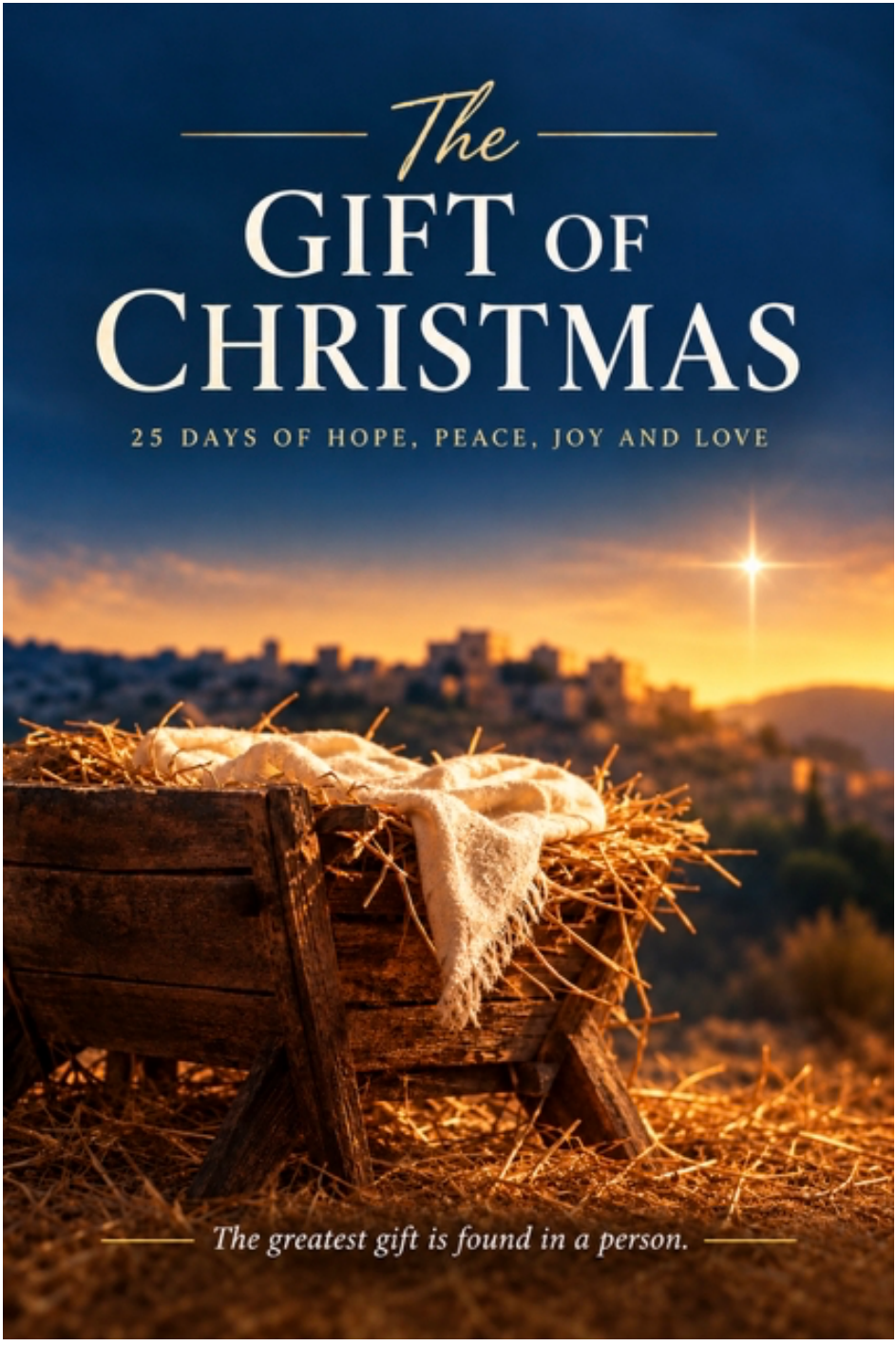
The Gift of Christmas

The greatest gift is found in a person


The
GIFT OF
CHRISTMAS
25 DAYS OF HOPE, PEACE, JOY AND LOVE
The greatest gift is found in a person.

A 25-Day Devotional

The Gift of Christmas
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Colorado Springs, Colorado

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Introduction

by Michael Haley

Read: Deuteronomy 8:10-18

God has been so gracious to me throughout the years. When I stop to consider all the gifts He has given me, I can't help but be thankful. God has blessed me with a wife who loves me unconditionally and demonstrates selfless love to our children and grandchildren. He has blessed us with three children who love us and, despite growing up as preacher's kids, continue to love and serve His church faithfully. For the past 18½ years, I have also had the privilege of pastoring the same church. God has given me a front-row seat to witness Him working in the lives of people from all walks of life.

When I reflect on these blessings, I'm reminded of the words of James 1:17: *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change*. Every good gift ultimately comes from God. Yet, how often do we get so caught up in enjoying His gifts that we forget to thank the Giver?

This morning, as I sat on my back patio enjoying a day off from the office, I was reminded once again of how much we need to be intentional about gratitude. Sometimes, we need to be reminded of just how much we should be thankful for.

I was reading a devotional from *Our Daily Bread* dated October 12, 2026, and came across the story of Dan Wallace, a Greek scholar who travels the world cataloging ancient manuscripts. At the height of his career, Dan contracted encephalitis, a disease that causes the brain to swell. He spent the next year in a wheelchair, traveling to five hospitals and even the Mayo Clinic. Although he survived, he lost much of his memory, including his knowledge of foreign languages. But Dan refused to give up. He eventually returned to the classroom and had to relearn the very language he had spent years mastering. As he explained, "I had to relearn Greek, and I taught myself Greek using the textbook that I myself had published the year before!"

As we look forward to Christmas and the hope, peace, love, and joy that accompany the season, let's be careful not to become so caught up in the celebration that we overlook the reason for it. John 3:16 reminds us that God demonstrated His love for the world by giving His one and only Son. Jesus is our hope! Jesus is our peace! Jesus is our love! Jesus is our Joy!

The greatest gift of Christmas isn't something we find under a tree. ***Jesus is The Gift of Christmas.***

Day 1

Hope in the Darkness

by Jon Haley

Isaiah 9:2

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone.

Have you ever experienced complete darkness? Thirty-five years ago, as a seventeen-year-old, I remember looking up at the sky and realizing how dark and vast it was. We were stranded on a back road in the middle of Mexico, and I don't think I had ever experienced such darkness. Darkness has a way of making us feel uncertain, vulnerable, and sometimes afraid. Trust me, I was fearful that night.

Life can feel that way, too. We experience seasons when the future seems uncertain, circumstances feel overwhelming, and answers are difficult to find. Sometimes the darkness comes through disappointment, grief, financial struggles, or broken relationships. Other times, we simply wonder what God is doing.

The people of Israel understood what it meant to live in darkness. They faced uncertainty, oppression, and the consequences of their own sin. Yet, through the prophet Isaiah, God gave them an incredible promise. **A great light was coming!**

Isaiah 9:6 reveals the source of that light. A child would be born, and a son would be given. Hundreds of years before Jesus' birth, God promised a Savior who would bring hope to a world that desperately needed it.

Notice the names Isaiah uses to describe Jesus. He is our Wonderful Counselor when we need wisdom, our Mighty God when we feel weak, our Everlasting Father who cares for us, and our Prince of Peace when life feels overwhelming.

The hope of Christmas is not that our circumstances will always change, but that Jesus changes everything. Christmas reminds us that God did not abandon us in our darkness. He sent His Son to bring light, life, and salvation. Whatever darkness you face this Christmas season, remember that darkness never has the final word. Jesus does!

Our hope is not found in the absence of darkness but in the presence of Jesus, the Light of the World.

Day 2

Hope for the Weary

by Jon Haley

Isaiah 40:28-31

28 Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary;
his understanding is unsearchable.
29 He gives power to the faint,
and to him who has no might he increases strength.
30 Even youths shall faint and be weary,
and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

Can you remember a time you felt exhausted? When I was nineteen and a full-time college student, I remember how exhausted I felt. I was working three jobs and carrying 18 hours in Bible College, trying to pay cash for an engagement ring. Other than maybe when our children were infants, I can't remember a season with less sleep.

The Christmas season can be one of the most wonderful times of the year, but it can also be one of the most exhausting. Between shopping, decorating, family gatherings, and endless activities, we can

become so busy celebrating Christmas that we forget to slow down and enjoy the One we are celebrating.

But sometimes our weariness has nothing to do with our schedules. Maybe you're exhausted from carrying a burden that nobody else knows about. Perhaps you're weary from praying for something that hasn't changed, dealing with a difficult relationship, or facing circumstances that seem beyond your control.

In Isaiah 40, God reminds His people of something we all need to remember: **Our strength is limited, but His strength is not.** The One who created the universe never runs out of strength. And here's the incredible promise found in verse 29: *He gives strength to those who have none.*

Those who wait upon the Lord will have their strength renewed. Notice that God doesn't promise to remove every difficult circumstance. Instead, He promises to provide the strength we need to keep going. That's the hope we celebrate at Christmas. God didn't simply send us encouragement from a distance. He sent us His Son. Jesus came into our broken and weary world to offer the hope and strength we could never find on our own.

This Christmas, if you're feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, or discouraged, remember that you don't have to face life in your own

strength. **When your strength runs out, God's strength is still available.** Stop trying to carry everything yourself. Place your trust in the One who never grows weary.

Day 3

Hope in the Waiting

by Michael Haley

Lamentations 3:21-26

21 But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: 22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; 23 they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him." 25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him. 26 It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

The expectation of Christmas morning can almost be unbearable for a child. Maybe that's why many families began the tradition of opening one Christmas present on Christmas Eve. Waiting is difficult. Waiting without hope is seemingly impossible. In verses 25 and 26, we see the dreaded word *wait* twice. But did you notice another word repeated twice as well? This word gives us purpose in the waiting. It reminds us that waiting is not a waste. Verse 25 tells us that God is ***good*** to those who wait, and verse 26 says it is ***good*** to wait for His salvation. *"Waiting on Him is not a waste when we understand that in the act of waiting, we are placing our trust and confidence in Him. Waiting is a great form of worship because, in our waiting, we are*

releasing our perceived control to the One who is in complete and total control."[1]

The holidays can be difficult because they tend to remind us of all that we have lost. Maybe it's the loss of a loved one. Perhaps you are grieving the loss of the "picture-perfect" family you once had or dreamed about for years. Like Jeremiah, maybe you need to remind yourself of God's faithfulness. Remember, His mercies are new every morning. God will give you enough grace to get through today. Tomorrow, when the sun rises, His mercies will be renewed, providing the grace you need for another day. Seasons come and go, but the steadfast love of the Lord will see us through both good times and bad.

If you find yourself in a season of waiting, I pray you will experience the goodness of God as you wait. There is hope in the waiting when we remember to worship while we wait.

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[1] *Beauty from Ashes:* Finding Grace in our Grief. Michael Haley, May 2023.

Day 4

Hope that doesn't disappoint

by Michael Haley

Romans 5:1-5

Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3 Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

My wife and I prayed and hoped for our second child for nearly 10 years. There were countless months when my wife would go to the dollar store to buy a pregnancy test. Every time she took another test, we hoped this would be the month we would finally receive good news. Month after month, our hope was met with disappointment. But God eventually answered our prayers and blessed us with a second child. In fact, He gave us more than we asked for and blessed us with a third! I'm guessing there have been times in your life when you were filled with hope, only to experience disappointment.

Depending on your translation, verse 5 says this hope will not put us to shame (ESV), cause us to be ashamed (KJV), or lead to disappointment (NLT). So, what kind of hope is Paul talking about?

First, Paul describes a hope that allows us to stand confidently in the grace of Jesus. When someone puts their faith in Jesus, they are justified, and this justification brings peace with God. Before Christ, we were enemies of God, but through Christ, we are brought into a right relationship with Him. The peace we receive in verse 1 leads to the rejoicing we see in verse 2. We rejoice because one day we will share in the glory of God.

Second, we see that this hope can grow through suffering. When we go through trials, we can rejoice because God is producing endurance, character, and greater hope in us. We rejoice because one day we will share in His glory, and we rejoice because God is using our suffering to strengthen our hope.

Now, back to verse 5. Our hope will not put us to shame or ultimately end in disappointment because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. This doesn't mean we won't experience disappointment in this life. It means our earthly disappointments cannot undo what God has promised us in Christ.

One day, we will be fully reconciled to God and share in His glory for all eternity.

Our hope in Christ may be tested by disappointment, but it will never end in disappointment.

Day 5

Hope in God's Promises

by Mike Haley

Hebrews 10:23

"Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise." (NLT)

"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful." (NKJV)

As a young dad, I quickly learned that my children remembered the promises I made to them. On several different occasions, I heard these words from my children: "Dad, you promised!" I also heard my wife say, "Don't make promises to the kids you can't keep." (Ouch!)

Our God is amazing because He not only remembers every one of His promises, but He also keeps them all!

What promises has God made to you? Here are two that remind me of His faithfulness.

1. God promises us everlasting life.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, He who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life” (John 5:24, NKJV).

I love the assurance that the Lord Jesus has forgiven my sins and given me new life. I know He dwells within me, and I have the promise of eternal life. What an incredible assurance! My salvation is not based on my ability to earn God's favor, but on the finished work of Jesus Christ. I can have full confidence in this promise because God is faithful.

2. God promises to give us wisdom and direction.

“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness but have the light of life” (John 8:12, NKJV).

God promises that He will not leave us to wander aimlessly through this world without direction. He promises to guide us and lead us along the way. Psalm 73:23–24 reminds us:

“Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (NKJV).

This verse reminds me that throughout every day of my life, God will give me wise counsel and direction. He will guide me until the very end and then receive me into His presence. How could I ask for anything more from the God who is the anchor for my soul? He holds me in His hand and directs my steps.

As a young boy, I was deeply convicted of my sin after hearing the gospel of Christ. I knew I needed to repent of my sin and believe that the Lord Jesus had died on the cross for me. He paid the price for my salvation, and He rose from the dead, demonstrating His power over sin and death and His ability to give me eternal life.

He saved me and then gave me a life to live and a direction to follow. I became a follower of Christ. I began praying as David prayed:

"Show me Your ways, O LORD; teach me Your paths. Lead me in Your truth and teach me; for You are the God of my salvation; on You I wait all the day" (Psalm 25:4–5, NKJV).

I am so thankful I made that decision to follow Christ, and I have never regretted it. His promises are wonderful, and He is faithful to keep every one of them. No matter what circumstances I face or what the future holds, I can rest in the assurance that God will never fail me.

What promise of God do you need to hold on to today? Remember, our confidence is not in the promises of people, who may disappoint us, but in the God who is always faithful. He has promised us everlasting life, His guidance along the way, and the assurance that He will never leave us. We can trust Him because He always keeps His promises.

Day 6

Jesus Christ is Our Hope

by Mike Haley

I Timothy 1:1

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope."

Christ is our hope! He is the One who was promised. He is the only One who came down from heaven to reveal God the Father to us. He came into this world, born of Mary in the humble town of Bethlehem, fulfilling the prophecies given by the Old Testament prophets.

Hundreds of prophecies foretold the details of His coming: the place of His birth, the messenger who would announce that the promised Messiah had arrived, and the words John the Baptist would declare: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The prophets also foretold details of His ministry, His betrayal, His trial, His suffering on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead. More than 300 Old Testament prophecies point to the coming Messiah, and Jesus Christ fulfilled them. He is the Promised One!

He is our hope! He lived a sinless life and perfectly fulfilled the righteous requirements of God's law. He is the only One who has ever lived a perfect life. He demonstrated His power over the natural world by walking on water, calming the winds, and commanding the waves to be still. His disciples were amazed and asked, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?” (Mark 4:41, NKJV).

He healed every kind of sickness, even cleansing a man with leprosy. He opened the ears of the deaf, the eyes of the blind, and the mouth of a man who could not speak.

He is our hope! Jesus also demonstrated His authority over the supernatural world. He delivered a man who was possessed by a legion of demons and Mary Magdalene, from whom seven demons had been cast out. Both became followers of the Lord Jesus. Even the demons recognized His authority and knew who He was. Satan and his demons are powerful, but they are not all-powerful. Our God can do the impossible because He is the Almighty Creator and Sovereign Ruler of the universe. Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords!

He is our hope! Jesus demonstrated His power over death. He raised the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus from the dead (Mark 5:41–42). He raised Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, from the dead (John 11:43–44). He even stopped a funeral procession and

raised the only son of a widow in the town of Nain (Luke 7:11–17). Jesus has power over death!

He is our hope! Christ not only has authority over the natural and supernatural worlds, but He is also Lord over all of history. The history of this world is His story! He has a plan for the ages and knows the final days of human history. They are revealed in His Word. He also knows the history of every human being. He is sovereign over the nations and intimately involved in our lives, both collectively and individually. He is amazing! He is our hope because He has a purpose for my life and yours.

David reminds us of God's knowledge and care for us:

“You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God” (Psalm 139:16–17, NLT).

God's plans for His people are also described in Jeremiah:

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11, NKJV).

And God's desire is that people would come to know Him:

“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9, NKJV).

Jesus Christ is our hope! He fulfilled the promises of God, demonstrated His power over all creation, conquered death, and holds the future in His hands. Whatever you face today, you can place your hope in Him. He is the Promised One, the risen Savior, and the King of kings. He is our hope!

Day 7

Peace Announced

by Jon Haley

Luke 2:13-14

[13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying:
[14]Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!

The shepherds were not the most upstanding citizens in the Ancient Near East. Most commentaries will inform you they were not even allowed to be witnesses in a court of law because they were not reliable or trustworthy. The Shepherds were outcasts and continually lived as ceremonially unclean. This meant they could not enter the Temple and worship.

I find it incredibly intriguing that the uncredible witnesses become incredible witnesses of the birth of Jesus. Luke tells us they immediately went and told everyone about the night that changed history.

17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. **18** And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them.

Take a moment to meditate on the words the Angel told the Shepherd. The Angel reveals the purpose for which God became man.

10 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. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

> *These despised men hear the most wonderful thing about how this joy comes. It comes through the birth of "a Savior … who is the Messiah, the Lord" (v. 11). This is the only time in the Gospels this phrase is used. It's the only time we see all the titles of Jesus brought together—Savior, Messiah, Lord. He will save his people from their sins. Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah promised to Israel. And most staggeringly of all, he is Lord. He is God. He is Maker of all. He is Ruler of all. The angels not only give the gospel to the Shepherds; they give the true identity of Christ.*[2]

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[2] Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2018), 43.

The Gospel, the Good News, came to the humble, lowly Shepherds. They received, accepted, believed, rejoiced and then shared it. This is how all of Jesus should respond to the Gospel. How about you? Have you received and believed the Good News? If yes, are you rejoicing and sharing the Gospel that brings joy to all people? Don't miss the result of believing and receiving. The angels sing a hymn of praise before they leave. **14** "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

In other words, peace is available to those who have believed and received the Gospel's Good News. Apart from a relationship with God through Jesus, peace on earth for all men is impossible.

Day 8

The Gift of Peace

by Jon Haley

Colossians 1:20

20 *and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

There are two types of families. The families who methodically, slowly, and intentionally go around the room, opening one present at a time for everyone to watch. Then there was my family growing up. It was 1.2.3. go. Seemingly, in a few seconds, all the presents are opened, and the pile of paper is massive. Which one is your family?

Have you ever been given a gift you knew you needed or wanted? That's exactly what God did for us at Christmas. When we think about the birth of Jesus, we often picture a baby lying in a manger, surrounded by Mary, Joseph, shepherds, and animals. It's a beautiful picture, but if we stop at the manger, we miss Christmas's greater purpose. **Jesus was born so that we could be reconciled to God.**

In Colossians 1, Paul reminds us that sin separated us from our Creator. Verse 21 describes our condition before Christ. We were alienated from God and hostile toward Him because of our sinful hearts

and actions. That's not a very comforting Christmas thought, is it? But here's the good news! God didn't leave us in that condition.

Verse 20 tells us that Jesus made peace through the blood of His cross. The baby born in Bethlehem came into this world with a purpose. He would live a sinless life, die in our place, and rise again so that we could be forgiven and restored to a right relationship with God. We can't purchase, achieve, or earn the peace Jesus offers. It is a gift made possible through His sacrifice.

This Christmas, as you exchange gifts with family and friends, remember the greatest gift ever given. God sent His Son to provide what we needed most. Jesus didn't come simply to make our lives more peaceful. He came to make peace between God and us.

The greatest gift of peace is knowing that, through Jesus Christ, we can be made right with God.

Day 9

Perfect Peace

by Michael Haley

Isaiah 26:3-4

3 You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you,
because he trusts in you. 4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD GOD
is an everlasting rock.

I wonder how you would describe perfect peace. Is it a morning when the kids get up on their own and get ready for school without an emotional outburst? Maybe they even get up early, make their own breakfast, and pack their own lunches. Perhaps it's a day when you get up early and enjoy a beautiful run on a calm, cool morning. Or maybe it's the opportunity to sleep in, enjoy a perfectly quiet house, and sit under a warm blanket with a cup of hot tea or coffee.

Isaiah tells us that perfect peace comes when we keep our minds focused on God. In its context, this passage points to the peace God will ultimately establish when His kingdom comes in its fullness. We look forward to the day when Jesus returns, and we enjoy the new heaven and new earth. What a glorious day that will be! But I also believe this passage has something to teach us about our present circumstances. When we keep our minds focused on Christ, we can

experience His peace even while living in an imperfect world. It is the kind of peace described in Philippians 4:7: *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."*

The ability to focus our minds on Christ grows as we learn to trust Him. God has proven throughout history that He is trustworthy. Isaiah describes Him as an everlasting rock, which is a firm foundation that will never fail. Notice the connection between Isaiah 26:3 and Philippians 4:7. God keeps us in perfect peace, and His peace guards our hearts and minds. As one Bible commentary explains, Jesus can create perfect peace within our minds even when storms rage around us. Our circumstances may be uncertain, but our God is unchanging and dependable.

What is stealing your peace today? Take some time to refocus your heart and mind on Christ. Remember who He is, reflect on His faithfulness, and choose to trust Him. You may not be able to change the circumstances around you, but you can turn your attention to the One who holds you steady through them. Perfect peace isn't found in our circumstances; it's found in creator.

Day 10

Peace in the Storm

by Michael Haley

Mark 4:35-41

35 On that day, when evening had come, he said to them, “Let us go
across to the other side.” **36** And leaving the crowd, they took him
with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with
him. **37** And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking
into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. **38** But he was in the
stern, asleep on the cushion. And they woke him and said to him,
“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” **39** And he awoke
and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the
wind ceased, and there was a great calm. **40** He said to them, “Why
are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?” **41** And they were filled
with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even
the wind and the sea obey him?”

The sea of life seems to be filled with storms. Some storms pass as quickly as they appear, while others seem to linger. Storms that hurt. Storms that cause damage. Storms that strike fear. Storms that leave us feeling broken. Storms that reveal both our weaknesses and our strengths. The reality is that you are either in a storm, have just come out of one, or have a storm brewing on the horizon.

The storm the disciples faced that night was revealing. The crashing waves and howling wind exposed their lack of faith. I wonder

how many times the storms in my own life have revealed the same thing.

When the disciples shifted their focus to the storm, they lost sight of a couple of important truths. First, Jesus was the one who invited them into the boat to cross the sea. When Jesus leads you into a storm, you can be sure He will meet you there. Second, their fear caused them to lose sight of the fact that Jesus was in the boat with them. They asked Him, *"Do you not care that we are perishing?"*

Not only had the storm exposed their lack of faith, but it had also caused them to forget who Jesus was. Instead of recognizing His authority, they addressed Him as Teacher. Yet, the One sleeping in their boat was the same One who could calm the wind and sea with a word.

How often do we do the same thing? When the storms of life come, we focus on the crashing waves instead of the One who has power over them. We begin to question whether God cares, forgetting that He is right there with us.

Jesus can calm the storms around us, but He can also calm the storms raging within us. The next time fear begins to overwhelm you,

remember who is in your boat. You may not know when the storm will end, but you can trust the One who is with you through it.

Will you turn your eyes to Jesus and hear Him say, **“Peace! Be still!”**?

Day 11

Peace that Guards

by Mike Haley

Philippians 4:6-7 NKJV
"Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Life can be overwhelming at times! All of us face the demands of busyness, deadlines, work, home, and school. Recently, I sat with a man who told me, "I can't wait to get my wife back. She is teaching full time at school, teaching Sunday School on Sunday, and studying at night to finish her master's degree." That's overwhelming!

When life becomes overwhelming, we need to remind ourselves that we do not have to carry the load alone.

There are times when we need a word of encouragement and comfort. We need to be reminded that God's peace comes as we slow down and reconnect with the God of all comfort. Second Corinthians 1:3–4 describes Him as the "Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation" (NKJV).

Even the apostle Paul experienced overwhelming circumstances. He wrote, “we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life” (2 Corinthians 1:8, NKJV). Paul was so overwhelmed that he felt he could not go on. But he went on to explain that these circumstances taught him not to trust in himself, but in God, “who raises the dead” (2 Corinthians 1:9). His circumstances reminded him that his strength was not enough, but God's strength was more than sufficient.

I have felt that way too!

It is so natural for us to trust in ourselves. But when life seems unbearable, what should we do? We need to make time to be still. We need moments to quiet our minds and reflect on the God who is watching over us. Philippians 4:7 reminds us that “the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (NKJV).

The word translated “guard” gives us the picture of a military guard standing watch. It is used in Acts 9:24 to describe the soldiers who were watching the gates of Damascus, hoping to capture Paul. What a powerful picture! God's peace stands guard over our hearts and minds. He sees what lies ahead, watches over us, and provides the strength and comfort we need through every difficult season.

When we take time to remember who God is, our trust in Him is renewed. Through prayer and meditation on His Word, we can experience the peace that comes from His presence. We find comfort in knowing that we are not alone. We must come apart before we come apart! We need to make time to connect with the God who loves us and watches over us. He guards our hearts and minds.

In the busyness of this season, please take time every day to remember the God who watches over you. He cares for you. He loves you. He guards you. Trust Him every day. Put your phone down, slow down, and take time to think about the goodness of God.

Give thanks to Him! He sent His only Son to demonstrate His love for us. What amazing love!

Day 12

Jesus is our peace

By Mike Haley

Ephesians 2:13-15

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for He Himself is our peace, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace."

The Lord Jesus Christ has made it possible for Jews and Gentiles to live at peace with one another as one body—the body of Christ, which is the church. In the past, there was deep division between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews often viewed Gentiles as outsiders, and even the temple reflected this separation. A dividing wall in the temple courts marked the boundary beyond which Gentiles were not permitted to enter.

But through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, that wall of separation was broken down. Jesus brought Jews and Gentiles together to form one new body of believers. The good news is that there is no distinction when it comes to salvation. Everyone who comes to Christ receives forgiveness and a place in the family of God.

In the church, we are no longer divided by social status, national boundaries, or racial prejudice. In the body of Christ, we are one. We are all sinners who have been saved by grace and washed clean through the blood of Jesus. He made peace possible through His death on the cross.

He is our peace!

As John Phillips explains, “The gospel reduces all people to the same level. All people are brought into the great equation of salvation through the common denominator: repentance toward God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

The gospel of Christ gives every believer a new identity and a special place in God's family. We are citizens of heaven, and our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Philippians 3:20; Luke 10:20). We have been born again into the family of God. We are now His children and joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:16–17).

Through Jesus, we have been brought near to God. We are no longer strangers or outsiders. We are welcomed into His family as His sons and daughters. What a wonderful gift!

The same cross that brought us peace with God also makes peace possible with one another. We may come from different

backgrounds, cultures, and circumstances, but in Christ we belong to the same family.

He is our peace!

Day 13

The Gift of Joy

by Jon Haley

Luke 1:46–49

"And Mary said, 'My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.'"

My wife of thirty-three years is named JOY. We have so many ornaments, hand towels, and Christmas décor with her name on it. The word JOY is synonymous with Christmas. We sing the song, Joy to the World, the Lord is come, which is about the second advent, not the first, but that is for another devotional. The word may be attached to the season, but Christmas doesn't always feel joyous. We have gifts to buy, parties to attend, meals to prepare, and expectations to meet. Somewhere in all the activity, it's easy to lose sight of the joy Christmas is supposed to bring.

When Mary learned that she would give birth to Jesus, her life was about to become anything but easy. She was young, unmarried, and facing an uncertain future. Questions, misunderstandings, and challenges she could never have anticipated would follow. Can you

imagine how many difficult conversations she would have? Her parents, friends, Joseph, and Religious leaders.

Yet Mary's response was not one of fear or frustration. It was worship! She declared, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." Notice that Mary's joy wasn't rooted in her circumstances. It was rooted in her Savior. She didn't rejoice because life would be easy. She rejoiced because God was doing something extraordinary.

The same is true for us today. Christmas reminds us that genuine joy isn't found in perfect circumstances, beautifully wrapped presents, or everything going according to plan. **Real joy is found in knowing the Savior who came to rescue us from our sins.** Mary recognized that God had done great things for her. And through Jesus Christ, God has done something even greater for us. He has provided the gift of salvation.

This Christmas, don't allow the busyness of the season to rob you of the joy of knowing Jesus.

The greatest joy of Christmas isn't found in what we receive, but in WHO we have received.

Day 14

Joy in His Presence

by Jon Haley

Psalm 16:11

"You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

I remember when I was around seven years old, opening my "big" Christmas gift. This would be the gift of all gifts. This was the present I was dreaming about. I unwrapped the gift to find a remote-controlled police car. I was ecstatic; this was exactly what I wanted, and if my memory serves me correctly, my twin brother got the same one. I had so much fun with that car for the next hour until it broke. My happiness ended with the broken car. That's the problem with happiness that depends on circumstances. It doesn't last.

But the Bible describes a different kind of joy. In Psalm 16:11, David declares, "In your presence there is fullness of joy." Notice where David says joy is found. Not in possessions. Not in accomplishments. Not even in the absence of problems. **Fullness of joy is found in God's presence.**

When Jesus was born, God didn't simply send us a message from heaven. He came to be with us. Matthew 1:23 says Jesus would

be called *Immanuel*, which means “God with us.” Think about that for a moment. The Creator of the universe stepped into His creation. The eternal Son of God took on human flesh. He came to live among us, ultimately giving His life so that we could be reconciled to God.

Through Jesus Christ, we can enjoy a relationship with God that brings a joy this world cannot offer. Christmas decorations will come down. Gifts will eventually wear out. The excitement of the season will fade. But the joy found in knowing Jesus can remain through every season of life.

You don’t have to wait for everything in your life to go well to experience joy. You can experience it today because God is with you. I must ask: are you more interested in His presents or His presence?

Day 15

Joy Despite Circumstances

by Michael Haley

Philippians 4:4

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice.

Maybe you've heard the acronym JOY that reminds us of the right order for our priorities: **J**esus, **O**thers, **Y**ou.

Jesus — When Jesus is our priority, joy becomes our reality. One Bible commentary says, *"Joy reigns in the heart only when Christ is Lord of life."* Paul isn't telling the church to rejoice only when we experience the joy of the Christmas season. As followers of Jesus, we are called to rejoice in every season and circumstance. I truly believe that the joy of the Lord is experienced most fully when He is truly Lord of our lives.

Others — Learning to put others before ourselves allows us to experience joy rather than becoming self-centered, self-focused, and eventually self-consumed. Maybe one reason Christmas is known as the most joyous time of the year is that we tend to focus a little more on others. Christmas has become a season of giving and generosity.

People seem to wear bigger smiles than at other times of the year. Could it be that we experience greater joy simply because we are focusing on others a little more?

Jesus modeled this kind of selfless living. Mark 10:45 reminds us that He came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. If Jesus, the Son of God, came to serve others, shouldn't we follow His example?

You — Have you ever met a self-centered person who was filled with joy? I don't mean someone who expresses happiness, but someone who experiences true joy. In Philippians 2:3, Paul encourages us to walk in humility by valuing others above ourselves. Learning to put others first is one way we can experience the joy of the Lord in every circumstance. A selfish life is an unhappy life, while a selfless life reflects the life of Jesus.

How are your priorities? May we put **Jesus first, others second, and ourselves last.** When we stop making life all about us and begin living for Him and serving others, we discover a deeper joy. After all, **Jesus is truly where the joy is.**

Day 16

Abiding Joy

by Michael Haley

John 15:11

[11] These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Here in verse 11, Jesus tells us that He shared these truths so His joy could be in us and our joy could be full. So, what had He just been teaching? John 15 is all about abiding, or remaining, in Jesus. He describes Himself as the vine and us as the branches. When we abide in Him, He produces fruit in our lives. But when we fail to remain connected to Him, we cannot bear fruit on our own.

Jesus connects abiding in Him with experiencing His joy. Notice that He doesn't simply promise us happiness when life goes our way. He offers us something deeper: **His joy in us.** Our joy isn't dependent on perfect circumstances but on our connection to a perfect Savior.

So, how do we abide in Jesus? Later in the chapter, Jesus tells us to abide in His love and keep His commandments (John 15:9–10). We remain close to Him as we spend time in His Word, follow His

teaching, and walk in obedience. Abiding isn't a one-time decision; it's a daily choice to depend on Jesus rather than ourselves.

The world tells us to chase joy through experiences, possessions, and circumstances. Jesus reminds us that lasting joy is found in Him. The more we walk with Him, the more His life shapes ours and His joy fills our hearts.

Are you trying to find joy in what is happening around you, or are you finding joy by remaining connected to Jesus? **True, abiding joy isn't found in what life gives us, but in the One who gives us life.**

Day 17

Joy in Salvation

By Mike Haley

Psalms 51:12

"Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by Your generous Spirit."

We all know the happiness that comes from receiving a gift we have wanted or having a visit from a friend or relative we haven't seen in a long time. At Christmas, we love watching our children and grandchildren unwrap presents under the tree. Happiness is often a temporary emotion brought on by a special event or experience.

Joy, however, goes much deeper. It is more than a moment of happiness or excitement. Joy is an inner sense of peace and spiritual contentment that comes from knowing the Lord and living with His purpose in mind. Investing in the lives of our children, grandchildren, and others brings a deep sense of joy. Watching people embrace the gospel of Christ and seeing the changes He makes in their lives brings a joy that is difficult to describe.

There is joy in writing this Christmas devotional alongside my sons. I also remember the joy of taking my daughter and her husband, along with three boys from their children's home, on a trip to

Guatemala. Those boys made friends with other children at a home there, and I watched them share the gospel with someone who trusted Christ as Savior. That was an overwhelming joy! I love the memories of those moments because they remind me that the joy of the Lord is a lasting joy.

Nehemiah 8:10 reminds us, “The joy of the LORD is your strength” (NKJV).

King David knew what it was like to lose his joy. He had been described as a man after God's own heart, but he took his eyes off the Lord and began seeking to please himself. His sin brought brokenness and a loss of joy. In Psalm 51, we find David's prayer of repentance. He asked God for forgiveness and pleaded with Him to restore the joy of His salvation.

Have you ever lost your joy? I have. And through those seasons, I've learned that there are some important ways to find it again.

1. **Joy returns when we praise the Lord for His blessings.** When we take our eyes off our circumstances and remember God's goodness, our hearts are reminded of all we have to be thankful for.

2. **Joy returns when we help others experience the joy of the Lord.** When we invest in others, serve them, and share the gospel, we experience the blessing of seeing God work in their lives.
3. **Joy returns when we trust the Lord and give back to Him with thanksgiving.** A grateful heart recognizes that everything we have comes from Him. Jesus reminded us, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35, NKJV).

If you have lost your joy, take time to consider where you may have lost your focus. Return to the Lord in prayer, seek His forgiveness, and ask Him to restore the joy of His salvation, just as David did.

Happiness may come and go with our circumstances, but the joy of the Lord is rooted in our relationship with Him.

Joy is a choice to rejoice. I choose joy!

Day 18

Jesus, our joy

By Mike Haley

Hebrews 12:1-2

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the same and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God"

The Lord Jesus faced opposition from the religious leaders of Israel. Even His own family and those who had watched Him grow up struggled to believe His claims. To many, He was simply the son of a carpenter from Nazareth.

But Jesus knew why He had come. He came to be the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. He knew the suffering that awaited Him, yet He also knew what lay beyond the cross. Hebrews 12:2 tells us that He endured the cross "for the joy that was set before Him." Jesus looked beyond the pain and suffering to the joy of accomplishing the Father's will and securing salvation for all who would believe in Him.

The joy set before Jesus gave Him the strength to endure. He knew that His death and resurrection would change the world. He also looked ahead to the day when He would return, establish His Kingdom, and reign as King of kings. His eyes were fixed on what was coming, and that future joy kept Him focused on the mission He had been sent to accomplish.

The joy of Jesus was found in looking ahead! We, too, can look ahead and find great joy in the promises God has given us.

One day, Jesus will return and establish His Kingdom on earth. He will reign as King of kings, and Scripture promises that we will reign with Him (Revelation 20:4–6). What a glorious day that will be!

We also have the promise of a glorified body, free from the limitations and struggles of this life. We will be caught up to be with the Lord, and we will be with Him forever (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). We look forward to the day when death, sorrow, and pain will be no more. What a wonderful reunion and what a glorious time of rejoicing that will be!

The joy of looking ahead helped our Lord endure the trials He faced and the suffering of the cross. We, too, can endure the difficulties of life when we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and remember

the future He has promised us. Our present struggles are real, but they are not the end of our story.

There is a wonderful old hymn titled *It Will Be Worth It All (When We See Christ)*. Its message reminds us that when we finally see Jesus, the trials of this life will seem small in comparison to the glory that awaits us.

Keep looking ahead! Keep your eyes on Jesus! The promise of His return and the joy of being with Him forever give us reason to keep running the race.

It will be worth it all when we see Jesus!

Day 19

Love Came Down

by Jon Haley

John 3:16

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life."

Do you buy your presents early? Do you buy online? Do you wait until the last minute and enjoy the rush of the mall crowds? We spend countless hours searching for the perfect gifts for the people we love. We make lists, check them twice, and sometimes spend more money than we intended. Why do we do all of this? Because giving is one of the ways we express our love.

But long before we ever exchanged Christmas gifts, God gave the greatest gift the world has ever known. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. The motivation for the gift of Jesus, was love. Romans 5:8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

And God's love wasn't simply something He declared. It was something He demonstrated. **Love is more than something God says.**

Love is something God does. The baby born in Bethlehem was God's demonstration of His love for a broken and sinful world. Jesus came knowing that His journey would eventually lead to a cross. The manger was the beginning of a mission that would culminate in His death and resurrection.

That's what makes Christmas so extraordinary. The greatest gift ever given wasn't wrapped in colorful paper and placed beneath a tree. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. This Christmas, as you give and receive gifts, remember the gift that makes every other gift seem small. The greatest gift ever given was not found under the tree but on the tree. And that gift was given for you.

Day 20

Loved First

by Jon Haley

1 John 4:19
"We love because he first loved us."

I remember sitting at Burger King on Glenstone Avenue in Springfield, Missouri, as a nineteen-year-old "boy," madly in love with a nineteen-year-old girl but too scared to admit it. Suddenly, she answered my question with life-changing words: "I love you." It was as if the world stood still for a moment, or maybe an eternity. Have you ever stopped to think about who said "I love you" first in your most important relationships? Sometimes those three little words are difficult to say because saying them first requires vulnerability. We wonder whether the other person feels the same way.

When it comes to our relationship with God, there's never been any question about who loved first. **God did.** I John 4:19 reminds us of a remarkable truth: "We love because he first loved us." Before we ever knew God, He loved us. Before we ever sought Him, He was pursuing us. Before we ever understood our need for a Savior, God had already provided one.

As we looked at yesterday, Romans 5:8 tells us that God demonstrated His love for us: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Think about that. God didn't wait for us to get our lives together. He didn't wait until we became good enough or religious enough. He loved us when we didn't deserve His love. While Jesus was on the cross, He knew I would betray Him. He knew I would often fail Him, and yet He loved me enough to die for me.

This is the message of Christmas. When Jesus entered the world in Bethlehem, He came to people who desperately needed a Savior. His birth was not a reward for humanity's goodness. It expressed God's grace. And because God loved us first, we now have the opportunity and responsibility to love others. That's where Christmas becomes more than a celebration. It becomes a demonstration.

But God's love challenges us to love differently. Maybe this Christmas there's someone you need to forgive. Perhaps there's a relationship you need to restore. Maybe someone simply needs to know they are loved. You don't have to wait for them to make the first move. After all, God didn't wait for you. Take the first step toward reconciliation and display the same love God gave you to them.

Day 21

Nothing Can Separate Us

by Michael Haley

Romans 8:38-39

38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul was convinced that nothing in this world could separate those who belong to Christ from the love of God. His confidence wasn't based on a life without trouble, but on a love that was greater than anything he would ever face. Death, life, the present, the future, and even the powers of this world could never separate him from God's love in Christ Jesus.

When we receive the Gift of Christmas, Jesus, we receive more than a moment of celebration. We receive the gift of eternal life and the privilege of a relationship with God. Through Jesus, we are brought into a relationship with the Father, and nothing in all creation can take that love away from us.

Think about that for a moment. We often measure love by how we feel or by how others treat us. When life is good, it's easy to believe

we are loved. But when we face disappointment, loss, or uncertainty, we may begin to wonder where God is. We can mistakenly believe that difficult circumstances mean God has stopped loving us. Paul reminds us that God's love is not measured by our circumstances. It is secured through Jesus Christ.

Zephaniah gives us another beautiful picture of God's love: *"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love"* (Zephaniah 3:17). God doesn't simply tolerate His children; He delights in them. His love brings comfort when we are troubled and reassurance when we feel weak.

As we celebrate Christmas, remember that the baby in the manger came to make a way for us to know God personally. Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus secured a relationship with God that no circumstance, power, or force in creation can destroy.

What are you facing today that makes you question God's love? Whatever it is, remember this truth: your circumstances may change, your feelings may fluctuate, and people may disappoint you, but God's love remains. **The greatest gift of Christmas is Jesus, and in Him, we have a love we can never lose**

Day 22

Love Like Jesus

by Michael Haley

Philippians 2:1-11

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, [2] complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. [3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, [6] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, [7] but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. [9] Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, [10] so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, [11] and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Christmas is a beautiful picture of love. God sent His Son into the world, not to be served, but to serve and ultimately give His life for us. Jesus left the glory of heaven, took on human flesh, and humbled Himself to become our Savior. But the love Jesus demonstrated was not only meant to be celebrated; it was meant to be followed.

In Philippians 2, Paul challenges us to have the same mindset as Jesus. He encourages us to put aside selfish ambition and pride, choosing instead to value others above ourselves. That doesn't mean we have less value, but that we stop making everything about us. Rather than focusing only on our own needs, we begin looking for ways to serve and care for the people around us.

Jesus is our greatest example of this kind of love. Though He was God, He willingly took the form of a servant. He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. The One who deserved all honor chose the path of humility so that we could receive the greatest gift of all: salvation.

Think about how different our relationships would be if we followed His example. What if we were more concerned about serving than being served, listening than being heard, and encouraging others than seeking recognition? Imagine how our homes, churches, and communities might change if we consistently put the needs of others ahead of our own preferences.

Loving like Jesus doesn't always come naturally. Our pride tells us to protect our interests, demand our way, and seek recognition. But when we remember how Jesus loved us, we find the motivation to love others with that same humility and grace.

This Christmas, as you celebrate the love of God displayed through Jesus, look for opportunities to share that love with others. You don't have to do something extraordinary. Sometimes the most Christlike thing you can do is offer a listening ear, extend forgiveness, meet a need, or serve without expecting anything in return.

Who in your life needs to experience the love of Jesus through you today? Follow His example by choosing humility over pride and service over selfishness. The greatest gift of Christmas is Jesus, and one way we honor Him is by learning to love like Him.

Day 23

The Greatest Love

By Mike Haley

John 15:13
Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.

It is almost Christmas! Children are counting the days to Christmas. This is such a special time of year! Children anticipate opening their presents, wondering if they will receive the gifts they have been hoping for. I do love Christmas! It is a wonderful opportunity to tell our family members, co-workers, and teachers just how much they mean to us. Sharing with others and demonstrating our love in different ways gives this season an atmosphere of love and appreciation.

We attend banquets, parties, and special church services that remind us of the true meaning of Christmas. It is a wonderful time to remember the sacrifice of our Heavenly Father in sending His only beloved Son to be born in Bethlehem. Jesus Christ willingly came into this world and ultimately laid down His life for us. There is no greater demonstration of love than someone who is willing to give his life for another.

The love Jesus demonstrated for us is a powerful reminder of how precious life is. We only have one life to live, so let's live with purpose. Let's live for something that lasts. Love your family. Love one another. Love your neighbor as yourself, just as Jesus taught us.

I love this story about true love. A doctor was removing the stitches from an elderly man's injured thumb when he noticed the man was in a hurry. The doctor asked if he had somewhere he needed to be. The man explained that his wife was in a nursing home, and he wanted to have breakfast with her. He also shared that she suffered from Alzheimer's disease.

The doctor asked if his wife would be upset if he arrived late. The man explained that she no longer recognized him and hadn't called him by name in five years. The doctor was surprised and asked, “You still go every morning, even though she doesn't know who you are?” The elderly man smiled and replied, “She doesn't know me, but I still know who she is, and I still love her.”

That kind of love is a beautiful picture of commitment. True love is patient and kind. It doesn't give up when circumstances become difficult. First Corinthians 13 reminds us that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. This is the kind of love God has demonstrated toward us.

Jesus showed us what true love looks like when He willingly gave His life for us. He then challenged us to follow His example:

“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12, NKJV).

We celebrate Christmas because Jesus came to show us the love of God. His love was not simply spoken; it was demonstrated through His life, His sacrifice, and His willingness to give Himself for us.

As you celebrate Christmas, look for opportunities to demonstrate that same love to those around you. Be patient. Be kind. Be faithful. Don't give up on the people God has placed in your life.

Jesus came to show us true love. Let His love be seen in you!

Day 24

Love made visible

By Mike Haley

I John 4:9

God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him.

Christmas Eve, we love going to a candlelight service. I especially love reading the account of the birth of Christ. The angel appeared to the shepherds on the hillside as they were caring for their sheep. He announced that the Savior had been born, who is Christ the Lord. 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, goodwill toward men."

The shepherds hurried into the city to find this special baby, just as the angel had told them.

Jesus was born, and at about the age of thirty, He began His public ministry, which lasted approximately three and a half years. After being baptized by John in the Jordan River, Jesus began a ministry unlike anything the world had ever seen.

His life was amazing! He demonstrated the love of God in extraordinary ways. He fed multitudes who were hungry. He healed the

sick of their illnesses and diseases. He taught with authority and showed people how to pray. He opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. He had compassion for the hurting and broken. He cast demons out of men, women, and children, delivering them from the hopelessness that had taken hold of their lives. He saw those grieving the loss of loved ones, and He brought comfort like no one else could. He even raised the dead!

He demonstrated such love. And then, He was willing to lay down His own life and be nailed to a cross for us. His death paid the penalty for my sin and yours. He came to bring us back to God. God sent His Son to show us just how much He loves us.

"God is love." (1 John 4:8)

Such love. Amazing love!

Jesus calls us to love one another. First Corinthians 13:13 reminds us, "Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love." (NLT)

Let the Lord into your life. Receive His love and allow Him to change you. He will be a gift that keeps on giving. Then, look around and find someone who needs to experience that same love. Find a way to show them the love of God.

Day 25

The Greatest Gift

by Michael Haley

Luke 2:1-14

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. **2** This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. **3** And all went to be registered, each to his own town. **4** 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, **5** to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. **6** And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. **7** 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. **8** And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. **9** 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. **10** 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. **11** For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. **12** And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." **13** And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, **14** "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Christmas morning is finally here! For many of us, this day is filled with family, food, traditions, and presents. We spend weeks preparing, shopping, decorating, and anticipating the celebration, or maybe your wife spent weeks doing all those things. Yet in the middle

of all the excitement, it is easy to overlook the very reason we celebrate Christmas in the first place.

Luke 2 tells us the story of Jesus' birth. While Caesar Augustus was issuing decrees and people were traveling to their hometowns, God was fulfilling His plan to send the Savior into the world. Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem and laid Him in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. The King of kings entered the world not in a palace surrounded by riches, but in humble circumstances.

Then an angel appeared to shepherds with an incredible announcement: "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11). Notice the words *unto you*. Jesus came for us! He came because we needed a Savior. Our greatest need was not more possessions, greater success, or a better set of circumstances. Our greatest need was to be rescued from sin and brought into a relationship with God.

That is what makes Jesus the greatest gift of Christmas. Every present we unwrap today will eventually wear out, break, or be replaced. The excitement of Christmas morning will fade, and the decorations will soon be packed away. But Jesus offers something that will never lose its value: forgiveness, eternal life, and a relationship with God that lasts forever.

James 1:17 reminds us that every good and perfect gift comes from above. And John 3:16 tells us how great God's love is: He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him would have eternal life. God didn't simply send us something we needed. He gave us Someone we desperately needed.

As you celebrate Christmas today, enjoy the blessings, cherish the moments with loved ones, eat as much as you can while watching some football or basketball, and give thanks for every good gift God has placed in your life. But above everything else, remember Jesus. He is the reason for the celebration, the source of our hope, the giver of our peace, the foundation of our joy, and the greatest expression of God's love.

Have you received the greatest gift of Christmas? More importantly, have you trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior? If you have, take time today to thank Him for all He has done for you. If you haven't, you can receive His gift of salvation by placing your faith in Him.

The greatest gift of Christmas isn't found under the tree. It's found in a Person. His name is Jesus, and He is **The Gift of Christmas**.

The Gift of Christmas

The greatest gift is found in a person