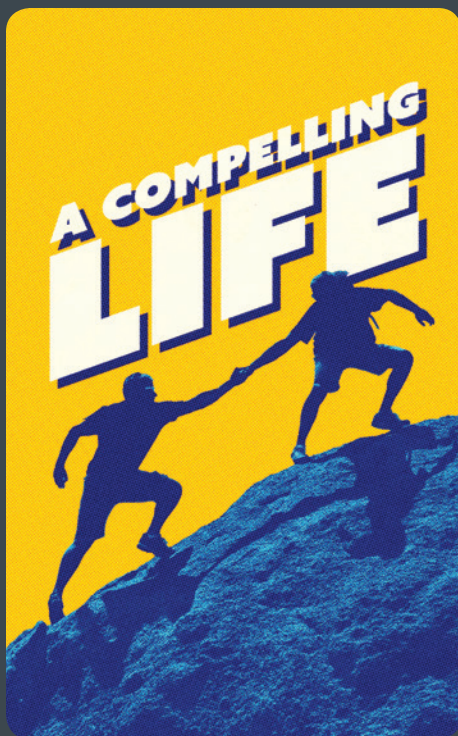


# *Sermon Journal*



November 25–  
December 29



December 30–  
February 9

Asbury  
United Methodist Church



# **God With Us**

PAGE 9

# **A Compelling Life**

PAGE 51



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# Asbury's Vision Statement:

**Developing all generations for significant lives in Christ.**

This defines our specific and unique calling.

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## Asbury's Marks:

**Worship and obey Christ**

**Learn and live out Scripture**

**Influence and invite others to follow Christ**

**Steward time, skills and resources**

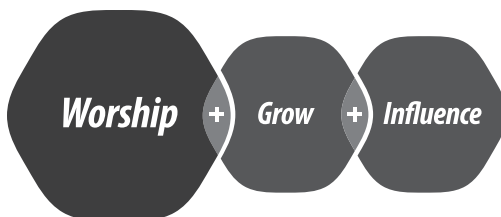
**United with the Body of Christ**

These are outward signs of spiritual growth for a Christ-follower at Asbury.

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## Asbury's Map

Worship +2. This is what we want people to do to connect at Asbury.



# Prayer and Priority List

- Every Sunday, come to worship, grow and influence.
- Every Sunday, communion and prayer available at 9:00 am in the Mason Chapel.
- Every Monday, Celebrate Recovery, Celebration Station and the Landing meet.

## November

- Sun, 11.29 Advent begins  
 "God with Us" sermon series begins  
*Perceptions* books on sale every Sunday through Christmas

## December

- Sun, 12.6 Communion in all services  
 Adopt a Christmas Child gifts due
- Sat, 12.12 Deliver Christmas gifts through 2nd Saturday
- Sun, 12.13 Joining Asbury luncheon, 12:15 pm in Parlor  
 Service of Remembrance, 5:00 pm in the Mason Chapel  
 Piano music with Rick Fraley, 6:00 pm in Sanctuary
- Fri, 12.18 Peter Mayer concert, 7:00 pm at Venue
- Sun, 12.20 "The Greatest Gift," Asbury's living nativity, 5:00 pm in Sanctuary
- Thur, 12.24 Christmas Eve services, 4:00 (modern), 6:00 and 8:00 (traditional) in Sanctuary and 11:00 pm (communion and candlelight) in the Mason Chapel. Child care is available for all except the Chapel service
- Fri, 12.24-25 Merry Christmas! Asbury offices closed
- Thu, 12.31 New Year's Eve Watch Night Service, 6:00 pm, Mason Chapel

## January

- Fri, 1.1 Happy New Year! Asbury offices closed
- Sat, 1.2-8 College missions team in Rio Bravo
- Sun, 1.3 "A Compelling Life" sermon series begins  
 Communion in all services
- Sun, 1.10 Joining Asbury luncheon, 12:15 pm in Parlor
- Mon, 1.18 Winter Roadmap classes begin

## February

- Sun, 2.7 Communion in all services
- Wed, 2.10 Lent begins

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# Pastor Tom's Year in Review

We spent the first part of 2015 focusing on discipleship. We began the year with **"God's Big Story"** and looked at the big stories found in Scripture: Creation, Rebellion, Israel, God's Kingdom, the Church and New Creation. We learned "the gospel" means God's kingdom is available to all through Jesus Christ. Our **"Cross Fitness"** series during Lent focused on spiritual disciplines of a personal nature. These practices help us live "in" the gospel day by day. After Easter we focused on living "out" the gospel by how we treat others; we **"Walk the Talk"** when we live according to Jesus' brilliant teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. We concluded our discipleship focus by seeing how it applies to us corporately in our **"Ekklesia"** series. Ekklesia means "called-out assembly." As part of Christ's holy church, we are called out to spread the gospel to others near and far.

We celebrated July 4th holiday with a reminder that it is **"In God We Trust"** first and foremost. Then, in a series that hit close to home for many, we talked about the ways our fears drive us to hide from God. Fortunately, we discovered that our lives are safely **"Hidden"** in Christ and we are completely loved and accepted by Him. We spent the month of August **"Wrestling with God"** as we studied some paradoxes found in Scripture. This was something we've never considered before. It was exciting to see how two things in the Bible which seem to contradict can both be true. After an incredible Day of Service, we dove into what it means to live as servants. I posed the question, "Is it really, **'Just a Day?'**" Paradoxically, yes and no! Today is the only day we have to live like Jesus as God's servants, but our daily choices shape our lives—so yes, it is more than just a day.

Fall got off to a great start with our guest preacher, Dr. Timothy Tennent (president of Asbury Theological Seminary). **"The Three-Mile-Per-Hour-God"** helped us see Jesus didn't mind interruptions, and He was never in a hurry. He didn't accomplish His mission of redeeming the whole world at break-neck speed; He accomplished it at the pace of walking—which is three miles per hour. Then we settled into several parables from Luke's Gospel. When we see the invitation to partnership for the sake of God's Kingdom work in each of these parables, we recognize it is an honor that we **"Get to Give"** in ways that will have lasting effects.

An Advent study closes 2015 by looking at some of God's names found in the Bible. No single word picture, title or name can capture all His attributes. Only by piecing them together can we begin to understand God, how much He loves us and how far He is willing to go—to be **"God with Us."** We think you'll like this one!

We are thankful for a wonderful year and looking forward to sharing 2016 with you!



Dr. Tom Harrison, *Senior Pastor*

# About Advent

There are few things more ordinary, more common and more central to the human experience than keeping time. Because of its enormous influence on our lives, most religious traditions have their own way of thinking about and observing time. As Christians, we believe God created time (Genesis 1:5). We believe He set the sun, the moon and the stars in the sky to mark time (Genesis 1:14). We believe God sets aside specific times like the Sabbath for special purposes (Genesis 2:3). We believe He acts in time; He makes Himself known in history. We believe in the fullness of time God sent His Son to rescue, redeem and restore the world (Galatians 4:4), and in the fullness of time God will send Jesus again to unify everything in heaven and on earth (Ephesians 1:10). These two events—Jesus' birth and Jesus' return—bookend the Christian calendar.

The Christian calendar, like other Christian practices, is a normal activity (timekeeping) that has been particularly shaped to connect us to God and to order our lives around His story. In the course of a year, the Christian calendar tells God's story with a particular focus on Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension and return. It invites us to order our present in remembrance of what God has done in the past and in anticipation of what God will do in the future.

The Christian year actually begins four Sundays before Christmas Day with the season of Advent (from the Latin for "coming"). Advent is a season of preparation and anticipation. During this time, we prepare to celebrate Jesus' first coming by remembering Israel's prophets, who looked forward to the day that God would send the Messiah, as well as those who welcomed the Messiah and paved His way—Mary, Joseph, Zechariah, Elizabeth and John the Baptist. At the same time, we long for the day when Jesus will come again to raise the dead, to enact justice, to restore peace and to reign forever.

Traditionally, Advent, like Lent (the 40 days before Easter), is a season of self-denial, fasting, repentance, prayer, patience and hope. But as Christmas creeps into stores in October and into our schedules well before December 25, Advent is often lost amid Black Friday sales and office parties. Yet its observance remains a critical reminder that our lives are not defined or determined by bargains or bonuses but by the one who declared, "I am coming soon!" (Revelation 22:7) and who called us to wait faithfully for His return.

Jason Jackson, *Director of Adult Discipleship*



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# How to Use This Journal

Congratulations on your decision to engage the Word of God on a daily basis. You have chosen the best approach to spiritual growth available.

Pastor Tom developed the journal several years ago to offer a structured daily reading plan because he wants people learning how to feed themselves spiritually. He places tremendous value on personal study and exposure to the whole Bible. There are many reading plans available but he thought it best to provide one connected to the sermon series.

Journaling is typically a personal or “inward” discipline. How you relate to the Lord depends largely on your personality and the nature of your relationship. Some may prefer a more academic approach of word studies and cross-references while others may carry on intimate dialogues with Jesus using the Scripture as a springboard for conversation. How ever you approach journaling is OK.

While journaling is an inward discipline, the journal itself can be used as a guide for group discussion or family devotionals. Think of it as a tool for spiritual growth. Asbury puts time and effort into creating these journals because it is one of the best ways we can help develop all generations for significant lives in Christ.

To begin, you will need a Bible you can understand; the New International Version is a safe bet and the version our pastors use for preaching. The New Living Translation is a little more “user-friendly” for beginners.

1. Pray first. Ask for wisdom and understanding and for the Lord to speak to you through the text.
2. Read the scripture referenced at the top of the page. If you have trouble locating passages, use your Bible’s table of contents. References are always listed in this order: book, chapter, verse(s).
3. Respond to the scripture by answering these three questions in your own words: What does the passage teach me about God? What does the passage teach me about people? What does this passage teach me about myself?
4. The daily reflections offer insight and can be used for personal application or group discussion. Use the blank lines to write or “process” your own thoughts and reflections.
5. Consider everything you write as dialogue with God—a casual, informal prayer conversation that helps you grow into knowing Him (and yourself) better.

Finally, be sure to bring your journal every Sunday to take notes from the sermon.



GOD  
*with*  
US



# Introduction:

I was excited when Pastor Tom decided to do a study of the names of God for Advent. This kind of research is fun for me. Showing the connection of God's Old Testament names to the person of Jesus as seen in His first and second comings was our challenge in writing this journal. We are not attempting an in-depth, technical study of the Hebrew language. Rather, we are seeking to open eyes and hearts to aspects of God's unchanging character and to tap into His infinite power and provision as revealed through His various names in Scripture.

Some things you'll notice about this journal—first, in response to several people's input we've made the readings longer (averaging 25–30 verses). Secondly, Tim Ottley (a wise friend and fellow staff member) suggested the Advent series offer a short reflection each day, something a little more casual and personal for the Christmas season. I found this approach refreshing and enjoyed writing it so much I continued it through the January series. I hope you enjoy it, too.

Finally, I wanted to add something special—a Christmas gift to you, my brothers and sisters in Christ. For the next several weeks I am speaking blessings over you. I call forward your spirit each day to receive blessings from the Father's heart to help build up, nurture and refresh each of you in your daily lives. All of us on staff at Asbury want you to have the wholeness and fullness of being everything the Lord has designed you to be.

Merry Christmas, my friends, and God be with you.

Sincerely,  
Stephanie Hurd, *Journal Coordinator*

P.S. I would like thank Susan Goforth for contributing the "Compelling Life Stories" which you'll have the pleasure of reading during the January series. I also want to thank Robin Brush who provides the first line of feedback during the writing process. I am truly grateful!

## Elohim: Mighty Creator

Elohim is the first reference to God that appears in Scripture. It reveals Him as the great and mighty Creator, maker of heaven and earth. By His power and authority Elohim created all that is seen and unseen. What's more, this Old Testament name of God found in the opening lines of Genesis connects all of creation to Jesus Christ, a fact not fully fleshed out until His incarnation.

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**WEDNESDAY** / NOVEMBER 25, 2015

## Genesis 1:1–2:3

God is the ultimate storyteller. He ordained all stories (at least the good ones) should have a beginning, middle and an end. God's story, as told through Scripture, follows this pattern but adds in flashbacks and foreshadowing to keep readers on their toes. We'll begin our Advent study at the beginning—with the creation of all things; where the Author of life establishes the setting (the world of story) and introduces the main characters: the Creator and His image-bearers. *Elohim* is the first Name of God that appears in Scripture and reveals to us the great and *mighty Creator*, the maker of heaven and earth. By His power and authority He created all that is seen and unseen. With tenderness, love and grace He created you and me.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the knowledge that God made you to bear His likeness and to live upon this earth at this very time. I bless you with the gift of assurance that you are an integral and intentional part of God's glorious creation and an important part of His magnificent eternal story.*

Note: The preaching text is Genesis 1:1–5.

THURSDAY / NOVEMBER 26, 2015

## Job 38

Most people think only of Genesis when discussing Elohim's creative work. Personally, I like the book of Job (rhymes with "probe"). The first 37 chapters are Job and his friends in deep discussion for what *seems* like an eternity. They are trying to explain to one another why God would allow Job, His faithful servant, to lose everything. Finally in chapter 38, God responds. The language is poetic and full of imagery, but the message is clear—God is sovereign over His creation. Elohim is so much bigger than I credit Him, more mysterious and more powerful. I imagine Elohim didn't just "roll out of bed one day" and say to Himself, *I think I'll make a universe*. How much "time" did He spend planning it? Did He "confer" excitedly with the Son and the Spirit in the "development stages"? I wonder if He "wondered" how certain ideas would turn out, such as free-will and cells that can mutate. Perhaps I phrase my musings in terms too ordinary and language too limiting for an omniscient and omnipresent God, but I'm a simple creature and I do so out of curiosity and awe for the Uncreated One. Job 38–41 helped me see Elohim in a new light—and gave me a glimpse of the Lord's immense joy and undeniable sovereignty over His creation.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a hunger for the mysteries of our faith and scope for imagination to grasp the joy of the Lord over you, His beloved creation.*

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 FRIDAY / NOVEMBER 27, 2015

## Revelation 4

I love it when Scripture lets us peek into Elohim's holiest places. What a crazy scene this is. I don't exactly know what to make of it, but it seems colorful, flashy and loud. Two things are certain—it's full of worship and the Lord is at its center. The Lord is great and mighty, worthy to receive glory and honor. Why? Because He created all things. We bless the Lord when we acknowledge that. It was an intentional act of Elohim's will that made you and gave you life and placed you on your little patch of earth for so long as it pleases Him to have you here. You are no accident. You are beautiful and beloved. God smiled the day He created you, and when you thank Him and praise Him for His creative action—somehow your prayers become part of a boisterous scene like the one in today's reading.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with celebrating the beauty of His holiness and the glory of the Holy One who accepts you completely and calls forward the best in you.*



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**SATURDAY / NOVEMBER 28, 2015**

## **John 1:1–18; Colossians 1:15–19**

Our first revelation of God in Scripture is that of Creator. From the opening paragraphs, the Lord is revealing Himself—not only His attributes of power and might, but also His triune nature. Elohim is a masculine plural noun; God's Holy Spirit is introduced in Genesis 1:2, and we catch another subtle reference in Genesis 1:26 when the Lord says, "Let's make mankind in **our** image." What's more, the Old Testament Name of God found in the opening lines of Genesis connects all of creation to the other person in the Trinity: Jesus Christ, a fact not fully fleshed out (pardon the pun) for the world until His incarnation. Not only was Jesus there in the beginning but all things were made *through* Him. We are created in Christ Jesus; we have life in His Name. What's more, His Spirit lives in us and is helping us be more and more like Him.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you to be a reflection, a manifestation, a light on earth revealing the facets of God's nature and His Son, Jesus Christ. I bless you, child of the incarnate God, the God of all gods, to walk in the power of the Creator who is manifested in you.*



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MONDAY / NOVEMBER 30, 2015

## Isaiah 64

We read in today's passage a heart-cry for God to come down from heaven and make things right. Isaiah seems to twist upon his request as if it pains to say it; he knows making things right will be costly and painful because the effects of sin are deadly. Mountains tremble in the presence of God and His judgment is a refining fire and yet, how else can we be saved? Isaiah knows our best acts of righteousness are no better than a filthy, bloody rag. The only way we can be saved from our sin is if the Lord Himself does the saving. *"Yet you, LORD, are our Father. . . we are all the work of your hand. . . don't remember our sins forever"* Isaiah pleads. Elohim's creation needs redemption; Elohim's image-bearers need salvation. Elohim is the God who saves. He did come down to earth that first Christmas—to redeem and to save His people from their sin. Jesus' Name in Hebrew is *Yeshua*, which means "salvation." The Creator is the Savior, and He alone has the power to do both.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you in the Name of the one who was wounded for your transgressions. I bless you with profound transformation that comes from the work of Yeshua removing your sins and repairing your brokenness. I bless you with the peace that comes from being made right with Elohim.*

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**TUESDAY** / DECEMBER 1, 2015

## Isaiah 65:17–25

During Advent, we reflect on Jesus' first coming, and we look forward to Jesus' second coming at the "end" of the story. As the Lord reveals His plans for the new heaven, the new earth and the new Jerusalem—His joy and excitement are obvious, even contagious. Elohim's new creation will not be mindful of the former things, the things that caused so much sorrow. In Elohim's new creation, people will be healthier and happier; old adversaries will be friends, and the work of our hands will bring us joy. Jesus brought that future kingdom near to us when He came as a man. As we anticipate Christ's return, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to live in God's kingdom while we still occupy earth. When we pray for God's will to be done, when we carry with us everywhere we go the peace and joy of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we find spiritual purpose in our studies, our jobs, our retirements—we are mingling a future paradise with a current reality.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with favor in your walk with Jesus. I bless you with favor among authorities, in the marketplace and even with your enemies. I bless you in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ who was and is and is to come.*

## Adonai: Lord and Master

Abram is the first to call God Adonai. Adonai comes from the root word meaning: master, lord and owner. When applied to God, it communicates He is Lord of lords and Ruler of the whole earth. There are promises and blessings that come with being owned by God, but there are also responsibilities. Adonai is a name or title which requires something of us. God as Creator doesn't necessitate a response, but the fact that Jesus is Lord does.

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**WEDNESDAY / DECEMBER 2, 2015**

## Genesis 15

As the story progresses through the book of Genesis, we are introduced to Abram (Abraham)—the protagonist of protagonists. It's clear the Lord loves Abram for his faith, and in a critical moment later in his life, Abram's faith will change the history of the world making him the father of a multitude—not only of his physical descendants, the Jews, but also his spiritual descendants—all those who share his faith in God. What's more—he becomes the forefather of the Savior of the world, Jesus. Abram is the first to call God *Adonai*. Adonai comes from the root word meaning: master, lord and owner. When applied to God, it communicates He is Lord of lords and Ruler of the whole earth. In this encounter, Abram submits himself to God's lordship and accepts the personal responsibilities that come of being owned by God.

Your prayer reflection:

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*I bless you with the security that comes from belonging to God and the promises that come from being part of Abraham's family. I bless you with loving the Lord your God, listening to His voice, and holding fast to Him in such a way that future generations are blessed.*

Note: The preaching text is Genesis 15:1-6.

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**THURSDAY** / DECEMBER 3, 2015

**Joshua 7**

The Lord provides a son for Abram in his old age, and from Abram the tribes of Israel are born. They become slaves in Egypt for 400 years until the Lord sends Moses to bring them out (what’s known as “the exodus”). Joshua is Moses’ successor and is tasked with leading the Israelites into the land God promised Abram. In today’s reading, Joshua is having a crisis of faith because of a setback in their conquest of the land. Joshua pleads with the Lord—*you own us and we are yours, so why did you bring us here to die?* I love the way God responds, “*Stand up! What are you doing down on your face? Israel...has violated my covenant.*” It’s a pretty simple cause and effect.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with daily steps of obedience in little things and obedience in radical and unthinkable things to position you for God to fight for you. I bless you with your ways always being pleasing to Adonai. I bless you with peace as God fights your battles and routs your enemies.*

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**FRIDAY / DECEMBER 4, 2015****Matthew 7:21–29**

*Kyrios* is the Greek word for lord, master, owner; in the New Testament it is applied to Jesus and indicates His supreme authority. After all, He is the one who makes the final decision about each person's eternal destiny. *Kyrios* or *Adonai* is a name or title which requires something of us. God as Creator doesn't necessitate a response, but the fact that Jesus is Lord does—it requires service, real service—not lip service. It's when we obey the will of the Father that we are treating Jesus as Lord of our lives. Truthfully, Jesus already owns us; accepting Jesus as *Adonai* will help us make a deeper commitment to Him and reap rewards beyond imagining.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with supernatural wisdom and strength to put Jesus' words into practice. I bless you with a life that stands securely on the rock-solid foundation of Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. I bless you with stability of the soul.*



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**SATURDAY** / DECEMBER 5, 2015

## Matthew 8

In Psalm 24 King David tells us, “*The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.*” Today’s reading illustrates Jesus’ lordship over disease and illness, nature and demons too—He has command over all these, and all these must obey Him. It’s people who are unpredictable. The Lord gave us free will which means we can choose not to obey Him. In today’s reading, the thing that stops Jesus in His tracks is the faith of the centurion. This Roman commander appears to be a God-worshipper, meaning he is not Jewish but worships the God of the Jews and his position in the Roman army affords him a unique understanding of authority. Jesus is impressed. He turns to His followers and announces, *This guy “gets” it!*

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a keen awareness of how Jesus’ lordship is absolute reality in the natural and spiritual realms—every atom, every molecule, every cell must answer to Him. I bless you with learning to pray powerful prayers in the Name of Jesus who has authority over all things. I bless you with seeing those prayers answered in ways that grow your faith.*



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**MONDAY** / DECEMBER 7, 2015

**Matthew 26:36–46**

Graciously, God allowed this tender, private moment in Jesus’ life to be recorded in Scripture. Here we see Jesus struggle with the powerful oppositions at war within Him. *Friends—keep Me company! Father—let this cup pass from Me! The spirit is willing, but the flesh is—so weak. Father—may Your will be done. Your will, not Mine.* Even the Lord Jesus Christ submits Himself to the lordship of His Father. Jesus is fully aware of the cost and yet, He is willing to pay the price. He had the freedom to walk away, but He chose to stay. Jesus demonstrated His love for us in that while we were yet sinners, He died for us. To respect Jesus and submit ourselves to Him is the best thing we can do.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with an uncompromising lifestyle that always considers what Jesus did and would do. I bless you with the very character and nature of Jesus who is working in you, helping you live according to Adonai’s good and perfect will. I bless you with a heart that fights for others, especially your family and loved ones.*

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TUESDAY / DECEMBER 8, 2015

## Revelation 19:1–21

Again we'll conclude this week's Advent study by seeing how God's Old Testament Name applies not only to Jesus' first coming but also to His second coming. This is where our conversation gets tricky. Many intelligent biblical scholars diligently study the subject of end-time prophecies but still have differing opinions about how and when these events will unfold. One thing is certain: God is sovereign over the second coming, and we are wise to keep our souls in a state of readiness for Jesus' return. We can see from today's reading that parts of it are going to be rough, but I like this reading because it iterates for us that Jesus is *Lord of all*, and those who faithfully serve Him will be with Him to the end.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with triumph, not just survival. I bless you with lifting your eyes toward Adonai who defeats the enemy and every work of the enemy that has come or will come into your life. I bless you with peace that comes from revering the Lord of lords and the King of kings.*

## Jehovah Jireh: The Lord My Provider

When the Lord revealed Himself to Abram on the basis of meeting his needs, Abram symbolically called the place Jehovah Jireh which means “Jehovah sees” or “Jehovah will see (to it).” We love Christmas because it’s about a baby in a manger, but to isolate Christmas from the rest of the story is to miss the point—and the provision. Through Jesus, Jehovah Jireh “saw to” the salvation of the world so He could offer us life with Him forever.

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**WEDNESDAY** / DECEMBER 9, 2015

## **Genesis 22:1–19**

This is the climax of Abraham's story. The Lord asks Him to do the unthinkable, and Abraham (Abram) responds in obedience. Not only that, but he calls it worship. The book of Hebrews tells us Abraham reasoned God could even raise the dead. Was resurrection something people knew about way back then? What foresight! What faith! When the Lord substituted the ram for Isaac, He revealed Himself as *Jehovah Jireh* which means "Jehovah sees" or "Jehovah will see (to it)" and Abraham symbolically named Mount Moriah, "The Lord Will Provide."

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with situations to increase and grow your faith. I bless you with the Father's intervention so often and on such a profound level that you rest emotionally secure in Him. I bless you with no longer fearing life's problems because Jehovah will see what needs to be done, is done.*

Note: The preaching text is Genesis 22:9–18.

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 THURSDAY / DECEMBER 10, 2015

## Leviticus 4:32–35; 5:14–19

Substitutionary sacrifice is mentioned specifically for the first time when a ram dies in Isaac's place on Mount Moriah. Many years later, the Lord devises a sacrificial system to cover the people's sins, what is known as "atonement." What we learn from these passages is the price of sin is death—and forgiveness of sin comes only with the shedding of innocent blood "in the place of" the guilty person's blood. What makes the sacrifice even more costly, is it had to be without defect—only the best lamb in the flock would suffice.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with full awareness of your sin and knowing God has provided an acceptable sacrifice. I bless you with brokenness over your sin so that you can run to the arms of Jehovah Jireh, who has declared you unconditionally loved and accepted. I bless you with brokenness over the sins of others, but without condemnation or judgment.*

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 FRIDAY / DECEMBER 11, 2015

## Isaiah 53

The prophet Isaiah speaks of one of Abraham's descendant who would be the substitutionary sacrifice for the whole world. About 700 years before Jesus' first coming to Earth, Isaiah foretold what would happen to Him and why. We love Christmas because it's about a baby in a manger, but to isolate Christmas from the rest of the story is to miss the point—and the true gift. The gift of Jesus is salvation and eternal life. Jesus is the only Name by which people are saved. It is a gift offered freely to us, but it was hard-earned by our Savior. The Provider is also the Provision. Thanks be to God.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with knowing Jehovah Jireh made provision to save you from your sin, restore you to relationship with Himself and offer you life in His kingdom beginning today. I bless you with faith to believe and be saved. I bless you with a life of abundance in Christ Jesus.*



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**SATURDAY / DECEMBER 12, 2015**

## 2 Chronicles 6:12–42

This week wouldn't be complete without looking more closely at Mount Moriah because the connections are just too cool (at least for people like me who love all things Israel). God brings Abraham to Mount Moriah to sacrifice Isaac and there provides a substitute. Hundreds of years later, King David purchases the same spot and dedicates it the Lord. David's son, Solomon, builds the first temple there, and the glory of the Lord fills it. Today the temple is long gone, but its mountain still stands at the heart of old Jerusalem. *"On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided."*

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with having all your needs generously supplied according to God's glorious riches in Christ Jesus. I bless you with courage and awareness to pray for all your needs no matter how big or small. I bless you with people who will believe in you, be life-giving to you and help make you successful.*



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**MONDAY** / DECEMBER 14, 2015**Galatians 3:23–4:7**

Somehow, in the eternal scheme of things—Abraham is the forefather of all who have faith in God. By this faith, we who are not Jews (people under the Law) become part of the Jewish heritage by being counted among Abraham’s seed and heirs to the promises, the wonderful promises, God gave him thousands of years ago. What’s more, through Jesus we become adopted into God’s family—we become heirs of the King, children of the Most High.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a vibrant relationship with Abba Father who is more than capable of parenting you. I bless you with a rich, eternal inheritance as a child of God. I bless you in the Name of the Jehovah Jireh who conforms you to the image of your older brother, Jesus Christ.*

TUESDAY / DECEMBER 15, 2015

## Isaiah 9:1–7

Jehovah Jireh not only meets our needs for salvation and the forgiveness of sins, He is our source for everything. This prophetic passage from Isaiah gives names to several facets of Jesus’ character while revealing His role as our enduring and compassionate provider and protector. When the days are short and we see Christmas lights adorning homes and trees, we are reminded that Jesus is the light of the world, the promised Messiah who reigns supreme over all living things and gives us hope when times are dark.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with seeing the kingdom of peace established in your life as you worship your ruler, the Prince of Peace. I bless you with receiving wise counsel from Him on every issue that causes you concern. I bless you with living safely under the Mighty King who is able to provide for you beyond what you can hope, dream or imagine.*

## The Great I Am: The Existing One

God says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Jesus says "I am the First and the Last." I Am Who I Am is the personal name by which the Lord wished to be known and worshipped in Israel. He is the Existing One—the intimate and unchanging God who never leaves us nor forsakes us. He is with us in the present tense and always will be.

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**WEDNESDAY** / DECEMBER 16, 2015

## Exodus 3

As the story progresses through Exodus, God continues to reveal Himself—this time to His faithful servant, Moses. This introductory meeting puts the remainder of the Old Testament narrative into motion. Moses is called to lead the children of Israel out of slavery in Egypt and into the land God promised in covenant to the patriarchs. This encounter was the first pebble in a landslide of activity between God and His chosen people. *I Am Who I Am* is the personal name by which the Lord wished to be known and worshipped in Israel. He is the “Existing One” who shows His character to be dependable, faithful and trustworthy. The Hebrew rendering for this Name is YHWH, or “Yahweh” and was considered so holy by the ancient Israelites it was not to be spoken—in fact, the actual pronunciation has been lost over the years.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with knowing the truth of Yahweh's unchanging nature and His immense love for you. I bless you in the Name of the Great I Am to experience His faithfulness as He reveals Himself to you—going before you, behind you and with you each and every day.*

Note: the preaching text is Exodus 3:14–15.

**THURSDAY** / DECEMBER 17, 2015

**Exodus 34:1–14**

The Lord proclaimed His Name and the implications of its meaning to Moses during this close encounter in the early stages of their relationship. The Great I Am, who is compassionate, gracious, patient, faithful, loving and just, the God who works wonders, passes in front of Moses. Moses responds to the awesome presence of the Lord by falling to the ground and worshipping. If you continue reading chapter 34, you will see Moses spent 40 days and nights with the Great I Am on Mount Sinai. When Moses returned to the Israelite’s camp his face was radiant—shining so brightly he had to cover it so the people could approach him.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the gift of true worship in the presence of the Great I Am. I bless you with such intimate communion with Him that your countenance exudes facets of His character. I bless you with being known as a person who radiates the presence of Christ on earth.*

FRIDAY / DECEMBER 18, 2015

## Psalm 50

Before going to Israel, Pastor Tom recommended we read *The Source* by James Michener. This historical fiction helped me see the cultural challenges a monotheistic nation would have had living in a world saturated by paganism. Ancient people believed their gods had power over specific parts of nature such as rain or fertility but were otherwise very much like themselves *or worse*—corrupt and self-serving, impatient and impersonal, unjust and unconcerned, sex-crazed and violent. People believed their sacrifices actually fed these gods, who only used humans and cared nothing for them. In this Psalm, the Great I Am is setting Himself apart from all others. He calls on heaven and earth to be His witnesses as He reminds Israel who it is they worship: The Mighty One, God, the LORD, righteous and just Judge, your God, Most High, deliverer and helper, covenant-keeper, Savior.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with understanding you were made by your Father for a glorious purpose. I bless you with the highest pursuit attainable—knowing the Great I Am. I bless you with seeing the Mighty One in many different ways. I bless you with a profound sense of safety that comes from knowing His heart, not just His power.*



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**SATURDAY / DECEMBER 19, 2015****John 8:42–59**

I like it when Jesus quarrels with the religious elite. Maybe it's because His human nature seems most evident then, or maybe it's because He's just so good at it. I imagine the Pharisees leaving those encounters thinking, *Drat! He did it again* and the disciples (whom I'm sure were teenage boys not middle-age men) gloating over their teacher's intellectual prowess with fist-pumps and high-fives. In this particular exchange, Jesus pushes the Pharisees a step too far: He applies God's personal Name to Himself, and places His own existence before the time of their patriarch, Abraham. Making Himself equal to the Great I Am, those were fighting words; the kind of words that incite violence, punishable by death in their culture, and Jesus would die for making this claim—even though it is true.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a deepening knowledge of the Great I Am. I bless you with unshakable confidence in your relationship to Him so that you can stand (even if you stand alone) closely connected to the Father and able to speak on His behalf in such a way as to make a public spectacle of His enemies.*



**MONDAY** / DECEMBER 21, 2015**John 18:1–14**

All four gospels provide an account of the night Jesus was arrested but the Gospel of John includes a curious detail. When the soldiers came looking for Jesus, they were knocked off their feet by His words—literally, not figuratively. Jesus had used the phrase “I am” emphatically before—*I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the good shepherd; I am the way and the truth and the life*—but people didn’t fall over then. This time was different. Jesus had spent the whole night in prayer—praying for Himself, His disciples, you and me and then for Himself again. By the time the soldiers arrived, Jesus was ready for the horror that awaited Him. The temple guard probably expected to catch Jesus unaware or hiding behind a tree but instead they found an imposing figure, completely calm and unafraid. In that moment, the Existing One’s divine nature went out like a shockwave into the night as Jesus spoke the words with authority—“I Am He.”

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with finishing your life with the power of the Great I Am flowing to you and through you. I bless you with continual abiding prayer that strengthens your spirit and brings you victory.*

TUESDAY / DECEMBER 22, 2015

## Revelation 1

God says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega." Jesus says "I am the First and the Last." It is the Great I Am who rules sovereignly over all human history. He is the beginning and the end. The Existing One created creation, He walked with Adam, Enoch and Job. He covenanted with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush and to the Israelites in a cacophony of thunder, earthquakes and trumpet blasts. *He was*. Then He entered the human story in the most intimate and personal way—as an infant, whose tiny neck smelled like sandalwood and his hair like a field the Lord has blessed. He grew into a man, lived, died, was resurrected, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. *He is*. Jesus has an actual birth date; His return also has an arrival date. There is more to come. *He is to come*.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the Spirit of the Living One who manifests His power and His grace in you as you walk among unsaved men and women that they would not be able to resist His testimony in you, for so long as you draw breath or until He returns (whichever comes first).*

## Jehovah Rohi: The Lord My Shepherd

Shepherds play a major role in God's story—the ancient Israelites were first and foremost keepers of livestock and flocks. The Lord identifies with their primary vocation, *"Like a shepherd, he will care for his flock, gathering the lambs in his arms, hugging them as he carries them, leading the nursing ewes to good pasture."* God describes Himself as Jehovah Rohi, the Lord My Shepherd throughout the pages of the Old Testament and into the New when Jesus reveals Himself to be "the Good Shepherd," the eternal caretaker of God's people, the One who will be with us forever.

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 WEDNESDAY / DECEMBER 23, 2015

## Micah 5:1–4

Consider what these words must have meant to the original audience. Israel had been obliterated by Assyria and Judah's people were living in the shadow of that cruel empire as whispers of Babylon's growing power began reaching their ears. Judah's strength and glory were gone; her kings had failed her. The people were fearful and the times uncertain. But then God's word came to them through the prophet, Micah: *From one of your smallest towns will come the greatest Ruler. I can picture a Jewish momma tucking her children into bed that night, smoothing their hair and speaking words of comfort. There, there now. The Almighty has spoken, dear ones. He's sending us a new king, a Shepherd-King, like David. He will rule with strength and majesty. Yes, we will be safe when He rules the earth. Sleep in peace now. Sleep in peace.*

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with sleep that is safe and sweet. I bless you with Jehovah Rohi reassuring you of His promises and His Name throughout the night. I bless you with complete trust in the One who holds you securely in His arms.*

Note: The preaching text is Ezekiel 34:11-16.

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**THURSDAY / DECEMBER 24, 2015**

## Matthew 1:18–23

After Elohim created the world, He walked closely with His creation until Adam sinned and hid from God. God would walk closely with others—Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Moses—but the gap between Himself and His people would continue to widen. When God introduces Himself to Moses as the Great I Am, the One who was, is and will be, He includes the assurance, “I will be *with you*.” Moses constructs a special tent so the Lord may dwell with His people. But the close proximity is too much to handle and the Israelites beg Moses to stand between them and the Lord lest they die. From then on, there would always be an appointed person to mediate between God and men, that is, until the first Christmas. Jesus, who is Priest, Prophet, Judge, King, fully God, fully Man—became the ultimate mediator and closed the gap between God and humanity forever. Not only is God for us, but He is with us.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you in the Name of Immanuel who enables you to approach the throne of grace with freedom and full confidence because He accomplished everything necessary for you to live in perfect communion with your Creator now and forever.*

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**FRIDAY / DECEMBER 25, 2015**

## Luke 2:1–21

The first mention of someone in Scripture often reveals something of his character. When we meet David, he's tending sheep—a task often left to the youngest children, the women or the elderly. When God called David to be king of Israel, he was a youngster carefully watching over his family's livelihood on the same fields mentioned in today's reading. When Scripture introduces us to the shepherd-king's descendent, Jesus, we see a child born to a young mother in difficult circumstances. But we also see in the fields surrounding the town of Bethlehem, God the Father celebrating the arrival of His Son into the natural world by opening a rift between heaven and earth, lighting up the sky with His glory and filling the air with the praises of an angelic host. At the pinnacle of human history, Jehovah Rohi shared His greatest joy—with other shepherds.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with wonderment at the mystery of a God so majestic He is enthroned in the heavenly realms but so tender and compassionate He dwells gently within your heart by His Spirit. I bless you with the powerful presence of the Lord God Almighty. I bless you with the patient care of His Son who knows how hard it is to be human.*



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**SATURDAY / DECEMBER 26, 2015**

## **Psalm 23**

The prophet Moses was raised as a prince in Pharaoh's palace, but he spent 40 years as a shepherd before God called him to the job of leading the children of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. The Lord instructs Moses to use his shepherd's staff to perform miracles to help convince the people of his divine calling. But the staff was also symbolic, a sign that Moses would become a shepherd over God's people. Because they lived in an agrarian culture, ancient people understood the importance of shepherds to their flocks. Shepherds shield and protect the defenseless creatures in their charge; always watch for predators; lead and provide for everything the sheep need. Under the care of a good shepherd—the sheep are safe and lack nothing.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the Holy Spirit's guidance along right paths. I bless you with freedom from fear because Jehovah Rohi is close by you, even in life's deepest valleys. I bless you with a cup that overflows with blessings. I bless you with experiencing God's goodness daily.*



**MONDAY** / DECEMBER 28, 2015

**John 10:1–21**

In the book, *Scouting the Divine*, the author spends time with a shepherdess to learn first-hand about the relationship between shepherds and their sheep. When they first venture into the pasture, the sheep are scattered about, chewing on grass but otherwise undisturbed by their presence. The shepherdess calls to the sheep with a voice unthreatening but solid and commanding, “Sheep, sheep, sheep.” (The author holds her breath, could the words in John 10 be true?) As the shepherdess’ words echo across the field, the sheep begin running toward them. The shepherdess carefully counts the sheep as they approach, “I’m always counting, because you never know when one will remain in the field from sickness or injury,” she says. As they walk along the trail, the shepherdess introduces the sheep, calling them by name and explaining their particular personality and backstory while the sheep nuzzle against her legs. The author is elated. Not only is John 10 true, it is better than she ever imagined.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with recognizing the reassuring voice of your Shepherd who knows you intimately and calls you by name. I bless you with Jehovah Rohi’s leadership in your day-to-day of life. I bless you with the settled assurance that the Good Shepherd loves you enough to lay down His life for you. I bless you with trusting in His fierce protection and generous provision.*

**TUESDAY / DECEMBER 29, 2015**

# Revelation 7

Sheep are mentioned more than any other animal in the Bible. They are integral to God's story. Cain's offering from the field is rejected while his brother's offering from the flock is accepted, leading to a bloody conflict. Abram (Abraham) and his nephew, Lot, have to go their separate ways because the land can't sustain both their flocks. In the battle of wills between Pharaoh and Moses, the Egyptian king finally relents and tells Moses all the Israelites may go but their flocks must remain (they didn't). And on the way out of Egypt, the Israelites were commanded to eat, for the first time, the Passover lamb whose blood painted on the doorframes would protect them from death when God passed by. Hundreds of years later, upon seeing his cousin, John the Baptist would proclaim Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Jesus is the Lamb and is also the Shepherd, not only in this world but in the world to come.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with fully believing you've been washed sparkling clean by the blood of God's sacrificial Lamb. I bless you with being the sheep of His pasture today and forever. I bless you with gifting Jehovah Rohi the worship and praise He deserves.*

# A COMPELLING LIFE



A compelling life is enthralling and captivating—it evokes attention in a powerfully irresistible way. We will be looking at the most compelling figure in the history of the world—Jesus Christ. We'll discover how His identity and mission affects our identity and mission because it is His love that defines us and compels us to fulfill our purpose.

## Compelling Person

Most people, whether they believe in Him or not, would concede that Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history. What makes Jesus so influential? So enduring? So attractive? So controversial? We begin this series by looking at who Jesus is and what makes Him such a compelling person.

**WEDNESDAY** / DECEMBER 30, 2015

## John 1:1-18

We begin this series by looking at the identity of the most compelling figure in the history of the world, which is hard to capture with only six readings! Fortunately, this passage—even the first verse—speaks volumes. John 1:1 echoes and expands Genesis 1:1. The “Word” of God is what created the world, sustains it and governs it. The Word “was” God—fully God but also being “with” God makes the Word distinct from Him. In one of the great mysteries of the Christian faith—the Word is both God and the Son of God. Jesus came from God to make God known.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with experiencing the joy of God’s presence in private and public worship. I bless you with experiencing a special touch from Jesus during communion this Sunday.*





**FRIDAY** / JANUARY 1, 2016

### **John 1:43–51**

The soon-to-be disciples are excitedly discussing how Jesus meets the prophetic criteria for the Messiah that God laid out in Scripture hundreds of years prior to Jesus’ arrival. Philip’s invitation to Nathanael is our invitation also: come and see if Jesus really is who the Bible claims He is. Come and see if He is worth knowing, worth following, worth trusting. Come and see if He will show you even “greater things” than you can hope or imagine. Do you doubt? Come and see.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the assurance that Jesus sees you and knows you. I bless you with eyes open wide to witness Him working in your life in incredible ways. I bless you with curiosity, eagerness and enthusiasm to see what Jesus is really like.*

**SATURDAY / JANUARY 2, 2016**

## **John 5:16–30**

Some people received Jesus eagerly while others flat out rejected Him. Why? Because He made Himself equal with God. Following Christ because we think He is a good, moral teacher is pointless. There is plenty of good advice in the world, and we hardly follow any of it. Following Jesus because He is God is a completely different matter. Jesus has the power and the authority to judge and to give life. The fate of your soul is in His hands—whether you believe it or not, whether you accept it or not, whether you like it or not—does not change the truth of who Jesus is, it only changes you, who you are, what you will become and where you will spend eternity.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with freedom from fear of death and judgment because Christ has graciously taken these upon Himself. I bless you with the perfect love that drives out fear and makes your soul safe.*



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**MONDAY / JANUARY 4, 2016**

## **Luke 23:1–43**

Jesus did nothing to deserve death, but the shouts of the people prevailed, “crucify Him!” Some wailed and mourned, others sneered and mocked. The Messiah, God’s Chosen One, the King of the Jews—the King of all kings—was executed between two criminals, like a criminal. Since sin and death entered the human race through one man, Adam, it would be removed the same way—through one man, Jesus. A king is never more kingly than when he puts the needs of his people above his own.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the deep assurance that your heavenly Father knows exactly what you need, and has all the resources of the universe to meet your needs. He who did not spare His own Son will let nothing separate you from His love. I bless you with the gracious provision of the King of kings.*



## Compelling Purpose

Jesus had much to accomplish during His short time on earth. When one kingdom invades another, there is much to say and do. His mission was compelled by love, driven by purpose and would affect the entire world. It has been said, "All that is best in the civilization of today, is the fruit of Christ's appearance among men."

**WEDNESDAY** / JANUARY 6, 2016

## Luke 4:14–30

This is Jesus' "drop the mic and walk away" moment. Jesus was gaining popularity and word about Him was spreading far and wide. Eventually He comes strolling into Nazareth, the town where He grew up—the town where people still know His family, and remember Him as a curly-headed kid with a runny nose or perhaps an awkward teenager with a fluctuating voice. But now He's a grown man and a rabbi, at that. He goes to the synagogue and reads a passage from Isaiah, a Messianic prophecy. He returns to His seat and every eye is on Him. Then He lays it out (as His original audience would have understood it): *Yep. That's me and that's my mission. The Messianic age has begun. I'm anointed by the Holy Spirit to meet every human need. The kingdom of God is come—and I'm the one bringing it. Oh, and not just to the people of Israel, but to the whole wide world.* Bam! That just happened.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the reality of God's good news—where you are oppressed you will be set free; what you have lost will be restored; where you are lacking you will be made whole. I bless you with God's favor in such abundance that it causes you to marvel.*



**THURSDAY** / JANUARY 7, 2016

**Luke 4:31–44**

The spiritual world must be an interesting place. Here we see the demons easily recognize Jesus, know *exactly* who He is and are subject to His power and authority. There's another passage in Acts 19 where people are attempting to cast out demons by invoking the Name of Jesus which Paul preaches, and one evil spirit responds by saying, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?" OK. That's wild. We see Jesus' power and authority has dominion over the material world, too—He rebukes a fever, and it leaves. A couple times in Scripture, He changes the molecular structure of water so He can walk on its surface without sinking. Apparently this is what happens when God's kingdom intersects with earth—evil is subjugated; people are healed; power is exercised and the spiritual and material worlds are seriously affected.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a desperate hunger and thirst for bringing the manifest presence of God (whose Spirit lives in you) to your community.*

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**FRIDAY / JANUARY 8, 2016**

## Matthew 4:12–25

That passage (Isaiah 61) which Jesus read in the Nazareth synagogue describes the Messiah's ministry. The good news, also referred to as good tidings in Isaiah 40:9–10, was understood as the Lord coming to His people to lead them, care for them and redeem them. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the good news would be more fully understood as salvation made available to all people and the recreation of that which was corrupted by sin. Jesus spent much of His ministry explaining what the kingdom of God is like, demonstrating its power and teaching His followers how to live in it. Before ascending to heaven, He passed that baton to His followers and His followers continue to carry out His mission from generation to generation.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the power of God flowing through you to strengthen you in your daily walk. I bless you with the same power that raised Jesus from the dead pulsing in you and from you as a demonstration of God's kingdom at work in the world.*





MONDAY / JANUARY 11, 2016

**Luke 19:1–10**

Jesus tells the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost boy to help us understand His mission. He came to seek and to save those who are lost. The kingdom of God is a place of love and inclusion; it’s a place where one sinner repenting causes a party to break out in the heavenly realms. Why the rejoicing? Jesus put it most succinctly, *“For God so loved the world that he gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”* (John 3:16). God did not spare His own Son! Compelled by love, He gave up Jesus for us—for you and for me and for our precious children and grandchildren and spouses (even the neglectful ones) and our addict siblings and abusive parents and our annoying neighbors and that punk kid who sits next to you in class and that obnoxious coworker and that tyrannical boss and that rude driver who cut you off and, and, and, and...

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with seeing God’s fingerprint on those around you. I bless you with glimpses of God’s purposes for you as someone who brings light and life to those who are perishing.*



## Compelling Proof

Jesus' identity and His mission put Him in a unique position to serve God and humankind by making things right between the two. We cannot talk about Jesus without talking about what He accomplishes for us and how He proves, beyond all doubt, that God loves us.

**WEDNESDAY / JANUARY 13, 2016****Romans 5:1-11**

We have spent time looking at who Jesus is (His identity) and why He came to earth (His mission). But at the end of the day what matters most to me is that Jesus demonstrates God's love. He *shows us* how much God loves us. He makes God's love definitive, accessible and tangible. For Jesus to die for us while we were His enemies, while we were still sinners, is proof of His love and His commitment. Knowing God loves me to the point of ultimate sacrifice gives context to everything else. He has already gone as far as person or a god can possibly go and, in so doing, has gained my trust in all other things.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a fresh perspective on what the Father has done for you through Jesus, His Son. I bless you with increased faith to believe beyond all doubt that the Father welcomes you into His presence and rejoices at your coming.*





**FRIDAY / JANUARY 15, 2016**

## **John 1:29–34**

The Holy Spirit revealed Jesus' identity to John the Baptist, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" The truth of this prophetic statement would not be realized for about three more years. Jesus already had the power and authority to forgive our sins, but through His sacrificial death, He would do what was necessary to completely remove our sins from us. Jesus doesn't do anything halfway. He doesn't just cover our sins; He removes them. He doesn't just make us better; He makes us new. He doesn't just baptize with water; He baptizes with His very Spirit. If we only want to be a little saved or a little changed, then we've got the wrong guy.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you this day with the baptism of the Holy Spirit who purifies you from all unrighteousness and clothes you with the power of God.*

**SATURDAY** / JANUARY 16, 2016

## **Romans 3:21–31**

Paul is explaining that Jews have the advantage of knowing the Law but the Law primarily is useful in making people conscious of their sin. Yet, there is no difference in Jews and non-Jews when it comes to sin—we are all sinners whether we are conscious of it or not. Since he’s talking about the Law, he explains how we are *made right with God* in legal terms: Justification means we are declared “not guilty” before God because Christ died to pay the penalty for our sins. Christ’s own righteousness is credited to those who believe in Him. Jesus makes us “not guilty” and “righteous” at the same time. Redemption is another legal term (taken from the ancient slave market) that explains how a person obtains release from slavery by payment of a ransom. In other words, Christ paid the ransom to free us from *our* slavery to sin. God did all this for us as a demonstration of His own righteousness.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with faith made strong by Jesus, who starts and finishes your faith. I bless you with being fully satisfied that God is keeping His word to you—no matter how long it takes or how unlikely it seems. I bless you with knowing the Faithful One always keeps His word.*



**MONDAY / JANUARY 18, 2016**

## Colossians 1:9–23

Regardless of religious background, most people would acquiesce that Jesus is the single most compelling person in the history of the world. He split time in half—all dates now fall into one of two eras because He was born. The Roman cross was once an instrument of torturous death and shame but is now a universal symbol of hope because He died on one. In the ancient world, humility was avoided at all costs but now it is regarded as a virtue because He was humble. Jesus' life has furnished the theme for more songs, books, poems and paintings than any other person or event in history. Thousands of colleges, hospitals, orphanages and other institutions have been founded in His Name. Historians estimate that 70 million people have been martyred for their faith in Him and today, one third of Earth's population follow Him.

(P.S. Today's scripture is powerful in the context of this series. Please read it several times.)

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the peace of Jesus who desperately wants you to be reconciled to Him.*

**TUESDAY** / JANUARY 19, 2016

## Ephesians 2

The Bible's "hall of faith" (Hebrews 11) is a play on the phrase "hall of fame" because it recounts some of history's most compelling figures—ordinary people who were motivated by their faith in God to live in extraordinary ways: Abraham went when he didn't even know where he was going; Moses' parents defied Pharaoh's command when they saved their baby's life; and there were many others who conquered kingdoms, administered justice, routed foreign enemies; some whose weakness was turned to strength; and many who were destitute, mistreated or killed. Their stories prove they trusted God and were devoted to living out His purposes for them.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with being everything God has designed you to be and with doing the things He wants you to do. I bless you with the ability to carry out God's work. I bless you with not wasting time or effort on things God has not called you to do.*

## Compelling Provision

Jesus profoundly affects the world because He profoundly affects people—giving each individual a new identity and new purpose. Through His Spirit, Jesus empowers us to serve Him and provides a way for us to lead compelling lives too.

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**WEDNESDAY / JANUARY 20, 2016**

## **John 20:19–23**

How interesting that Jesus appears to His friends in His new, resurrected and imperishable body but He still bears the marks of His crucifixion. He shows them as proof of His identity on a few occasions and in the book of Revelation, John refers to the Lamb (Jesus) as “looking as if it had been slain.”

Those wounds Jesus received for our transgressions must serve as some kind of powerful, eternal, cosmic reminder of who Jesus is and what He has accomplished. Scripture says His followers bear a mark too, *the seal of the Holy Spirit*. My theory, based on several different scriptures, is that His seal is on our foreheads, is clearly visible in the spiritual realm and reads, “Holy to the Lord.” I don’t know if this is exactly right but I pretend like it is.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with clearly experiencing the power, love and self-control that comes from the Holy Spirit's presence in your life. I bless you with holding your head high as a person who is set apart for the Lord.*



**THURSDAY / JANUARY 21, 2016**

**John 7:25–44**

Jesus was physically present on Earth for a relatively short time, approximately 33 years. But He remains present through His Holy Spirit who connects every Christian to Him. Jesus likens the Holy Spirit to a flowing source of power that comes from God and never runs out. John Wesley used the image of “spiritual respiration” to help people think about the constant connection we should have with God through His Spirit. Our need for God can be compared to our need for air—and water. It is His Spirit who empowers us with everything we need to live a godly life while we remain physically present on Earth.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a God-filled life that causes you to be alert, refreshed and energized for God’s work. I bless you with practicing your spiritual respiration so consistently that it becomes as natural and automatic as breathing.*

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**FRIDAY / JANUARY 22, 2016**

## **John 14:15–31**

### *A Compelling Life Story*

Fanny Crosby became blind a few weeks after birth. Born in 1820 to a church-going family, she considered herself a Christian all of her life. She attended the New York Institute for the Blind (NYIB) in her early teens and became part of its faculty in 1846. Fanny was a prolific poet and a compassionate missions' worker. In 1849, New York suffered a cholera outbreak, and the NYIB closed for seven months. Fanny stayed in New York to nurse the sick and, according to Bernard Ruffin (*Fanny Crosby*), in the middle of all the sickness and death, she realized she had been so caught up in social, political and educational reforms that she had drifted away from God. This epiphany led to her writing more than 8,000 hymns and gospel songs. Our hymnal contains seven of them, including "To Thine Be the Glory" and "I Am Thine, O Lord."

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the power of the Holy Spirit to remember what needs to be remembered and the grace to forget what needs to be forgotten.*





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**MONDAY** / JANUARY 25, 2016

## **Romans 8:18–39**

It's easy to think a compelling life is beyond our reach or something that only happens to other people, but look how God makes a way for us: First and foremost He gives us His Spirit—the same power that created the world and raised Jesus from the dead helps us in our weakness. Not only does He help us, but He prays for us—and Jesus does too. In all things, God is working for our good. We didn't wander into this amazing situation—He called us into it; He chose us. And He doesn't condemn us. Because He loves us He justifies us, at the expense of His own Son. God, the God, is helping, praying, working, calling, justifying and loving each of us. With all this going for us, with God being for us—how can we do anything but lead a compelling life?

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with waking every morning knowing the living God is sustaining you and strengthening you for the opportunities and problems He sets before you. I bless you with overcoming the difficulties you face today. I bless you with being energized by the life of eternity upon all that you are and think and do.*

TUESDAY / JANUARY 26, 2016

## Titus 3:1–11

*A Compelling Life Story*

S. Truett Cathy grew up during the Great Depression. He was a devout Southern Baptist and fought in World War II. After the war, he opened a restaurant that specialized in chicken sandwiches. After working several weeks on double and triple shifts in his restaurant, he came to understand the importance of the commandment to rest on the seventh day (Exodus 20:8–11). From then on, he closed his diner on Sundays to rest, attend church and reconnect with his family. He continued to run his business on Christian principles and today his Chick-fil-A restaurant chain still remains closed on Sunday, both as a rest for the employees and as a testament to the Lord. Cathy lived out his faith through his business. He is quoted as saying, “We should be about more than just selling chicken: we should be a part of our customers’ lives and the communities in which we serve.”

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with devotion to doing what is good, excellent and profitable for everyone. I bless you with being gently reminded when you're not.*

## Compelling People

When Jesus makes things right between us and God, He makes us into new people as citizens of God's kingdom. An ambassador is an official diplomat sent from a country as a representative to a foreign country. Because we know what it means to be reconciled, we are put on mission to carry that message to others.

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**WEDNESDAY** / JANUARY 27, 2016

## **2 Corinthians 5:11–21**

This note from my Wesley Study Bible helped me better understand my role as a minister of reconciliation: “Wesley agreed with the Protestant Reformers that justification is making our relationship with God right through Jesus Christ. But Wesley understood justification in a particular way: God’s mercy and grace, shown in the suffering and death of Jesus on our behalf, pardons our sins and restores our capacity for love of God and neighbor. This occurs in the exercise of faith that is a gift from God to actively trust Jesus to receive God’s pardon and acceptance. It results in a renewal of the image of God in us that had been damaged by sin, so that we might begin lifelong growth in Christlikeness as the Holy Spirit enables us to love God and neighbor. What God has done for us (justification) and what God does in us (sanctification) are together a part of God’s work of restoring the whole creation back into right relationship with God.”

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with profound reconciliation with God that compels you to fearlessly share the peace you have with others.*



**THURSDAY / JANUARY 28, 2016**

**Romans 8:1–17**

C.S. Lewis writes in *Mere Christianity*, “A world of nice people, content in their own niceness, looking no further, turned away from God, would be just as desperately in need of salvation as a miserable world—and might even be more difficult to save. For mere improvement is not redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now and will, in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine. God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man...[Jesus is] interfering with your very self; killing the old natural self in you and replacing it with the kind of self He has. At first, only for moments. Then for longer periods. Finally, if all goes well, turning you into a different sort of thing; into a new little Christ, a being which, in its own small way, has the same kind of life as God; which shares in His power, joy, knowledge and eternity.”

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a deep heart identity as God’s very own child, a valued and loved member of His family. I bless you with the freedom and security to call Him your Abba, Father, Daddy.*

FRIDAY / JANUARY 29, 2016

# 2 Corinthians 2:14 – 3:18

*A Compelling Life Story*

*“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me”* (Romans 16:1–2). Phoebe was an early convert to Christianity and was likely the pastor of her home church. She probably worked closely with the Apostle Paul. Paul chose her to deliver what was going to be one of the most important letters found in the Bible, Paul’s letter to the Romans. In those days the church in Rome would have been a collection of home churches, and Phoebe would have read aloud Paul’s letter in each of those homes. She would have brought news of Paul and the other churches as well as answer any questions about Paul’s letter and its meaning. What a compelling life to be able to understand Romans so deeply and to be able to share it among brothers and sisters in such intimate home settings.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with glimpses of God’s whole design and your place and purpose in it. I bless you with glimpses of His image in you which is growing and transforming you day by day, little by little into His glorious likeness.*

**SATURDAY** / JANUARY 30, 2016

# Ephesians 1

Look at what we are! Look at what we have received! Paul is praising God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who makes all these descriptive words and phrases (from the NIV) true for us: Blessed. Chosen. Holy. Blameless. Adopted. Redeemed. Forgiven. Glorious. Lavished. In unity. Under Christ. With hope. Praise of His glory. Included. Saved. Marked. Guaranteed an inheritance. God’s possession. Given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. Enlightened. Knowing. With riches, power and strength... Read these words over and over. Soak them in. Be encouraged. Jesus has blessed you in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing. Yes, praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with sensing with every cell in your body, to the core of your very being—how much your Father adores you. I bless you with savoring, feeling and relishing the love your Father pours out on you, His chosen one.*



**MONDAY / FEBRUARY 1, 2016**

## **Galatians 4:1–11**

### *A Compelling Life Story*

Some facts about the familiar story behind John Newton, the writer of the hymn “Amazing Grace,” may surprise you. John began his sailing career at age 11. His first conversion experience happened during a storm while sailing back to England from West Africa where he had been forced into servitude to the wife of a slave trader. But John, like most of us, was a work in progress. He quit a few vices but continued to work on slave ships. Once during his travels he became very ill and again professed his belief in Jesus, asking God to control his life. Five years later, after achieving the rank of captain, he had a stroke and had to quit the slave trade. His next job, tax collecting, allowed him time to study to become an Anglican priest. A few years after his ordination, he wrote the most famous Christian hymn in history. Almost ten years after writing that hymn, John Newton finally became an active abolitionist, giving his testimony of the cruelty of slave ships and helping to end slavery in England. It took John Newton more than 40 years from his first profession of faith to grow into the man we admire today as the slave ship captain whose life was turned around by Jesus.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with confidence that your Father is making you new. I bless you with knowing what the enemy intends for harm, the Father works for the good of those who love Him.*

**TUESDAY** / FEBRUARY 2, 2016

## **Philippians 3**

Of all the compelling lives recorded in the Bible, Paul's has to be in the top five. As a young scholar in Judea, he was a shining star. He was trained by a notable rabbi, became a model Pharisee who was so zealous for Judaism that he became obsessed with opposing the Name of Jesus and His followers. After a personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus, he had a change of heart and a change of mission. Jesus called Paul to be a witness for Him to the Jews and the Gentiles (non-Jews) across the known world. As an ambassador of Christ, Paul would endure multiple floggings and lashings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, hunger, thirst, sleeplessness, constant danger and much more. In all these things, Paul actually delighted in his hardships, persecution and weaknesses because at those moments Christ's divine power in him was most evident.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with a bold new perspective to view the earthly trappings of popularity, material wealth, good health, successful careers, and even happy families as nothing more than a stinky heap of garbage **when compared to** the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.*

## Compelling Calling

The world is affected by Jesus because individuals are affected by Jesus. We are compelled by Christ's love to deliver the message of reconciliation that we, ourselves, have received. We have roles and responsibilities as citizens of heaven to fulfill our calling as ambassadors by showing others what God's kingdom is like.

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WEDNESDAY / FEBRUARY 3, 2016

## 2 Corinthians 5:11–21

### *A Compelling Life Story*

Saint Augustine of Hippo was an unlikely candidate for conversion, much less someone who would become regarded as one of our most influential Church fathers. Born in 354 A.D., Augustine grew up well educated and was especially well trained in rhetoric and philosophy. Although his mother was Christian, he rejected her teaching and instead practiced a religion known as Manichaeism. In his early life, he and his friends led a hedonistic lifestyle, pursuing pleasure above all else. Then, at the age of 31, Augustine converted to Christianity. He became a bishop in the western Church and was instrumental in developing Christian doctrine, especially that of the Trinity and Original Sin. Much of his writing is still intact today.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with evangelism as a natural part of your everyday life and as a normal part of your conversations and actions. I bless you with a vast harvest of family, friends and strangers.*



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**THURSDAY / FEBRUARY 4, 2016**

# 1 John 3

Here, the Apostle John seems to be elaborating on what he wrote in his Gospel in chapter three. When we accept Jesus, we are born again, not physically but spiritually. We are born into a new family—God’s. We begin living in a new kingdom—God’s. The Holy Spirit gives us assurance of our salvation; it is Him working in us to help us learn new behaviors which are congruent with our new identity. It is the Spirit of Love in us, transforming us into the very image of Love so that we may act in love toward all.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with being lavished by God’s love! I bless you with being transformed by His love. I bless you with being compelled by His love to love others generously.*

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**FRIDAY / FEBRUARY 5, 2016**

## 1 John 4:7-21

We would be remiss to conclude this series without looking at God's essential nature which is demonstrated through His actions. God is love. He showed us His love by sending His Son into the world to be the Savior of the world. Compelled by love, Jesus sacrificed Himself to make us right with God in every way. We are made perfect in love. And it is the love of God *in us* that compels us to love one another. We don't have to muster up love-feelings or love-actions all on our own. We get to use God's love to love others. Isn't that a relief?

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with not trying to love anyone on your own. I bless you with drawing daily and deeply from the actual source of all love. I bless you in the Name of the God of love.*

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**SATURDAY / FEBRUARY 6, 2016****1 John 5:1–15**

C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity*, “There is no other way to the happiness for which we were made. Good things as well as bad, you know, are caught by a kind of infection. If you want to get warm you must stand near the fire: if you want to be wet you must get into the water. If you want joy, power, peace, eternal life, you must get close to, or even into, the thing that has them. They are not a sort of prize which God could, if He chose, just hand out to anyone. They are a great fountain of energy and beauty spurting up at the very centre of reality. If you are close to it, the spray will wet you: if you are not, you will remain dry. Once a man is united to God, how could he not live forever? Once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?”

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with the “good infection” of Jesus. I bless you with living into your glorious purpose in the One who makes you a competent minister of reconciliation.*



**MONDAY** / FEBRUARY 8, 2016

## 2 Timothy 4:1–18

I appreciate this letter—it’s a snapshot of an ambassador of Christ in his everyday life. Paul advises his protégé like a good mentor, or older brother or father-figure might do: *Hold to the truth Tim, and don’t lose your head. Be prepared and work hard.* And we see Paul, the great evangelist, was a regular guy dealing with regular people and regular stuff: *Get here as quick as you can and bring my coat! Oh, and my books too. And watch out for Alex—he’s a real troublemaker.* And finally, we see what sets Paul apart: *The first day of my trial, everyone split. But not the Lord. He was there by my side and gave me strength. He used it for good, for the good of the people who heard the message. And don’t worry Tim, Jesus will rescue me. He keeps my soul safe.*

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with keeping your head when it seems the whole world is losing theirs. I bless you with standing apart from the crowd. I bless you with finishing the race like a mighty athlete who is strong in the Lord.*

TUESDAY / FEBRUARY 9, 2016

## Philippians 4:4–9

I like ending here, with Paul’s exhortation from his letter to the Philippians, because it’s so encouraging. We have reason to celebrate. We *get* to celebrate God. And we get to celebrate *with* God. What a tremendous privilege! Jesus brings us near to Him and He is near to us. He hears our prayers as if we were standing right beside Him. We don’t have to worry—about anything. He’s got us. God guards our hearts and minds so we can focus our thoughts on what’s good. We can put into practice what’s good. When we do, we’ll stand apart from the crowd, and people will see it. This is how we minister to others through our everyday life—by showing them what it’s like to live in God’s kingdom while we are still on Earth. That’s what it means to be an ambassador of Christ.

Your prayerful reflection:

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*I bless you with leading a life so compelling it causes people to seek you out, wanting to know about the hope and the peace within you. I bless you with being ready to give them an answer.*

Tomorrow is Ash Wednesday which marks the beginning of Lent on the Christian calendar.









Look for Asbury's app  
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To download a PDF of this sermon journal,  
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Did you know Asbury offers weekday preschool, along with many opportunities for children and students (ages 6 weeks through 12th grade) to learn and grow on Sunday mornings and throughout the week? Go to **[asburytulsa.org](http://asburytulsa.org)** to discover how we can partner with you in creating a foundation of faith in your family.



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