



ADVENT

Hope for a Weary World

What has this year been like for you?

For many, 2022 has been a year of recovery. Others continue to reel from the effects of loss and pain. Wherever you are in your journey today, it's likely that you desire a sense of hope.

The lyrics to the Christmas carol "O Holy Night" capture well a longing in our hearts.

*"Long lay the world in sin
and error pining, till He
appeared and the soul felt its
worth. A thrill of hope, the
weary world rejoices."*

Hope in a weary world is possible when we encounter Jesus — our "Immanuel, God with us," who entered our world to bring good news to all people.

Advent — the season leading up to Christmas — is a perfect time to reflect on the true source of hope.

Because He is both the substance and the object of our faith, He alone provides us with a living hope

(1 Peter 1:3). 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 and weariness.

We invite you to focus your attention on Jesus Christ during this Advent season. In addition to following along in your copy of the daily devotional, you can refresh your view of Jesus by reading one chapter in the Gospel of Luke every day up to Christmas. Along with daily readings, you'll also have the opportunity to take a deeper dive into common questions about Jesus and Christianity in a section called "Faith Asked Question."

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 One

DAYS 1-7

Nov. 27

DAY ONE

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, ESV)

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 were created to know the Author of the story.

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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What are you waiting for? **Read more about how to trust God as you wait.**



Melissa Long serves as the Writers Team Leader for Cru® U.S. Digital Strategies. Originally from Lookout Mountain, Georgia, Melissa currently resides on the edge of a mysterious swamp in Florida with her husband, Philip, and two lively teenagers who remind her daily that we're all on a journey.

Nov. 28

DAY TWO

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, 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)

"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)

"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

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? Is there something that is keeping you from experiencing who Jesus really is?

As you read the Gospel of Luke this December, may you encounter Jesus, understand what He taught and see what He accomplished more clearly than ever before. May you see Jesus as your hope in the darkness and your close companion as you look for joy in the places you're stretched thin.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How can you be sure that Jesus is the savior He claimed to be? **Read more about how Jesus fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies.**



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Pray & Respond:

Jesus, most days, I miss who You really are. I get distracted by superficial things and oftentimes want a superficial savior. Show me the areas in my life where I'm not seeing You clearly and help me desire not only You but also the ways You are changing me from the inside out. Help me to show Your love to those around me.

Nov. 29

DAY THREE

So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin.

(Hebrews 4:14-15, NLT)

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

(Romans 8:28, NIV)

I have always wondered if Jesus gets me at all. I have questions like, does He really understand me? Does He feel my pains? Can He relate to my struggles as a young girl with the payment of school fees? How does He just sit there and watch me suffer all these basic needs? Does He understand my temptations? Why me?

Having faced many difficulties growing up in a traditional setting within a West-Africa capital city, I have felt God did not know me personally or love me uniquely. I felt

this way because I struggled to get most things in life. My mother had to sell her clothes to afford my fees during my high school education. I had to walk long distances of about two and a half hours to school because I could not afford transportation. On days I did have money, I had to choose either food or a ride home from school. I felt confident that God existed, but I didn't believe He was interested in somebody like me.

Casting my mind back now, I realized that throughout the difficulties, God was with me. His love and care were there, but I could not see it then. Pain can certainly blind our eyes and hearts. Glancing through life, I have come to appreciate God and His timing. In subtle ways, Jesus was working on my heart to show me He cares — through encouraging verses I saw on social media, billboards or even on bumper stickers. Still today, I can now see His love through even difficult moments.

The writer of Hebrews gives me a glimpse of how Jesus, my high priest, being both fully God and fully man, has experienced all that I am going through and have yet to go through. Amazing! The heartbreaks, the disappointments and delays. I can actually rejoice in this weary world because Jesus gets me. In fact, God sent Jesus to be with us, to experience and endure life on earth. Jesus understands me thoroughly!

DAY THREE

Pray & Reflect:

Dear Lord, you know my weaknesses and all I go through on a daily basis. Thank you that your eyes are on me and you empathize with me. Help me to live a victorious life through the power of the Holy Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

Why does God allow suffering? **Explore more about how God has experienced suffering and why He understands your pain.**



Comfort Arthur was born and raised in Accra, Ghana, and serves with the Great Commission Movement of Ghana as someone who loves using technology to solve problems in the body of Christ. She loves to teach and take on new challenges.

Nov. 30

DAY FOUR

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, NIV)

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, ESV)

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 (non-Jewish) 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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How can we rely on the Bible?
Learn more about commonly asked questions concerning Scripture.



Melissa Long serves as the Writers Team Leader for Cru® U.S. Digital Strategies. Originally from Lookout Mountain, Georgia, Melissa currently resides on the edge of a mysterious swamp in Florida with her husband, Philip, and two lively teenagers who remind her daily that we're all on a journey.

Dec. 1

DAY FIVE

But the angel said, “Don’t be afraid, Zechariah! God has heard your prayer. Your wife, Elizabeth, will give you a son, and you are to name him John. You will have great joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.”

(Luke 1:13-14, NLT)

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, ESV)

Think of the last time you had to wait for something. How did you respond to the situation?

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 God 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

DAY FIVE

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:

In seasons of waiting, what misconceptions about 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?

Pray:

Lord, reveal the misconceptions I have about You. Where am I not believing the truth about You? Help me to meditate on what is true. Please give me faith to trust You.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

Why is our view of God important?



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.

Dec. 2

DAY SIX

But the angel reassured them. “Don’t be afraid!” he said. “I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.” Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, “Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased.”
(Luke 2:10-14, NLT)



*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)**

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 praise to God. 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 & 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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How does your personality help you connect with God?
Explore more here.



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Dec. 3

DAY SEVEN

Everyone was expecting the Messiah to come soon, and they were eager to know whether John might be the Messiah. John answered their questions by saying, “I baptize you with water; but someone is coming soon who is greater than I am—so much greater that I’m not even worthy to be his slave and untie the straps of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He is ready to separate the chaff from the wheat with his winnowing fork. Then he will clean up the threshing area, gathering the wheat into his barn but burning the chaff with never-ending fire.”

(Luke 3:15-17, NLT)

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, NIV)

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 in today's reading, while he baptized with water, the Messiah who was coming would baptize with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3).

As we read a few days ago, 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.

Christmas reminds us that Christ the Messiah has come! When you turn from sin and trust in Him, you too will receive the promised Holy Spirit, whom Christ gives.

The Holy Spirit guarantees that you belong to Christ and that your identity is solidly defined by Him and rooted in Him. And the Holy Spirit empowers you to follow Christ.

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.

Reflect:

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

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

Who is the Holy Spirit and how does He work in the lives of those who trust Christ for their salvation?





Week Two

DAYS 8-14

Dec. 4

DAY EIGHT

When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

*‘The Spirit of the Lord
is upon me, for he has
anointed me to bring Good
News to the poor. He has
sent me to proclaim that
captives will be released,
that the blind will see, that
the oppressed will be set
free, and that the time of
the Lord’s favor has come.’*

He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat

down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. “The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!”

(Luke 4:16-21, NLT)

Ever done any jail time?

I have. Cold and confined, my barred cell contained the bare essentials: a bed and bathroom. Dim light filtered through a window high on the wall. Movement was limited to six square meters.

This is certain: the three hours I spent in our local jail-turned-escape-room were enough to put me off prison for life!

Luke and Isaiah reveal Jesus’ mission to “proclaim freedom for the captives.” I’m wondering, when Jesus mentions these captives, whom do you think He’s referring to?

Perhaps your mind goes to criminals, to women and children trapped in the horrors of human trafficking, or maybe to someone addicted to drugs.

But have you considered that Jesus might be describing you, too, as a captive to something?

The word “captive” comes from the Latin *capere*, which means “to take,

hold or seize.” If you’re captive, your ability to move or act freely is limited, as you’re held in a space that you are powerless to leave.

Seen through this lens, my own forms of captivity become apparent.

- How often I stick within my comfort zone’s confines, avoiding asking courageous questions that could benefit others for fear of awkwardness!
- How inclined I am to care more about what others think of me than what they think about God, keeping me quiet when opportunities arise to proclaim Christ with my words.
- How many months I spent stewing in fury and unforgiveness toward the family member who betrayed my trust, inflicting deep damage. Yet how spacious the freedom was when I finally let Jesus help me relinquish my desire to retaliate!

Maybe you know what it is to be bound by bitterness, to be tied up by irreverent fears. To be shackled by shame. Addicted to ease. Enthralled by a God-substitute (i.e. idol).

Do you recognize the parts of your life under enemy occupation? Jesus is heaven-bent on your liberation. Where might He be inviting you into fuller freedom today?

Pray:

God, show me where I am bound by fears, idolatry or unforgiveness. Give me grace to let You draw me out of captivity, by the power of the Spirit, through the ministry of Christ’s word and through His Body, the church.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How can you find freedom in forgiveness? **Learn more about Grace’s journey of finding hope.**



Gracie Mackenzie is a Kiwi-Fijian who serves with Student Life in New Zealand as a researcher and curriculum curator. She relishes drives with her husband and playing women’s rugby. Her current passion is helping the Church embody the beauty of God’s design for our sexuality and gender.

Dec. 5

DAY NINE

Jesus answered them,
“Healthy people don’t need
a doctor—sick people do.
I have come to call not
those who think they are
righteous, but those who
know they are sinners and
need to repent.”

(Luke 5:31-32, NLT)

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

(Psalm 107:9, ESV)



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.

In fact, Jesus broke religious stereotypes by pursuing, befriending and rescuing those who were most soul-sick — those who didn't fit the religious mold of the day.

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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

Have you felt the need for the acceptance that Jesus showed?
If so, you might find Julia's experience interesting.



Janet Beal has been a Cru® staff member for 60 years, serving most of that time in Latin America. She currently serves as an academic mentor for five staff members who are participating in a master's program focusing on their leadership development. She delights in mentoring young women leaders, hanging out with her family, cross-stitching and reading voraciously.

Dec. 6

DAY TEN

“But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, offer the other cheek also. If someone demands your coat, offer your shirt also. Give to anyone who asks; and when things are taken away from you, don’t try to get them back. Do to others as you would like them to do to you.”

(Luke 6:27-31, NLT)

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)

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 has lived out His words in verses 27-28 perfectly — through His life, death and resurrection. In fact, while we were still sinners, enemies of God, Jesus died for us and

reconciled us to God (Romans 5:6-11). 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.

Reflect & Pray:

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?

Dear God, I ask in prayer that You help me to see the relationships in my life that need Your healing touch of restoration and reconciliation. In the power of your Spirit, help me to trust and believe You for the faith I need to take my next steps forward. In Jesus' name, amen.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How can I love people I disagree with? **Learn more about loving by faith.**



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Dec. 7

DAY ELEVEN

A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The young man who had died was a widow's only son, and a large crowd from the village was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. "Don't cry!" he said. Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. "Young man," he said, "I tell you, get up." Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk! And Jesus gave him back to his mother.

(Luke 7:12-15, NLT, 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)

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

world feels like it has stopped spinning — whether through tragedy, when you need forgiveness, when your heart feels hardened to God, when you need God's reassurance — no matter who you are, you can look to God, and He will see you and lovingly give you just what you need.

Reflect & 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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How can I trust God while I wait?
Explore more about trusting God in times of waiting.



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.

Dec. 8

DAY TWELVE

One day Jesus said to his disciples, “Let’s cross to the other side of the lake.” So they got into a boat and started out. As they sailed across, Jesus settled down for a nap. But soon a fierce storm came down on the lake. The boat was filling with water, and they were in real danger. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, “Master, Master, we’re going to drown!” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and the raging waves. Suddenly the storm stopped and all was calm. Then he asked them, “Where is your faith?” The disciples were terrified and amazed. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “When he gives a command, even the wind and waves obey him!”

(Luke 8:22-25, NLT)

“And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

(Matthew 28:20, NIV)

“Master, Master, we’re going to drown!”

Theirs was a cry of survival in the middle of an extraordinary storm. These men knew the sea. Many had made their livelihood 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.

In the midst of your grief, anger and sorrow, 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.

Pray & Reflect:

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

If you are in a storm right now, if you can muster the faith, thank God that He is with you in the darkest nights of the soul, even when you can’t feel His presence.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

Where is God in the midst of my darkness? To those who may be battling depression, anxiety or mental illness (or if you know someone who is), you’re not alone.

Find more resources here.



How can I trust God in difficult situations? **Explore more of what it means to trust God.**



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 her book, “Buried Dreams: From Devastating Loss to Unimaginable Joy.”

Dec. 9

DAY THIRTEEN

“For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.”

(Luke 9:24, NIV)

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)



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 can bring 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, NLT).

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 compassionately forgave. He turned the tables on injustice.

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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What does the reward of following God look like in daily life? **Explore more about how reverence brings reward.**



Dec. 10

DAY FOURTEEN

But the Lord said to her, “My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her.”

(Luke 10:41-42, NIV)

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)

Have you ever felt distracted or overwhelmed by having too much to do? Especially around the Christmas season? 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.

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 FOURTEEN

Reflect & 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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What is spiritual growth and why is it important?

Explore more about how to grow spiritually.



Dec. 11

DAY FIFTEEN

And he said to them, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.’”
(Luke 11:2, ESV)

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

As these verses state, Jesus’ kingdom is coming, when one day all will bow before Him. Throughout the New Testament, we see the promise that Christ will return. 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. And at that time, we will see the culmination of Jesus's redemption and perfect restoration — the restoration we all long for.

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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What do you expect when you think about Jesus' return to the earth?

Explore more about what the Bible says.



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 and then went to Dallas Seminary to earn a Th.M. She has been a Cru staff member for over 20 years.



Week Three

DAYS 16-23

Dec. 12

DAY SIXTEEN

“And don’t be concerned about what to eat and what to drink. Don’t worry about such things. These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need.”

(Luke 12:29-31, NLT)

Then, turning to his disciples, Jesus said, “That is why I tell you not to worry about everyday life—whether you have enough food to eat or enough clothes to wear. For life is more than food, and your body more than clothing. Look at the ravens. They don’t plant or harvest or store food in barns, for God feeds them. And you are far more valuable to him than any birds!”

(Luke 12:22-24, NLT)

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? Even though it is a light-hearted comedy, we have all experienced the anxiety that comes from feeling like what we want and need is just out of reach. We worry, plan, balance the checkbook yet again, hope for the promotion, or work just a little bit harder to hopefully gain a bit more security. Whatever you might be experiencing, persistent Christmas marketing can easily add 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, drinkwater 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 our movie characters have experienced if they had realized that they have a heavenly Father who cares deeply for the small details of life that really matter?

Reflect:

“These things dominate the Thoughts of unbelievers all over the world, but your Father already knows your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and he will give you everything you need” (Luke 12:30-31, NLT). 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?

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

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How can you focus on what truly matters and not get carried away by this season's busyness?



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.

Dec. 13

DAY SEVENTEEN

“And you will perish, too, unless you repent of your sins and turn to God.”

(Luke 13:3, NLT)

“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)

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 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. A key detail to remember about repentance is that you don't repent in order to get God to love you more. You repent because He loves you. 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.

Reflect & Pray:

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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What is repentance, and how do I do it? **Explore more about why repentance is foundational in your relationship with Jesus.**



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.

Dec. 14

DAY EIGHTEEN

When Jesus noticed that all who had come to the dinner were trying to sit in the seats of honor near the head of the table, he gave them this advice: “When you are invited to a wedding feast, don’t sit in the seat of honor. What if someone who is more distinguished than you has also been invited? The host will come and say, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then you will be embarrassed, and you will have to take whatever seat is left at the foot of the table!

“Instead, take the lowest place at the foot of the table. Then when your host sees you, he will come and say, ‘Friend, we have a better place for you!’ Then you will be honored in front of all the other guests. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

(Luke 14:7-11, NLT)

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, ESV)

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.

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.

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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What does it mean to humble ourselves before Jesus and other people?
Explore more about biblical humility.



Dec. 15

DAY NINETEEN

“When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, ‘At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! I will go home to my father and say, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.’ So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. His son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.’ But his father said to the servants, ‘Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.’ So the party began.”

(Luke 15:17-24, NLT)

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)

“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 longingly

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.

Thomas Rodrigues serves as a volunteer with Cru® in Queens, 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 NINETEEN

Respond & 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!

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What is God's discipline?
Explore more here.



Dec. 16

DAY TWENTY

“If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. ... No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.” The Pharisees, who dearly loved their money, heard all this and scoffed at him. Then he said to them, “You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God.

(Luke 16:10-15, NLT)

“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)

In this chapter, we read about Jesus teaching His disciples and the crowds. He told the parable 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.

Though impoverished in this life, Lazarus was relieved of his suffering in eternity. The rich man, suffering in Hades, was cut off from any source of comfort and any chance to use his resources to help others. In this parable, Jesus presents another example of those who the world considers unlikely, as being the ones who inherit the kingdom of God, whereas those who appear to have everything, or seem religious, actually miss the gospel.

Jesus taught His followers that their actions in this life have an impact in eternity. Some would call this having an eternal perspective.

Reflect & Respond:

One mark of a true Christ-follower is generosity. 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. 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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What does "eternal perspective" mean? **Explore more about how having an eternal perspective can change how you live.**



Anne Marie Winz has followed Christ for the past 50 years. She's married to Mark, has two adult children, and enjoys teaching, drinking coffee and birding. She's also a staff member with Cru.

Dec. 17

DAY TWENTY-ONE

“If you cling to your life, you will lose it, and if you let your life go, you will save it.”

(Luke 17:33, NLT)

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)

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. Who knew what it was to give up much, only to gain much more? 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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

How do you respond when you feel angry? **Explore more about giving our anger to God.**



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.

Dec. 18

DAY TWENTY-TWO

“For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

(Luke 18:14, NLT)

“I tell you the truth, anyone who doesn’t receive the Kingdom of God like a child will never enter it.”

(Luke 18:17, NLT)

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)



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. Jesu 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” and 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 serves as the Director of Publishing at Cru®. He and his team help to write, edit and publish many of the evangelism and discipleship resources used by Cru staff and others around the world, all of which can be found at www.crustore.org. He lives with his family in Orlando, Florida, and enjoys writing, crossword puzzles, and all sorts of games and sports.

Reflect & 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?

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What is God's mercy? **Explore more about our merciful God and the cost of His mercy.**



Dec. 19

DAY TWENTY-THREE

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 19:9-10, NLT)

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)

“They just don’t understand me. If they only knew what I was really like...”

How often have you heard or said these words?

Throughout Luke’s gospel, Jesus consistently responds to misunderstood or marginalized people with tenderness and compassion. He welcomes those with poor reputations and those who are shunned on account of something external: a disease or malformity, a heritage or line of work.

As the chief tax collector for a prosperous commercial region, Zacchaeus was very wealthy. It’s also likely that he was despised by everyone around him. Tax collectors walked a precarious line of holding a lucrative job in service to the Roman government and doing so at the expense of their fellow Jewish citizens. Many of them grew wealthy by extorting their neighbors.

But Jesus’ encounter with Zacchaeus shows the power of God’s transforming love. He responded with saving faith in Jesus and was transformed into a rich man who could make it “through the eye of a needle” (Luke 18:25).

There seems to be another dimension to the saving work that Jesus accomplished here. While Zacchaeus was a son of Abraham by birth, he was likely stereotyped as a criminal and ostracized from the

family of Abraham by religious leaders and respectable Jews alike.

Not only did Jesus grant Zacchaeus eternal life, but He restored Zacchaeus to his community. As Zacchaeus demonstrated public generosity and hospitality and Jesus declared him a “true son of Abraham,” the reborn Zacchaeus began living out his new identity.

Jesus’ encounters with people throughout the Gospels seem to follow this pattern. When He comes on the scene, people’s true identities show. The religious elite display their true, prideful colors. And those who see their need are revealed as the heirs of God’s kingdom.

It’s the same today. When you recognize your need for spiritual healing and confess Jesus as the only one who can give it, like Zacchaeus, your past no longer defines your identity. Jesus does.

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. Courtnee currently serves with Cru City Neighbors.

DAY TWENTY THREE

Reflect & 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 imagine You sitting here beside me and all the others joining us at the table.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What does it mean to have your identity in Christ?
Explore more about how God sees you.





Week Four

DAYS 24-28

Dec. 20

DAY TWENTY-FOUR

Then, with the crowds listening, he turned to his disciples and said, “Beware of these teachers of religious law! For they like to parade around in flowing robes and love to receive respectful greetings as they walk in the marketplaces. And how they love the seats of honor in the synagogues and the head table at banquets. Yet they shamelessly cheat widows out of their property and then pretend to be pious by making long prayers in public. Because of this, they will be severely punished.”

(Luke 20:45-47, NLT)

*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)

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. We are more like the religious leaders than we would like to admit. We have that same tendency toward hypocrisy. And though very few of us would identify as hypocrites, 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 before coming to Him. You can bring your real self to Him, just as you are. He knows all about your thoughts and actions. remember that Jesus loves you just the way you are. He's not asking you to clean up your act before coming to Him. 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.

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?

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What is God's grace? **Explore more about what His grace is and why we all desperately need it.**



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. She's also a staff member with Cru.

Dec. 21

DAY TWENTY-FIVE

While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box. Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins. “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”
(Luke 21:1-4, NLT)

“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)



You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.
(Philippians 2:5-8, NLT)

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.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

Is faith in Jesus a big leap? **Explore more about the claims Jesus made and who He says He is.**



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

Dec. 22

DAY TWENTY-SIX

“Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers.” Peter said, “Lord, I am ready to go to prison with you, and even to die with you.” But Jesus said, “Peter, let me tell you something. Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.”

(Luke 22:31-34, NLT)

At that moment the Lord turned and looked at Peter. Suddenly, the Lord’s words flashed through Peter’s mind: “Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny three times that you even know me.” And Peter left the courtyard, weeping bitterly.

(Luke 22:61-62, NLT)

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 first.

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 on the cross. And Hebrews 7:25 states that, just like He did for Peter, Jesus forever lives to make intercession for you. So that, like Peter, you will reach the other side of failure — for His glory and your good.

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.

Reflect & 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.

Faith Asked Question:

What happens when I feel like I've failed God? **Explore more about God's forgiveness when we inevitably fail Him.**



Dec. 23

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN

Two others, both criminals, were led out to be executed with him. When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. ...

One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you’re the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you’re at it!” But the other criminal protested, “Don’t you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn’t done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

(Luke 23:32-34, 39-43, NLT)

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)

After a recent car accident, my living room roof leaking on my head, mold in our other car and squatters discovered in our rental, 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 sarcastically 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 few years especially, I realize how weak and fearful I am, often filled with doubts that He can or will rescue me. As a sinner and a doubter, 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 the God who was willing to die to take on Himself the wrongs of sinful humanity. This criminal cried out for forgiveness,

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 and forgiveness that we often doubt He wants to give. Jesus is yearning for you to have a relationship with Him. Claim His forgiveness and thank Him for all of His love.

Jan Stewart serves as a writer for Cru® communications. She's passionate about sharing inspiring stories describing how people experience God's love.

DAY TWENTY SEVEN

Reflect & Respond:

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

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



Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

Why did Jesus have to die?
**Explore more answers
about the crucifixion.**



Dec. 24

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT

As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him. He asked them, “What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?” They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn’t heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.”

(Luke 24:15-18, NLT)

“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)



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 unending hope.

Faith Asked Question: A Deeper Dive

What is the resurrection and why is it foundational to the Christian faith? Explore more about how there is no Christianity without Jesus's resurrection.



Is genuine hope possible in a broken world? Explore more about the hope Jesus gives.



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.

DAY TWENTY EIGHT

Reflect:

Where might you need hope today?

Prayer:

Jesus, thank You that because of Your death and resurrection, I can have hope in this world. Thank You that You promise Your followers that You are with us, that even when You seem silent, You're present. Thank You that You are our Immanuel, God with us. Give me the faith to trust Your words and restore my hope.

Dec. 25

DAY TWENTY-NINE

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, ESV)

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!

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 by scanning the QR code below 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.

Join Virtually:



ADVENT

Hope for a Weary World

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