



THE **ROCK**
STUDENT MINISTRIES
P S . 6 1 : 2

December Devotions 2018



Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the **law of the LORD!**
Blessed are those who keep **his testimonies**,
who seek him with their whole heart, who also do no wrong,
but walk in **his ways!**
You have commanded **your precepts** to be kept diligently.
Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping **your statutes!**
Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all **your commandments.**
I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn **your righteous rules.**
I will keep **your statutes**; do not utterly forsake me!
How can a young man keep his way pure?
By guarding it according to **your word.**
With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from **your commandments!**
I have stored up **your word** in my heart, that I might not sin against you.
Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me **your statutes!**
With my lips I declare all **the rules of your mouth.**
In the way of **your testimonies** I delight as much as in all riches.
I will meditate on **your precepts** and fix my eyes on **your ways.**
I will delight in **your statutes**; I will not forget **your word.**



There are some **basic** things we must have in order to be called a Christian. We can't just say we are a Christian without some things being in place. We can't claim to be a chicken without producing some eggs, right? The reality of our life and walk with Christ is that this life is made up of **basic** principles. This year we'll look at some of these. We'll put them in 3 sections: Attitudes, Actions and Beliefs. These **basic** things come together in one life led by Christ to produce something extravagant.....all for God's glory.

We feel that these **basic** things be present in the life of the one that claims Christ as their savior and as one who claims to follow Christ and belong to God. We are always to be striving for and working towards these things as we seek to know Christ and make Christ known. We haven't perfected these things but are simply pursuing these things. These things aren't complex, they are **basic**.

This year we'll spend our time together focusing on these things. **Basic** things that must be present for the greater Life to be a reality. No one was ever extra without first possessing the **basics**. BELIEF influences Attitudes influences Actions. If this is true, and we feel it is, then we must ensure we are centering all our thoughts, attention, focus and priorities around what we believe to be true about God. Then and only then will our attitudes and actions proclaim Him loudly in a world that is desperate for Him.

So our heart this year is to be about the basic and allow God to bring about the extra.

Attitude Walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, Actions bearing fruit in every good work and
Belief Increasing in the knowledge of God.

The Hope & Prayer

The hope of this devotion book is to provide the opportunity for students and adults to spend time with God in His Word and through prayer. There are many great devotion books available to us and we are thankful you have chosen to journey through God's Word with this particular one. We hope and pray that students and adults take this opportunity to walk with God in Word and Prayer seriously and become intentional in the time they devote to Him each day. We believe if this happens our walk with Him will strengthen.

Another great hope and prayer is that families will journey through this devotion guide together. Imagine if each family were having conversations based on what they were reading each day from God's Word? There is great possibility and great promise for the family that is centered around God and His Word.

The Plan

The plan will be to take 5 days each week to work through the devotions. These will be set up to be done Monday through Friday. Saturday will be used for reflection or catch up. We will provide a blank page for you to possibly reflect on the week in general, what stood out, what needs reminding, what steps were taken. Sunday will be a day of rest and worship. We will also give you a page for sermon notes...keep it all together right!?

In most cases our devotions will work with our sermons from The Rock. It will be another way to keep the idea fresh and hopefully help us drive the thought deeper down. This devo will be grounded in **the Word of God**. Scripture alone is our guide and help. The plan is to allow you the opportunity to open Scripture and see for yourself. We will help you each day with a simple devotion, grounded in Scripture but there is much more for you to see and read. **Throughout the year we will offer a Bible Reading Plan at the bottom of each devotion.** In some cases, our devotion will come from this passage but there will be some that are totally separate. Either way we want to give you the opportunity to trek with us as we journey through the Bible this year. We must get past the laziness of not getting in the Word of God. We hope you'll join us in this devotion book and reading plan but the end result is for you to get in the Word. Any way you do that is fine with us but how cool would it be if we were all trekking along together?

So have fun and dig in. At the least we hope you'll spend 5 minutes a day with our devotion. The end goal is to not only do the devotion but take some and read the reading plan Scripture of the day and jot down some thoughts. But again...the goal is simple.

The SET UP

Each day the devotion will provide a Scripture and then from there offer three things, an explanation, an illustration and an application. We must not be hearers only but doers. So, these 3 steps will help us make sense of God's Word and best discover the heart of God as we read His Word.

A Few Tips and Tricks to Keep in Mind While Reading...

You've often heard the words **observation, interpretation, and application** around the Rock. You'll hear them, work through them and hopefully they eventually become a regular part of how you handle Scripture. Here is one great way to think about these principles as we seek to discover the heart of what God is wanting us to see and do from His Word. This is also a great tool to use when reading Scripture with other...it's called the **One-To-One Method**.

We've even left you a blank page to the right of each devotion for this!!!

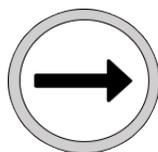
After reading the passage look for these three things:



A **light bulb**: anything that shines out in the passage and draws attention; it can be something important or something that particularly strikes the reader.



A **question mark**: anything that is hard to understand; something that the reader would like to be able to ask the author about.



An **arrow**: anything that applies personally to the readers life.

Want to go deeper than the above three things?

5 questions to ask when reading Scripture?

These questions will better help you get the point of Scripture and what God desires for us to hear and do. So again, work through the struggle and watch as God blesses this time.

1. What Does This Text Teach Me About God?
2. What Does This Text Teach Me About Man?
3. How Does This Text Point to Christ?
4. What do I need to know in light of this teaching?
5. What do I need to do in light of this teaching?

5 tips for a faithful, daily devotion

1. **Make it a priority** – stop making excuses and simply do what you know needs to be done in your walk with God. Enough is enough.
2. **Pray for guidance** – ask the Spirit to help you as you begin this time or if you've been doing this for years.
3. **Remove distractions** – you know how mad you get when someone interrupts your favorite song, show, book, game? Be that way with your time with the Lord.
4. **Plan for the Plan** - set aside a time and place but understand you don't have to be restricted with these. The important thing is doing it!
5. **Make it a Community Thing** – Get accountability! Bring your friends or family into it. If you go alone you'll not go far!

Missionary Prayer – Each week we'll provide a name of a missionary we are partnering with. We encourage you to pray for strength, wisdom, and boldness for them, their ministry and family.

saturday - december 1

PREPARE THE WAY

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

“He will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared.” —Luke 1:16–17

What John the Baptist did for Israel, Advent can do for us. Don't let Christmas find you unprepared. I mean *spiritually* unprepared. Its joy and impact will be so much greater if you are ready!

That you might be prepared...

First, meditate on the fact that we need a *Savior*. Christmas is an indictment before it becomes a delight. It will not have its intended effect until we feel desperately the need for a Savior. Let these short Advent meditations help awaken in you a bittersweet sense of need for the Savior.

Second, engage in sober self-examination. Advent is to Christmas what Lent is to Easter. “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!” (Psalm 139:23–24) Let every heart *prepare him room...* by cleaning house.

Third, build God-centered anticipation and expectancy and excitement into your home—especially for the children. If you are excited about Christ, they will be too. If you can only make Christmas exciting with material things, how will the children get a thirst for God? Bend the efforts of your imagination to make the wonder of the King's arrival visible for the children.

Fourth, be much in the Scriptures, and memorize the great passages! “Is not my word like fire, says the Lord!” (Jeremiah 23:29) Gather 'round that fire this Advent season. It is warm. It is sparkling with colors of grace. It is healing for a thousand hurts. It is light for dark nights.

*During December we will be using devotions gathered from a book from John Piper. These devotions are written by him with the intention of gaining a proper perspective of Advent or Christmas. You'll notice some changes from a normal devo but pray they challenge you and prepare your heart and mind for Christmas morning and the season!

sunday - december 2

MARY'S MAGNIFICENT GOD

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Luke 1: 46-55

Mary sees clearly a most remarkable thing about He is about to change the course of all human history. The most important three decades in all of time are about to begin.

And where is God? Occupying himself with two obscure, humble women—one old and barren (Elizabeth), one young and virginal (Mary). And Mary is so moved by this vision of God, the lover of the lowly, that she breaks out in song — a song that has come to be known as “the Magnificat”
(Luke 1:46–55).

Mary and Elizabeth are wonderful heroines in Luke's account. He loves the faith of these women. The thing that impresses him most, it appears, and the thing he wants to impress on Theophilus, his noble reader, is the lowliness and cheerful humility of Elizabeth and Mary.

Elizabeth says, “Why is this granted to me that the mother of my Lord would come to me?” (Luke 1:43). And Mary says, “He has looked on the humble estate of his servant” (Luke 1:48).

The only people whose soul can truly magnify the Lord are people like Elizabeth and Mary—people who acknowledge their lowly estate and are overwhelmed by the condescension of the magnificent God.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

monday - december 3

THE LONG-AWAITED VISITATION

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Luke 1:68–71

Notice two remarkable things from these words of Zechariah in Luke 1.

First, nine months earlier, Zechariah could not believe his wife would have a child. Now, filled with the Holy Spirit, he is so confident of God's redeeming work in the coming Messiah that he puts it in the past tense. For the mind of faith, a promised act of God is as good as done. Zechariah has learned to take God at his word and so has a remarkable assurance: "God has visited and redeemed!"

Second, the coming of Jesus the Messiah is a visitation of God to our world: "The God of Israel has visited and redeemed." For centuries, the Jewish people had languished under the conviction that God had withdrawn: the spirit of prophecy had ceased, Israel had fallen into the hands of Rome. And all the godly in Israel were awaiting the visitation of God. Luke tells us in 2:25 that the devout Simeon was "looking for the consolation of Israel." And in Luke 2:38 the prayerful Anna was "looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."

These were days of great expectation. Now the long-awaited visitation of God was about to happen—indeed, he was about to come in a way no one expected.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

tuesday - december 4

FOR GOD'S LITTLE PEOPLE

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Luke 2:1–5

Have you ever thought what an amazing thing it is that God ordained beforehand that the Messiah be born in Bethlehem (as the prophecy in Micah 5 shows); and that he so ordained things that when the time came, the Messiah's mother and legal father were living in Nazareth; and that in order to fulfill his word and bring two little people to Bethlehem that first Christmas, God put it in the heart of Caesar Augustus that all the Roman world should be enrolled each in his own town?

Have you ever felt, like me, little and insignificant in a world of seven billion people, where all the news is of big political and economic and social movements and of out-standing people with lots of power and prestige?

If you have, don't let that make you disheartened or unhappy. For it is implicit in Scripture that all the mam-moth political forces and all the giant industrial complexes, without their even knowing it, are being guided by God, not for their own sake but for the sake of God's little people—the little Mary and the little Joseph who have to be got from Nazareth to Bethlehem. God wields an empire to bless his children.

Do not think, because you experience adversity, that the hand of the Lord is shortened. It is not our prosperity but our holiness that he seeks with all his heart. And to that end, he rules the whole world. As Proverbs 21:1 says,

“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.”

He is a big God for little people, and we have great cause to rejoice that, unbeknownst to them, all the kings and presidents and premiers and chancellors of the world follow the sovereign decrees of our Father in heaven, that we, the children, might be conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus Christ.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

wednesday - december 5

NO DETOUR FROM CALVARY

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Luke 2:6–7

Now you would think that if God so rules the world as to use an empire-wide census to bring Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, he surely could have seen to it that a room was available in the inn.

Yes, he could have. And Jesus could have been born into a wealthy family. He could have turned stone into bread in the wilderness. He could have called 10,000 angels to his aid in Gethsemane. He could have come down from the cross and saved himself. The question is not what God *could* do, but what he *willed* to do.

God's will was that though Christ was rich, yet for your sake he became poor. The “No Vacancy” signs over all the motels in Bethlehem were *for your sake*. “For your sake he became poor” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

God rules all things—even motel capacities—for the sake of his children. The Calvary road begins with a “No Vacancy” sign in Bethlehem and ends with the spitting and scoffing of the cross in Jerusalem. And we must not forget that he said, “He who would come after me must deny himself and take up his cross” (Matthew 16:24).

We join him on the Calvary road and hear him say, “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:20). To the one who calls out enthusiastically, “I will follow you wherever you go!” (Matthew 8:19). Jesus responds, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20). Yes, God could have seen to it that Jesus have a room at his birth. But that would have been a detour off the Calvary road.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?

thursday - december 6

PEACE TO THOSE WITH WHOM HE'S PLEASED

taken from *Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings* by John Piper

Scripture: Luke 2:12–14

Peace for whom? There is a somber note sounded in the angels' praise. Peace among men on whom his favor rests. Peace among men with whom he is pleased. Without faith it is impossible to please God. So Christmas does not bring peace to all.

"This is the judgment," Jesus said, "that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than the light because their deeds are evil" (John 3:19). Or as the aged Simeon said when he saw the child Jesus, "Behold this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel and for a sign that is spoken against... that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (Luke 2:34–35). O, how many there are who look out on a bleak and chilly Christ- mas day and see no more than that.

"He came to his own and his own received him not, but to as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God, to as many as *believed* on his name." It was only to his disciples that Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

The people who enjoy the peace of God that surpasses all understanding are those who in everything by prayer and supplication let their requests be made known to God.

The key that unlocks the treasure chest of God's peace is faith in the promises of God. So Paul prays, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace *in believing*" (Romans 15:13). And when we do trust the promises of God and have joy and peace and love, then God is glorified.

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men with whom he is pleased—men who would believe.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

friday - december 7

MESSIAH FOR THE MAGI

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Matthew 2:1–2

Unlike Luke, Matthew does not tell us about the shepherds coming to visit Jesus in the stable. His focus is immediately on foreigners coming from the east to worship Jesus.

So Matthew portrays Jesus at the beginning and ending of his Gospel as a universal Messiah for the nations, not just for Jews.

Here the first worshipers are court magicians or astrologers or wise men not from Israel but from the East—perhaps from Babylon. They were Gentiles. Unclean.

And at the end of Matthew, the last words of Jesus are, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.”

This not only opened the door for the Gentiles to rejoice in the Messiah, it added proof that he was the Messiah. Because one of the repeated prophecies was that the nations and kings would, in fact, come to him as the ruler of the world.

For example, Isaiah 60:3, “Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.” So Matthew adds proof to the messiahship of Jesus and shows that he is Messiah—a King, and Promise-Fulfiller—for all the nations, not just Israel.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

saturday - december 8

BETHLEHEM'S SUPERNATURAL STAR

taken from *Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings* by John Piper

Scripture: Matthew 2:2

Over and over the Bible baffles our curiosity about just how certain things happened. How did this “star” get the magi from the east to Jerusalem?

It does not say that it led them or went before them. It only says they saw a star in the east (verse 2), and came to Jerusalem. And how did that star go before them in the little five-mile walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem as verse 9 says it did? And how did a star stand “over the place where the Child was”?

The answer is: We do not know. There are numerous efforts to explain it in terms of conjunctions of planets or comets or supernovas or miraculous lights. We just don't know. And I want to exhort you not to become preoccupied with developing theories that are only tentative in the end and have very little spiritual significance.

I risk a generalization to warn you: People who are exercised and preoccupied with such things as how the star worked and how the Red Sea split and how the manna fell and how Jonah survived the fish and how the moon turns to blood are generally people who have what I call a mentality for the marginal. You do not see in them a deep cherishing of the great *central* things of the gospel—the holiness of God, the ugliness of sin, the helplessness of man, the death of Christ, justification by faith alone, the sanctifying work of the Spirit, the glory of Christ's return and the final judgment. They always seem to be taking you down a sidetrack with a new article or book. There is little *centered* rejoicing.

But what is plain concerning this matter of the star is that it is doing something that it cannot do on its own: it is guiding magi to the Son of God to worship him.

There is only one Person in biblical thinking that can be behind that intentionality in the stars—God himself.

So the lesson is plain: God is guiding foreigners to Christ to worship him. And he is doing it by exerting global—probably even universal—influence and power to get it done.

Luke shows God influencing the entire Roman Empire so that the census comes at the exact time to get a virgin to Bethlehem to fulfill prophecy with her delivery. Matthew shows God influencing the stars in the sky to get foreign magi to Bethlehem so that they can worship him.

This is God's design. He did it then. He is still doing it now. His aim is that the nations—all the nations (Matthew 24:14)—worship his Son.

This is God's will for everybody in your office at work, and in your neighborhood and in your home. As John 4:23 says, "Such the Father seeks to worship him."

At the beginning of Matthew we still have a "come-see" pattern. But at the end the pattern is "go-tell." The magi came and saw. We are to go and tell.

What is not different is that the purpose of God is the ingathering of the nations to worship his Son. The magnifying of Christ in the white-hot worship of all nations is the reason the world exists.

**What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?**

sunday - december 9

TWO KINDS OF OPPOSITION TO JESUS

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Matthew 2:3

Jesus is troubling to people who do not want to worship him, and he brings out opposition for those who do. This is probably not a main point in the mind of Matthew, but it is inescapable as the story goes on.

In this story, there are two kinds of people who do not want to worship Jesus, the Messiah.

The first kind is the people who simply do nothing about Jesus. He is a nonentity in their lives. This group is represented by the chief priests and scribes. Verse 4:

“Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, [Herod] inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.” Well, they told him, and that was that: back to business as usual. The sheer silence and inactivity of the leaders is overwhelming in view of the magnitude of what was happening.

And notice, verse 3 says, “When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” In other words, the rumor was going around that someone thought the Messiah was born. The inactivity on the part of chief priests is staggering—why not go with the magi? They are not interested. They do not want to worship the true God.

The second kind of people who do not want to worship Jesus is the kind who is deeply threatened by him. That is Herod in this story. He is really afraid. So much so that he schemes and lies and then commits mass murder just to get rid of Jesus.

So today these two kinds of opposition will come against Christ and his worshipers: indifference and hostility. Are you in one of those groups?

Let this Christmas be the time when you reconsider the Messiah and ponder what it is to worship him.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

monday - december 10

GOLD, FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Matthew 2:10–11

God is not served by human hands as though he needed anything (Acts 17:25). The gifts of the magi are not given by way of assistance or need-meeting. It would dishonor a monarch if foreign visitors came with royal care-packages.

Nor are these gifts meant to be bribes. Deuteronomy 10:17 says that God takes no bribe. Well, what then do they mean? How are they worship?

The gifts are intensifiers of desire for Christ himself in much the same way that fasting is. When you give a gift to Christ like this, it's a way of saying, "The joy that I pursue (verse 10) is not the hope of getting rich with things from you. I have not come to you for your things, but for your- self. And this desire I now intensify and demonstrate by giving up things, in the hope of enjoying you more, not things. By giving to you what you do not need, and what I might enjoy, I am saying more earnestly and more authentically, 'You are my treasure, not these things.'"

I think that's what it means to worship God with gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

May God take the truth of this text and waken in us a desire for Christ himself. May we say from the heart, "Lord Jesus, you are the Messiah, the King of Israel. All nations will come and bow down before you. God wields the world to see that you are worshiped. Therefore, what- ever opposition I may find, I joyfully ascribe authority and dignity to you, and bring my gifts to say that you alone can satisfy my heart, not these."

**What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?**

tuesday - december 11

WHY JESUS CAME

taken from *Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings* by John Piper

Scripture: Hebrews 2:14–15

Hebrews 2:14–15 is worth more than two minutes in an Advent devotional. These verses connect the beginning and the end of Jesus's earthly life. They make clear why he came. They would be great to use with an unbelieving friend or family member to take them step by step through your Christian view of Christmas. It might go something like this...

"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood..."

The term "children" is taken from the previous verse and refers to the spiritual offspring of Christ, the Messiah (see Isaiah 8:18; 53:10). These are also the "children of God." In other words, in sending Christ, God has the salvation of his "children" specially in view. It is true that "God so loved the world, that he sent [Jesus] (John 3:16)." But it is also true that God was especially "gathering the children of God who are scattered abroad" (John 11:52). God's design was to offer Christ to the world, and to effect the salvation of his "children" (see 1 Timothy 4:10). You may experience adoption by receiving Christ (John 1:12).

"...he himself likewise partook of the same things [flesh and blood]..."

Christ existed before the incarnation. He was spirit. He was the eternal Word. He was with God and was God (John 1:1; Colossians 2:9). But he took on flesh and blood and clothed his deity with humanity. He became fully man and remained fully God. It is a great mystery in many ways. But it is at the heart of our faith and is what the Bible teaches.

"...that through death..."

The reason Jesus became man was to die. As God, he could not die for sinners. But as man he could. His aim was to die. Therefore he had to be born human. He was born to die. Good Friday is the reason for Christmas. This is what needs to be said today about the meaning of Christmas.

“...he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil...”

In dying, Christ de-fanged the devil. How? By covering all our sin.

This means that Satan has no legitimate grounds to accuse us before God. “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies” (Romans 8:33).

On what grounds does he justify?

Through the blood of Jesus (Romans 5:9).

Satan’s ultimate weapon against us is our own sin. If the death of Jesus takes it away, the chief weapon of the devil is taken out of his hand. He cannot make a case for our death penalty, because the Judge has acquitted us by the death of his Son!

“...and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.”

So we are free from the fear of death. God has justified us. Satan cannot overturn that decree. And God means for our ultimate safety to have an immediate effect on our lives. He means for the happy ending to take away the slavery and fear of the now.

If we do not need to fear our last and greatest enemy, death, then we do not need to fear anything. We can be free: free for joy, free for others.

What a great Christmas present from God to us! And from us to the world!

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

wenesday - december 12

REPLACING THE SHADOWS

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Hebrews 8:1–2

The point of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, has not just come to fit into the earthly system of priestly ministry as the best and final human priest, but he has come to fulfill and put an end to that system and to orient all our attention on himself ministering for us in heaven.

The Old Testament tabernacle and priests and sacrifices were shadows. Now the reality has come, and the shadows pass away.

Here's an Advent illustration for kids (and for those of us who used to be kids and remember what it was like). Suppose you and your mom get separated in the grocery store, and you start to get scared and panic and don't know which way to go, and you run to the end of an aisle, and just before you start to cry, you see a shadow on the floor at the end of the aisle that looks just like your mom. It makes you really happy and you feel hope. But which is better?

The happiness of seeing the shadow, or having your mom step around the corner and seeing that it's really her?

That's the way it is when Jesus comes to be our High Priest. That's what Christmas is. Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the real thing.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?

thursday - december 13

THE FINAL REALITY IS HERE

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Hebrews 8:1–2

Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the real thing.

Hebrews 8:1–2 is a kind of summary statement. The point is that the one priest who goes between us and God, and makes us right with God, and prays for us to God, is not an ordinary, weak, sinful, dying, priest like in the Old Testament days. He is the Son of God—strong, sinless, with an indestructible life.

Not only that, he is not ministering in an earthly tabernacle with all its limitations of place and size and wearing out and being moth-eaten and being soaked and burned and torn and stolen. No, verse 2 says that Christ is ministering for us in a “true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, not man.” This is the real thing in heaven. This is what cast on Mount Sinai a shadow that Moses copied.

According to verse 1, another great thing about the reality which is greater than the shadow is that our High Priest is seated at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. No Old Testament priest could ever say that.

Jesus deals directly with God the Father. He has a place of honor beside God. He is loved and respected infinitely by God. He is constantly with God. This is not shadow reality like curtains and bowls and tables and candles and robes and tassels and sheep and goats and pigeons. This is final, ultimate reality: God and his Son interacting in love and holiness for our eternal salvation.

Ultimate reality is the persons of the Godhead in relationship, dealing with each other concerning how their majesty and holiness and love and justice and goodness and truth shall be manifest in a redeemed people.

friday - december 14

MAKING IT REAL FOR HIS PEOPLE

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Hebrews 8:6

Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant, according to Hebrews 8:6. What does that mean? It means that his blood—the blood of the covenant (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 13:20)—purchased the fulfillment of God's promises for us.

It means that God brings about our inner transformation by the Spirit of Christ.

And it means that God works all his transformation in us through faith in all that God is for us in Christ.

The new covenant is purchased by the blood of Christ, effected by the Spirit of Christ, and appropriated by faith in Christ.

The best place to see Christ working as the Mediator of the new covenant is in Hebrews 13:20–21:

Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant [this is the purchase of the new covenant], even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The words “working in us that which is pleasing in his sight” describe what happens when God writes the law on our hearts in the new covenant. And the words “through Jesus Christ” describe Jesus as the Mediator of this glorious work of sovereign grace.

So the meaning of Christmas is not only that God replaces shadows with Reality, but also that he takes the reality and makes it real to his people. He writes it on our hearts. He does not lay his Christmas gift of salvation and transformation down for you to pick up in your own strength. He picks it up and puts in your heart and in your mind, and seals to you that you are a child of God.

saturday - december 15

LIFE AND DEATH AT CHRISTMAS

taken from *Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings* by John Piper

Scripture: John 10:10

As I was about to begin this devotional, I received word that Marion Newstrum had just died. She and her husband Elmer have been part of Bethlehem longer than most of our members have been alive. Marion was 87. They had been married 64 years.

When I spoke to Elmer and told him I wanted him to be strong in the Lord and not give up on life, he said, "He has been a true friend." I pray that all Christians will be able to say at the end of life, "Christ has been a true friend."

Each Advent I mark the anniversary of my mother's death. She was cut off in her 56th year in a bus accident in Israel. It was December 16, 1974. Those events are incredibly real to me even today. If I allow myself, I can easily come to tears—for example, thinking that my sons never knew her. We buried her the day after Christmas. What a precious Christmas it was!

Many of you will feel your loss this Christmas more pointedly than before. Don't block it out. Let it come. Feel it. What is love for, if not to intensify our affections—both in life and death? But, O, do not be bitter. It is tragically self-destructive to be bitter.

Jesus came at Christmas that we might have eternal life. "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly"

(John 10:10). Elmer and Marion had discussed where they would spend their final years. Elmer said, "Marion and I agreed that our final home would be with the Lord."

Do you feel restless for home? I have family coming home for the holidays. It feels good. I think the bottom line reason for why it feels good is that they and I are destined in the depths of our being for an ultimate Home-coming. All other homecomings are foretastes. And fore-tastes are good.

Unless they become substitutes. O, don't let all the sweet things of this season become substitutes of the final great, all-satisfying Sweetness. Let every loss and every delight send your hearts a-homing after heaven.

Christmas. What is it but this: *I came that they might have life*. Marion Newstrum, Ruth Piper, and you and I—that we might have Life, now and forever. Make your Now the richer and deeper this Christmas by drinking at the fountain of Forever. It is so near.

sunday - december 16

GOD'S MOST SUCCESSFUL SETBACK

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Philippians 2:9–11

Christmas was God's most successful setback. He has always delighted to show his power through apparent defeat. He makes tactical retreats in order to win strategic victories.

Joseph was promised glory and power in his dream (Genesis 37:5–11). But to achieve that victory he had to become a slave in Egypt. And as if that were not enough, when his conditions improved because of his integrity, he was made worse than a slave — a prisoner.

But it was all planned. For there in prison he met Pharaoh's butler, who eventually brought him to Pharaoh who put him over Egypt. What an unlikely route to glory!

But that is God's way — even for his Son. He emptied himself and took the form of a slave. Worse than a slave — a prisoner — and was executed. But like Joseph, he kept his integrity. “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” (Philippians 2:9–10).

And this is God's way for us too. We are promised glory — if we will suffer with him (Romans 8:17). The way up is down. The way forward is backward. The way to success is through divinely appointed setbacks. They will always look and feel like failure. But if Joseph and Jesus teach us anything this Christmas it is this: “God meant it for good!” (Genesis 50:20).

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?

monday - december 17

THE GREATEST SALVATION IMAGINABLE

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31

God is just and holy and separated from sinners like us. This is our main problem at Christmas and every other season. How shall we get right with a just and holy God? Nevertheless, God is merciful and has promised in Jeremiah 31 (five hundred years before Christ) that someday he would do something new. He would replace shadows with the Reality of the Messiah. And he would powerfully move into our lives and write his will on our hearts so that we are not constrained from outside but are willing from inside to love him and trust him and follow him.

That would be the greatest salvation imaginable—if God should offer us the greatest Reality in the universe to enjoy and then move in us to see to it that we could enjoy it with the greatest freedom and joy possible. That would be a Christmas gift worth singing about.

That is, in fact, what he promised. But there was a huge obstacle. Our sin. Our separation from God because of our unrighteousness.

How shall a holy and just God treat us sinners with so much kindness as to give us the greatest Reality in the universe (his Son) to enjoy with the greatest joy possible?

The answer is that God put our sins on his Son, and judged them there, so that he could put them out of his mind, and deal with us mercifully and remain just and holy at the same time. Hebrews 9:28 says, “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.”

Christ bore our sins in his own body when he died. He took our judgment. He canceled our guilt. And that means the sins are gone. They do not remain in God’s mind as a basis for condemnation. In that sense, he “forgets” them. They are consumed in the death of Christ.

Which means that God is now free, in his justice, to lavish us with the new covenant. He gives us Christ, the greatest Reality in the universe, for our enjoyment. And he writes his own will—his own heart—on our hearts so that we can love Christ and trust Christ and follow Christ from the inside out, with freedom and joy.

tuesday - december 18

THE CHRISTMAS MODEL FOR MISSIONS

taken from *Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings* by John Piper

Scripture: John 17:18

Christmas is a model for missions. Missions is a mirror of Christmas. As I, so you. For example, danger. Christ came to his own and his own received him not. So you. They plotted against him. So you. He had no permanent home. So you. They trumped up false charges against him. So you. They whipped and mocked him. So you. He died after three years of ministry. So you.

But there is a worse danger than any of these which Jesus escaped. So you! In the mid-16th century Francis Xavier (1506–1552), a Catholic missionary, wrote to Father Perez of Malacca (today part of Indonesia) about the perils of his mission to China. He said,

The danger of all dangers would be to lose trust and confidence in the mercy of God... To distrust him would be a far more terrible thing than any physical evil which all the enemies of God put together could inflict on us, for without God's permission neither the devils nor their human ministers could hinder us in the slightest degree.

The greatest danger a missionary faces is to distrust the mercy of God. If that danger is avoided, then all other dangers lose their sting.

God makes every dagger a scepter in our hand. As J.W. Alexander says, "Each instant of present labor is to be graciously repaid with a million ages of glory." Christ escaped the danger of distrust. Therefore God has highly exalted him! Remember this Advent that Christmas is a model for missions. As I, so you. And that mission means danger. And that the greatest danger is distrusting God's mercy. Succumb to this, and all is lost. Conquer here, and nothing can harm you for a million ages.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

wenesday - december 19

CHRISTMAS IS FOR FREEDOM

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: Hebrews 2:14–15

Jesus became man because what was needed was the death of a man who was more than man. The incarnation was God's locking himself into death row.

Christ did not risk death. He embraced it. That is precisely why he came: not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

No wonder Satan tried to turn Jesus from the cross! The cross was Satan's destruction. How did Jesus destroy him?

The "power of death" is the ability to make death fearful. The "power of death" is the power that holds men in bondage through fear of death. It is the power to keep men in sin, so that death comes as a horrid thing.

But Jesus stripped Satan of this power. He disarmed him. He molded a breastplate of righteousness for us that makes us immune to the devil's condemnation.

By his death, Jesus wiped away all our sins. And a person without sin puts Satan out of business. His treason is aborted. His cosmic treachery is foiled. "His rage we can endure, for, lo, his doom is sure." The cross has run him through. And he will gasp his last before long.

Christmas is for freedom. Freedom from the fear of death.

Jesus took our nature in Bethlehem, to die our death in Jerusalem, that we might be fearless in our city. Yes, fearless. Because if the biggest threat to my joy is gone, then why should I fret over the little ones? How can you say,

"Well, I'm not afraid to die but I'm afraid to lose my job"? No. No. Think!

If death (I said, death—no pulse, cold, gone!)—if death is no longer a fear, we're free, really free. Free to take any risk under the sun for Christ and for love. No more bondage to anxiety.

If the Son has set you free, you shall be free, indeed!

thursday - december 20

CHRISTMAS SOLIDARITY

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: 1 John 3:8

The assembly line of Satan turns out millions of sins every day. He packs them into huge cargo planes and flies them to heaven and spreads them out before God and laughs and laughs and laughs.

Some people work full-time on the assembly line. Others have quit their jobs there and only now and then return.

Every minute of work on the assembly line makes God the laughing stock of Satan. Sin is Satan's business because he hates the light and beauty and purity and glory of God. Nothing pleases him more than when creatures distrust and disobey their Maker.

Therefore, Christmas is good news for man and good news for God.

"The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). That's good news for us.

"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). That's good news for God. Christmas is good news for God because Jesus has come to lead a strike at Satan's assembly plant. He has walked right into the plant, called for the Solidarity of the faithful, and begun a massive walk-out. Christmas is a call to go on strike at the assembly plant of sin. No negotiations with the management. No bargaining. Just single-minded, unswerving opposition to the product.

Christmas Solidarity aims to ground the cargo planes. It will not use force or violence, but with relentless devotion to Truth it will expose the life-destroying conditions of the devil's industry.

Christmas Solidarity will not give up until a complete shutdown has been achieved.

When sin has been destroyed, God's name will be wholly exonerated. No one will be laughing at him anymore.

If you want to give a gift to God this Christmas, walk off the assembly line and never go back. Take up your place in the picket line of love. Join Christmas Solidarity until the majestic name of God is cleared and he stands glorious amid the accolades of the righteous.

friday - december 21

THE BIRTH OF THE ANCIENT OF DAYS

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: John 18:37

This is a great Christmas text even though it comes from the end of Jesus's life on earth, not the beginning.

The uniqueness of his birth is that he did not originate at his birth. He existed before he was born in a manger. The personhood, the character, the personality of Jesus of Nazareth existed before the man Jesus of Nazareth was born.

The theological word to describe this mystery is not *creation*, but *incarnation*. The person—not the body, but the essential personhood of Jesus—existed before he was born as man. His birth was not a coming into being of a new person, but a coming into the world of an infinitely old person.

Micah 5:2 puts it like this, 700 years before Jesus was born:

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.

The mystery of the birth of Jesus is not merely that he was born of a virgin. That miracle was intended by God to witness to an even greater one—namely, that the child born at Christmas was a person who existed “from of old, from ancient days.”

**What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?**

saturday - december 22

THAT YOU MAY BELIEVE

taken from *Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings* by John Piper

Scripture: John 20:30–31

I feel so strongly that among those of us who have grown up in church and who can recite the great doctrines of our faith in our sleep and who yawn through the Apostles Creed—that among us something must be done to help us once more feel the awe, the fear, the astonishment, the wonder of the Son of God, begotten by the Father from all eternity, reflecting all the glory of God, being the very image of his person, through whom all things were created, upholding the universe by the word of his power.

You can read every fairy tale that was ever written, every mystery thriller, every ghost story, and you will never find anything so shocking, so strange, so weird and so spell-binding as the story of the incarnation of the Son of God. How dead we are! How callous and unfeeling to his glory and his story! How often have I had to repent and say, “God, I am sorry that the stories men have made up stir my emotions, my awe and wonder and admiration and joy, more than your own true story.”

The space thrillers of our day, like *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*, can do this great good for us: they can humble us and bring us to repentance, by showing us that we really are capable of some of the wonder and awe and amazement that we so seldom feel when we contemplate the eternal God and the cosmic Christ and a real living contact between them and us in Jesus of Nazareth.

When Jesus said, “For this I have come into the world,” he said something as crazy and weird and strange and eerie as any statement in science fiction that you have ever read (John 18:37).

O, how I pray for a breaking forth of the Spirit of God upon me and upon you. I pray for the Holy Spirit to break into my experience in a frightening way, to wake me up to the unimaginable reality of God.

One of these days lightning is going to fill the sky from the rising of the sun to its setting, and there is going to appear in the clouds one like a son of man with his mighty angels in flaming fire. And we will see him clearly. And whether from terror or sheer excitement, we will tremble and we will wonder how, how we ever lived so long with such a domesticated, harmless Christ.

These things are written that you might believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came into the world. *Really* believe.

sunday - december 23

GOD'S INDESCRIBABLE GIFT

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

If while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. —Romans 5:10–11

How do we practically receive reconciliation and exult in God? One answer is: do it through Jesus Christ. Which means, at least in part, make the portrait of Jesus in the Bible—the work and the words of Jesus portrayed in the New Testament—the essential content of your exultation over God. Exultation without the content of Christ does not honor Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4–6, Paul describes conversion two ways. In verse 4, he says it is seeing “the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” And in verse 6, he says it is seeing “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” In either case you see the point. We have Christ, the image of God, and we have God in the face of Christ.

Practically, to exult in God, you exult in what you see and know of God in the portrait of Jesus Christ. And this comes to its fullest experience when the love of God is poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, as Romans 5:5 says.

So here's the Christmas point. Not only did God purchase our reconciliation through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 10), and not only did God enable us to receive that reconciliation through the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 11), but even now, verse 11 says, we exult in God himself through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus purchased our reconciliation. Jesus enabled us to receive the reconciliation and open the gift. And Jesus himself shines forth from the wrapping—the indescribable gift—as God in the flesh, and stirs up all our exultation in God.

Look to Jesus this Christmas. Receive the reconciliation that he bought. Don't put it on the shelf unopened. And don't open it and then make it a means to all your other pleasures. Open it and enjoy the gift. Exult in him. Make him your pleasure. Make him your treasure.

monday - december 24

THE SON OF GOD APPEARED

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: 1 John 3:7–8

When verse 8 says, “The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil,” what are the “works of the devil” that he has in mind? The answer is clear from the context.

First, verse 5 is a clear parallel: “You know that He appeared in order to take away sins.” The phrase “he appeared to...” occurs in verse 5 and verse 8. So probably the “works of the devil” that Jesus came to destroy are sins. The first part of verse 8 makes this virtually certain:

“The one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning.” The issue in this context is sinning, not sickness or broken cars or messed up schedules. Jesus came into the world to help us stop sinning.

Let me put it alongside the truth of 1 John 2:1: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.” In other words, I am promoting the purpose of Christmas (3:8), the purpose of the incarnation. Then he adds (2:2), “And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.”

But now look what this means: It means that Jesus appeared in the world for two reasons. He came that we might not go on sinning; and he came to die so that there would be a propitiation—a substitutionary sacrifice that takes away the wrath of God—for our sins, if we do sin.

**What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?**

tuesday - december 25

THREE CHRISTMAS PRESENTS

taken from Good News of Great Joy: Advent Readings by John Piper

Scripture: 1 John 3:7–8

Ponder this remarkable situation with me. If the Son of God came to help you stop sinning—to destroy the works of the devil—and if he also came to die so that, when you do sin, there is a propitiation, a removal of God's wrath, then what does this imply for living your life?

Three things. And they are wonderful to have. I give them to you briefly as Christmas presents.

1. A Clear Purpose for Living

It implies that you have a clear purpose for living. Negatively, it is simply this: don't sin. "I write these things to you so that you may not sin" (1 John 2:1). "The Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8).

If you ask, "Can you give us that positively, instead of negatively?" the answer is: Yes, it's all summed up in 1 John 3:23. It's a great summary of what John's whole letter requires. Notice the singular "commandment"—"This is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us." These two things are so closely connected for John he calls them one commandment: believe Jesus and love others. That is your purpose. That is the sum of the Christian life. Trusting Jesus, loving people. Trust Jesus, love people. There's the first gift: a purpose to live.

2. Hope That Our Failures Will Be Forgiven

Now consider the second implication of the twofold truth that Christ came to destroy our sinning and to forgive our sins. It's this: We make progress in overcoming our sin when we have hope that our failures will be forgiven. If you don't have hope that God will forgive your failures, when you start fighting sin, you give up.

Many of you are pondering some changes in the new year, because you have fallen into sinful patterns and want out. You want some new patterns of eating. New patterns for entertainment. New patterns of

giving. New patterns of relating to your spouse. New patterns of family devotions. New patterns of sleep and exercise. New patterns of courage in witness. But you are struggling, wondering whether it's any use. Well here's your second Christmas present: Christ not only came to destroy the works of the devil—our sinning—he also came to be an advocate for us when we fail in our fight.

So I plead with you, let the freedom to fail give you the hope to fight. But beware! If you turn the grace of God into license, and say, “Well, if I can fail, and it doesn't matter, then why bother fighting?”—if you say that, and mean it, and go on acting on it, you are probably not born again and should tremble.

But that is not where most of you are. Most of you want to fight sinful patterns in your life. And what God is saying to you is this: Let the freedom to fail give you hope to fight. I write this to you that you might not sin, but if you sin you have an advocate, Jesus Christ.

3. Christ Will Help Us

Finally, the third implication of the double truth that Christ came to destroy our sinning and to forgive our sins, is this: Christ will really help us in our fight. He really will help you. He is on your side. He didn't come to destroy sin because sin is fun. He came to destroy sin because it is fatal. It is a deceptive work of the devil and will destroy us if we don't fight it. He came to help us, not hurt us.

So here's your third Christmas gift: Christ will help overcome sin in you. 1 John 4:4 says, “He who is in you is greater than he that is in the world.” Jesus is alive, Jesus is almighty, Jesus lives in us by faith. And Jesus is for us, not against us. He will help you. Trust him.

**What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?**

wednesday - december 26

New

Scripture: Corinthians 5:17

Well....that went by fast didn't it? Christmas.

We pray that the walk through Advent was a healthy one. Meaning we pray you were able to devote time to God through His Word and thinking through what Christmas really means for us that follow Him.

A word I think of when I think of Christmas is NEW. We never have White Christmas', well hardly ever. The last Christmas we had at home with my mom and dad was a white Christmas. The only one before that was when I was in North Florida. Crazy right?

But snow makes things look fresh, clean, new. Why? It's all white.

White is our symbol for cleanliness.

For the believer we see a picture of this in 2 Cor. 5:17. It'd be good for you to read vv. 16-21. See the price of this freedom, this NEW you.

Rejoice in all that Christmas was and is....all that it brings...the newness, the hope, the joy. Reflect over the weekend all that He, God, has blessed you with and approach Monday looking forward to the new year!

The Point

We are new creations in Christ Jesus.

The Challenge

Lean on Him and not your own strength. Deeper down, further in. Reach!

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

thursday – december 27

Scripture: Psalm 119:9-16

Reflection

Think a little more on what you read...

A good way to do this is by asking some questions:

1. What sticks out from my time in the Word?
2. What are some things I need to continue to think on?
3. What did I learn about God?
4. What did I learn about myself?
5. What is something I need to work on in the future?
6. What would make my time in the Word better?
7. How can I pray this passage?
8. How does staying in God's Word effect my life?
9. How does not being in God's Word effect my life?

friday - december 28

5 ACTIONS FOR YOUNGER FOLLOWERS OF JESUS

(Turn to and read Titus 2:6–7)

Titus 1 helps us to understand the call and discipline of younger followers of Jesus.....the things Titus is urged towards are helpful.

The following areas are ways in which the gospel and sound doctrine will be displayed in the life of younger men.

1. BE SELF-CONTROLLED

It is important that we are self- controlled. It means we have control over our emotions and behavior, particularly when life is tough. The young have a propensity to be idealistic and spontaneous. They say things they shouldn't say, they feel things they shouldn't feel, they do things they shouldn't do. The Holy Spirit produces self-control in our life.

2. MODEL GOOD WORKS

The church needs young people who aspire to be in spiritual leadership, men who are true to the gospel and will model their Christ-like lifestyle to others and ladies who are will to take up the biblical role of women in the church and serve Christ faithfully. Paul has this in mind when he tells Timothy to watch his life and doctrine closely, so that he won't only save himself but his hearers as well.

3. SHOW INTEGRITY

Integrity means oneness or wholeness. We must allow the gospel to drive our lives and actions to display complete submission to Christ. No parts of our lives are partly His but our whole self belongs to Christ and acts like Christ.....no matter what or where.

4. SHOW DIGNITY

To show someone dignity is to show a person respect. All people are made in the image of God; therefore, we should show them dignity. When someone speaks in an undignified way it's immediately noticed because it's repulsive. Paul doesn't want Titus to not show dignity toward people because it will draw shame to Jesus.

5. USE SOUND SPEECH

Sound speech is when your words are healthy and true. Living in this way makes it harder for your opponents to speak evil of you. Young people are you quick to listen and slow to speak? Is your speech sound, healthy, and true to others?

The **Point** and **Challenge**: Everything here should be viewed through the lens of Jesus and his redemptive work in reconciling all things to himself. The principles of how to be a godly person can be lived out in a million different ways, but it must be in Christ.

saturday - december 29

Planning for Spiritual Necessities

As the year come to a close lets think about planning for a few days. All of us know about planning in relation to the basic physical necessities of life. We take steps to see that we have enough to eat and clothes to keep us warm. But do we take our spiritual needs that seriously? Do we apply the same earnestness in planning to maximize our ministry as we do in planning to make a living?

What I would like to do here is to try to persuade you to set aside time each week in the coming year to plan—and specifically to plan your life of prayer and devotion and ministry. The bulldozer of God's Spirit often arrives at the scene of our heart ready to begin some great work of building, and he finds that due to poor planning there are piles of disordered things in his way. We're not ready for him.

Notice some examples given to us in Scripture and let them drive our planning for this new year.....

Proverbs 6:6–7, - Turn and Read

The ant is an example not only because it works so hard, but also because it plans ahead. It takes thought in summer that there will be need in winter, and this forethought provides its needs in winter.

Proverbs 15:22, - yep, turn and read

Here the wisdom of planning is taken for granted, and the writer simply gives us advice for how to make plans that succeed. He says, Don't be so independent that you think yourself above counsel. Read the wisdom of others who have gone before you. Talk to experienced and wise people. Watch the way others do things and learn from their mistakes and successes.

Proverbs 16:3, - uh huh, turn and read

Again planning is taken for granted and the issue is: How can you plan in such a way that what you produce will have abiding value and not just pass away overnight? Answer:

Commit it to the Lord. That is, always seek the Lord's guidance and strength in your planning. Trust his wisdom and not your own. Then your plans will bear fruit that stays.

Proverbs 24:27, and again, turn and read

This probably means that it is important to be able to support yourself by the productivity of the field before you establish your own household. Perhaps we would say to a young person today: get a job before you get married. Or at least plan how you are going to support the new household you are establishing.

Careful planning is part of what makes a person wise and productive. Not to plan is considered foolish and dangerous. This is true even though the Proverbs teach that we do not know what the future may bring. "A man's mind plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Proverbs 16:9). The fact that the Lord is ultimately in control of the future does not mean we shouldn't plan. It means we should commit our work to the Lord and trust him to establish our plans according to his loving purposes.

The **Point** and **Challenge**: Plan this new year so that God will be honored in all you do!

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?
What is the next step I should take after reading this?

sunday - december 30

Pursuing Christ in the New Year

Turn and Read - (John 3:30)

This is our desire too for 2019. Jesus must increase, and we must decrease. To that end, we make this prayer to God as we enter the new year!

Increase our love for you as the greatest treasure of our hearts and decrease any idolatrous love of lesser things.

If this doesn't happen we will be idolaters and our lives will be governed by fear of losing our gods. But we want no gods before you (Exodus 20:3)! And if we love you with all our being (Luke 10:27) we will lose *nothing*! We will only ever gain! Help us to return to our first love (Revelation 2:4)! Do whatever it takes this year to increase our love for your Son, Jesus Christ, until he is truly all (Colossians 3:11).

Increase our trust in your promises and decrease our trust in our perceptions (Proverbs 3:5-6).

If this doesn't happen we will let our circumstances dictate our actions. And they are tyrants. But if we really believe what you promise us, we will be "free indeed" (John 8:36)! There is no greater apologetic in this world than a Christian who really believes (Hebrews 11:6). That's what we want to be. Do whatever it takes this year to help us walk by faith and not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Increase our passion for Jesus's reputation and decrease our passion for our own.

If this doesn't happen our witness will be hesitant, timid, or non-existent. We will be ashamed of the gospel (Romans 1:16) and that may lead to Jesus being ashamed of us when he returns (Mark 8:38). No, Father! But if we love your Son's glory more than ours we will find the freedom in witness and God-displaying works that we long for and we will see people come to Christ (2 Timothy 1:8) and we will labor so that the nations will be glad (Psalms 67:4)! Do whatever it takes this year to increase our love for Jesus's glory!

Increase our faith in your power and willingness to provide our material needs and decrease our fear-fueled efforts to financially secure our futures.

If this doesn't happen we will not sacrificially give to see the Great Commission fulfilled, our local churches amply funded, nor will we move to places in our cities or the world where the gospel is most needed. And we may prove to not know Jesus at all because we won't minister to him by serving the least of his brothers (Matthew 25:40). But if we really believe Philippians 4:19 and learn the secret of being content with what you provide in every circumstance (Philippians 4:12-13), not only will your Son's

kingdom receive a surge of resources, but the faith manifested in them will overcome the world in a thousand ways (1 John 5:4)! Do whatever it takes this year to set us wonderfully free from any bondage to serving money and let us know the joy and freedom of radical generosity (2 Corinthians 9:8)!

Increase our sense of the reality of the resurrection and decrease our fear of death.

If this doesn't happen, we will live in a plethora of fear and spend inordinate time and money on guarding our health. But you crushed your Son (Isaiah 53:10) and raised him on the third day (Acts 10:40) to remove the sting of death (1 Corinthians 15:55)! Death died in Jesus's death (John 11:25-26)! Therefore, life really is Christ (John 14:6), and death is gain (Philippians 1:21). And if we believe that with all our hearts, we will be an unstoppable force for the gospel all over the world! Do whatever it takes this year for us to live more in the freedom of the resurrection!

The **Point** and **Challenge**:

So this is our prayer for 2019: increase our love for you, our trust in your promises, our passion for your Son's glory, our faith in your provision, and the realization of the reality of our resurrection.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, with the deep desire that he may be glorified more in us this year than ever before, amen.

What did the Word teach me about God, Jesus, Man (me)?

What is the next step I should take after reading this?

monday - december 31

Praying in the New Year

Today is the last day of the year! Man, what a year at his been. Use today to intentionally **PRAY** for this year!

Use this guide:

Pray for you **heart** – pray the Lord would mold your heart through his Word this year!

Pray for your **mind** – pray the Lord would help you focus your mind daily on Him and striving to glorify him in all things!

Pray for your **time in the word** – pray that this year would be the year you spent more time in the Word than ever!

Pray for you **family** – pray that the Lord would help you influence your family for the gospel this year more than ever!

Pray for your **friends** – pray that the Lord would reveal to you those that are in your life that are bad influences and to bring you closer to those that are good for you!

the countdown is on.... 5...4...3...2...1

HAPPY NEW YEAR!!!!!!!