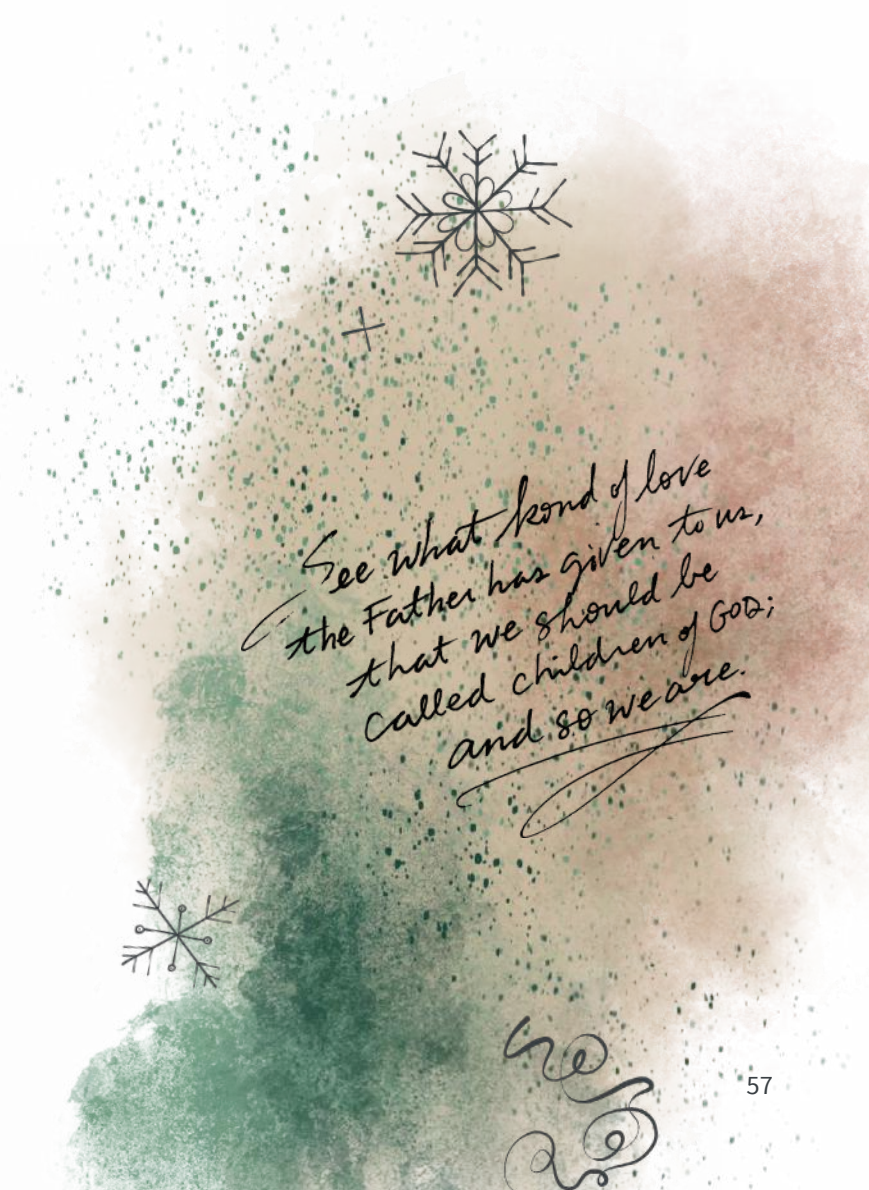
But like the second criminal, all you have to do is ask Jesus to forgive you to receive the forgiveness He offers — forgiveness you don’t deserve. Jesus is yearning for you to have a relationship with Him. Claim His forgiveness and thank Him for all of His love

If you’ve never asked Jesus to come into your life and forgive your sins, **there is no better time than the present.**

Jan Stewart works as a writer for Cru® in Orlando, Florida. She enjoys playing pinochle with her husband, Mark, and taking her border collie, Shadow, on walks. She’s passionate about finding and sharing inspiring stories about how people experience God’s love.

Reflect and Respond

What do you feel you deserve from God? Are you struggling with illness, finances, grief or loss? Turn these over to God and thank Him that He offers forgiveness that you do not deserve.



Day 27

DEC

24

LUKE

As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him.

He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"

They stood still, their faces downcast. One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"
(Luke 24:15-18, New International Version)

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
(John 16:33, NIV)

Read: Luke 24

When I was a kid, my mom drove me to Toys“R”Us to pick out the toy of my dreams for my birthday. With intense anticipation, I wandered the aisles in my mind before actually entering the warehouse to obtain that prized possession. Once I got home and thrust the batteries in, my excitement rapidly waned and I felt utterly crushed with despair. It

wasn't all I hoped it would be. It was a child-sized life lesson in disappointment.

Reading Luke 24 feels like riding a roller coaster of disappointment. As you read today's chapter, notice the three episodes of dashed and restored hope.

In verses 1-3, the mourning women's grief is compounded as they arrive at Jesus' tomb to find His body missing. Quickly, angels restore their hope with the announcement that Jesus has risen from the dead. But their joy is short-lived; their friends don't believe what sounds like nonsense. In a final scene, just hours later, Cleopas and his friend walk the weary road to Emmaus, wondering how their dreams for a grand future as citizens of the Messiah's kingdom could have turned sideways so quickly.

A week earlier, Jesus had triumphantly entered Jerusalem while religious leaders looked on with disgust. Jesus' followers must have boasted full hearts as their leader rode into the city like a conquering king.

Within five days, Jesus experienced an unjust trial, death on a cross and burial. "How can this be?" Jesus' friends must have thought as they cowered in an attic room. "What happened to our king?"

It's likely you can identify with some aspect of the disciples' experience on this roller coaster of disappointment. Disappointment is a regular part of life in our fallen world. But even if you are well acquainted with the "oh no" feeling of being let down regularly, you don't need to stay there.

Jesus invites you to a hope that ultimately cannot fail. In each instance in Luke 24, His hurting friends are provided the antidote to disappointment. He brings His followers back to the truth revealed in Scripture. The angels remind the distraught women of what Jesus had said before the devastating turn of events. And what Jesus patiently explains to the men walking to Emmaus invites us to remember the truth about Him.

Jesus also gave His followers the gift of His presence, which brought needed comfort. He was with them, and He is with you.

Even when you don't feel it, in your darkest moments, Jesus is with you. It is the promise of Christmas, when He entered the world to save it. It is the promise of Easter, when He rose in victory over death. It is the promise of Jesus, your source of unfailing hope.

Mick Haupt has served with Cru® for 30 years, mostly in creative realms. He enjoys taking photos, writing devotionals for a music ministry and helping men grow deeper in their faith. He lives in Orlando, Florida, with his wife and two rambunctious boys.

Christmas

Dec. 25 | Day 28

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel

a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

*"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"
(Luke 2:1-14, English Standard Version)*

As you reflect on Jesus' coming throughout this special day, take a moment with your family, friends or on your own to read today's passage from Luke 2 aloud. Or join us [here](#) for a virtual gathering around the family table of God, where we not only celebrate the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ, but look forward to His return.

As you listen, enjoy a foretaste of heaven, where brothers and sisters from every tongue, tribe and nation will glorify God together saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:10, ESV)

Merry Christmas!