



**DAILY
REFLECTIONS
FOR ADVENT**



We've forgotten how to receive the gift of God.
Advent is a season to slow down. It's a season of
formation. It's a season of longing, of hope. It's a season
of becoming aware that our God is generous beyond all
measure, meeting the deepest cries of our spirit.

Will we receive the gift of God?

Don't rush. Breathe. Look back. Look ahead. Look up.
Join us in the waiting and anticipation of Jesus among us.
Take time each day to reflect on the day's stories or
passages. What strikes you? Where do you see yourself?
Where is God calling you to receive... and to give? Sit
with these thoughts. Pray from them. Ask what God may
do in your own life as you anticipate the Advent of Jesus.

Slow down.

Breathe with us.

Listen to His voice.

Emmanuel is coming.

A HUGE thank you to Adam and Melanie Winters
for compiling and curating this project!



December 3rd

For this is how God loved the world: He gave His one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. -John 3:16

The holiday season pressures us toward perfection. If we participate at all in the traditions of the season, we are likely to feel a fear of falling short of some probably-unrealistic standard. Our finances may not be up to the dreams we have for gift-giving. Our cooking skills may not be Food Network-ready. Our family may not be warm and loving; in fact, our family may be flat-out dysfunctional. Everyone's expectations for a very merry Christmas may not be fully realized. Our own expectations may not be realized, for that matter! But it's okay.

I visited a Lutheran church the week before Christmas one year. In prayer before Communion, the pastor said something that really "made" the service for me, that "Ah!" moment that I knew I would carry with me specially through the coming week. He said, "We acknowledge that we worship You not as we ought, but as we are able."

Not as we ought, but as we are able.

Expectations unmet. Imperfection admitted. Yet somehow Jesus, Messiah, receives my worship anyway. The picture of Jesus' grace making up the difference between our "able" and our "ought" is profound. His presence in our world, in my home, and in my heart, makes all the difference. -Sabrina Justison

Lord, thank You that we don't have to be perfect. You gave Your Son for us all.

December 4th

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

Most summers I went to camp for a week with a small amount of spending money from my parents. Campers could use spending money at the camp store or at the snack shop. And, throughout the week, during our evening worship time, we would be educated about a specific need in the world and encouraged to generously give some of our spending money away. Since I knew I had less spending money than some kids, I discreetly averted my gaze and let the donation bins pass me night after night. On Friday, when our final opportunity came to shop at the camp store, I carefully selected enough items to use up the last of my money. After checking out, I was left with only a handful of coins and was feeling rather proud of my choices. Since it was the last day, a giving jar had been placed by the register to give kids one final chance to give. I carelessly dropped my handful of coins in the jar and muttered, "I hate change." The counselor working the register overheard my comment, looked me in the eyes, and said, "That's not a good reason to give." And that moment has stuck with me for over 20 years...because he was right. There was no generosity in my heart at that moment. Instead I was filled with pride and self-focus. I was giving away something I deemed "useless" and "burdensome."

It wasn't about the amount, it was about my heart. -Bethany Miller

Lord, turn our hearts towards generosity. Help us to put people before things.

December 5th

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

-2 Corinthians 5:17

My younger sister was baptized a couple of weeks ago. Several challenging things happened in my family when we were younger, and they affected her deeply. She stopped having a relationship with God and went down a pretty dark road. She met a few people in college who were interested in exploring who God is and what it means to have a relationship with Him. She decided to explore with them and got connected into a local church. Surrounding her baptism, 2 Corinthians 5:17 showed up in her life repeatedly. I decided that I wanted to paint a canvas of the verse to give to her as a Christmas present. Over Thanksgiving break, however, I saw some artwork that my high school-aged cousin has done over the years. She is very talented. I asked her if she would be willing to paint the canvas, so that the artwork would be high quality in addition to being meaningful. She agreed enthusiastically and has become very passionate about this piece. God has been so generous in putting so many people in my sister's life who encourage her in her walk. Her journey has been such an incredible reminder of His generosity in grace and His desire for a meaningful relationship with His children. -Sydney Morales

Lord, You have blessed us with people who shape us. Help us be people who bless others.

December 6th

Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it!

-Hebrews 13:2

Seraph

When our parents became ill and needed help
A young man in the neighborhood appeared.
All of us kids had moved away,
Florida, South Carolina, California, Alaska.
We wondered at first what he wanted.
He brought in the paper and rolled the trash can down to the
street on Tuesdays
after my dad couldn't do it anymore.
Later, when they stopped driving, Brian started to drive them
to doctor appointments, to town.
Now Brian comes whenever they call.
His work somehow allows him time off when he needs to come
help.
He comes by to check on them,
and knows what they need before they call.
I wish I could meet Brian, and shake his hand,
try to tell him how grateful and guilty I feel about him
helping my parents when I am so far away.
But Brian won't come around when I am here,
I am not clear about his reasons, but I understand.
When our parents became ill and needed help
A young man in the neighborhood appeared.
-Rob Seward

Lord, open our eyes to opportunities to be generous to those You put in our path.

December 7th

For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and His faithfulness continues to each generation. -Psalm 100:5

When I think of generosity, I first think of my grandparents. They left Italy at a young age to start a new life in NYC. Everything they did, up in their 90's, was for their family. They worked hard and sacrificed much, always thinking of how to make life better for their children. We witnessed their faith in watching them go to church every Sunday. My daughter is the fourth generation to be living in the home they worked so hard to purchase. The fifth generation, my great niece and nephews, are now part of that story. I pray that my family continues to think about what lessons we are passing on to the next generation. We must learn from our grandparents' generosity, and pass on the love of God and family.
-Barbara Padilla

Lord, help us to be an example to those who come behind us, just as those who've gone before us have been examples for us.

December 8th

“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name Him Jesus.” -from Luke 1:26-41

People are fascinated with the idea of angels among us. But when an angel appears, it’s only the message the angel delivers that matters. When Mary was visited by an angel, she didn’t spend the rest of her life telling the amazing story of angelic visitation, she instead was forever changed by the message from the angel, the words of GOD HIMSELF spoken to her.

How did she respond? She recognized it as God’s words, but she was confused, asked questions, and tried to fit the message with what she already knew of God, herself, and life. She chose to answer aloud that she wanted to be in agreement with God, even if she didn’t really understand how this was all going to play out. She sought out other believers who could help her continue to sort through the implications of what she had heard from God.

When I hear God speak through His word, it may not be an angel who delivers the message, but the message is the point, not the messenger anyway. Can I respond like Mary? Will I choose to: recognize God speaking and ask questions, trying to fit what I am hearing into what I already know, even if it’s confusing; answer that “I am the Lord’s servant may it be to me as YOU have said;” seek others in community who can help me make sense of God’s word and apply it in my life? -Sabrina Justison

Lord, help us look for the messages in the miraculous. Thank You for the generous way that you choose to use us.

December 9th

Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. By doing this they will be storing up their treasures as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life. -1 Timothy 6:17-19

When I was pregnant with Emily, Adam was in college full time and working part time at Starbucks. I had a hundred-year plan for our finances and housing and pretty much everything else. Having a baby while Adam was still in school was certainly not part of the plan, but it was happening. I started looking at the prices of everything a baby needs and I had major sticker shock. How on earth were we going to do this? As news got out to the Starbucks regulars that Adam's wife was pregnant, presents started coming in. For about a month straight, every time Adam went to work, he came home with something for the baby. We got gift cards to baby stores, outfits, toys, hand me downs, cash, and on and on. I had never met any of these people, and Adam just made small talk with them while he made their coffee, but they were so generous. By the time I had Emily, we had been given so much that we were able to show generosity to a few pregnant friends. We went from having no idea how we were going to make things work to having more than we needed, thanks to the generosity of Adam's Starbucks customers. -Melanie Winters

Lord, thank you for all the times You have met our needs in amazing ways. Use us to meet the needs of others.

December 10th

The Magnificat: Mary's Song of Praise

Mary responded,

“Oh, how my soul praises the Lord.

How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!

For He took notice of His lowly servant girl,

And from now on all generations will call me blessed.

For the Mighty One is holy,

And He has done great things for me.

He shows mercy from generation to generation

To all who fear Him.

His mighty arm has done tremendous things!

He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.

He has brought down princes from their thrones

And exalted the humble.

He has filled the hungry with good things

And sent the rich away with empty hands.

He has helped His servant Israel

And remembered to be merciful.

For He made this promise to our ancestors,

To Abraham and his children forever.”

-Luke 1:46-55

December 11th

Right now you have plenty and can help those who are in need. Later, they will have plenty and can share with you when you need it. In this way, things will be equal. As the Scriptures say, "Those who gathered a lot had nothing left over, and those who gathered only a little had enough." -2 Corinthians 8:14-15

Drew and I have had many encounters with generosity. We've been on the receiving end and giving end. We've been blown away by how God has shown up in our lives through the generosity of others and many of those encounters have become altars for us.

One of our most profound experiences with generosity occurred when we found LifePath. Never have we met a community that truly lives generosity out loud and loves so intentionally. Before we even moved to Delaware, LifePath was loving on us in a way we had never experienced in community. We quickly discovered that this generosity was not just coming from a few people, but was the identity of LifePath as a whole and a characteristic that was embraced by all.

As we continued to be blessed by the generosity of countless LifePath family members, we saw our own hearts and priorities changing. Drew and I started to think and act more generously and were able to see our generosity come full circle to bless others in the same way we had been blessed just a few months ago. The generosity of LifePath has literally changed our hearts and minds. This is a beautiful testimony.

-Allison Bulbuk

Lord, help us to be generous people down to our core, that generosity flows out of us and identifies us as Your people.

December 12th

Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For God loves a person who gives cheerfully. -2 Corinthians 9:6-7

I am amazed at how generous God's people can be. When I was a youth pastor, we lived in a depressed area with a high rate of unemployment. Many families were barely getting by after the factories in the area were shut down. One day a farmer who attended our church stopped by the parsonage where we lived. He stopped in and informed me that he had planted an extra crop of soybeans. After all of the crops he had planted for the year were harvested, he took the time and effort to plant, tend to, and harvest these "God's Beans" (as he called them). He said that he does this each year, and he gives away any profits from this planting to God in one way or another. He said that it was a very good year and he wanted the money to go into a fund for the less fortunate teenagers to be able to attend events they wouldn't normally be able to afford. God used this man's generosity to give me an opportunity to impact the teen's views on homelessness, Jesus' mission on Earth, and what authentic faith looks like.

-Adam Winters

Lord, help us to find creative ways to be generous toward others and toward You.

December 13th

Awake, O sleeper, rise up from the dead, and Christ will give you light. -Ephesians 5:14

Bethlehem, late at night, I was tired and was putting out the light
On blankets soft I laid my head and thanked Jehovah that I'd
found a bed

'Cause travelers just like me had left the city's inns without a
vacancy

As tempers flared and goodwill grew thin I was blessed to be
asleep in the inn.

But out the door, across the yard, the barn was filthy and the bed
was hard.

The Son of God was born to take my sin; my Savior Jesus found no
room in the inn.

Across the sky the angels streamed, and as they sang their praise I
simply dreamed a dream

As shepherds worshiped and adored I was sleeping though the
coming of my Lord

And though I loved and prayed to God, His coming to us seemed
so very odd

I couldn't recognize it then; Messiah came and I was sleeping in
the inn.

Oh, Jesus! Forgive me! I have loved my sleep more than You.

Oh, Jesus! Wake my heart once again. I don't want to be asleep in
the inn.

Two thousand years have come and gone, and still I find the need
to sing this simple song

My heart is slow to wake from sleep, and I am lazy when the
things of God are deep

And though I love and pray to God, I find His way of doing things
seems often odd

I cannot recognize Him when my foolish spirit is asleep in the inn.

Oh, Jesus! Forgive me! I have loved my sleep more than You.

Oh, Jesus! Wake my heart once again. I don't want to be asleep in
the inn.

-Sabrina Justison

Lord, wake our hearts. Open our eyes. Lead our paths.

December 14th

Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,
he did not think of equality with God
as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;
he took the humble position of a slave
and was born as a human being.

When he appeared in human form,
he humbled himself in obedience to God
and died a criminal's death on a cross.

Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor
and gave him the name above all other names,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

-Philippians 2:1-11

December 15th

From His abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ.

-John 1:16-17

Where have I seen God's generosity in my life?

Everywhere.

Can I say that? Can I really say that? We live in a time and place where being a Christian seems to call for inauthenticity, like we have to have everything together and looking great, and I don't want to do that. Everything is not together. Some things are very not together. And I know that saying I've seen God's generosity everywhere is not everyone's story, and may not always be mine.

But it's true.

I felt God's call in high school, and did nothing to deserve it. Having already given such a tremendous gift, He also blessed me with a great family growing up, a beautiful wife and daughter whom I could never deserve, and though we've struggled plenty of times and in plenty of ways, at the end of each experience we've always had God and always had each other and we've never really lacked for the basics either. Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor..." and sometimes that worries me! But I've learned over the years to try to recognize that if life turns the way of Job, to realize that God is still present there too. And for now, all I can say is, "The Mighty One has done great things for me!"

-Brandon Zinnato

Lord, You provide food for the birds, and You clothe the wildflowers. Help us to rest in your promises of generosity.

December 16th

So let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up. Therefore, whenever we have the opportunity, we should do good to everyone—especially those in the family of faith.

-Galations 6:9-10

It is impossible for me to look at my family without thinking of how it has been touched by generosity.

When God tugged our hearts towards two little boys in Ethiopia, He pulled so many others along with us, displayed by generosity in every form we could imagine.

Our village was generous with their money, by helping us cover the costs that came along with our adoption.

They were generous with time by watching our kids while we traveled overseas and when we came home and they needed a day to be out of the house.

They were generous with food, by providing our family with dinner for three months straight.

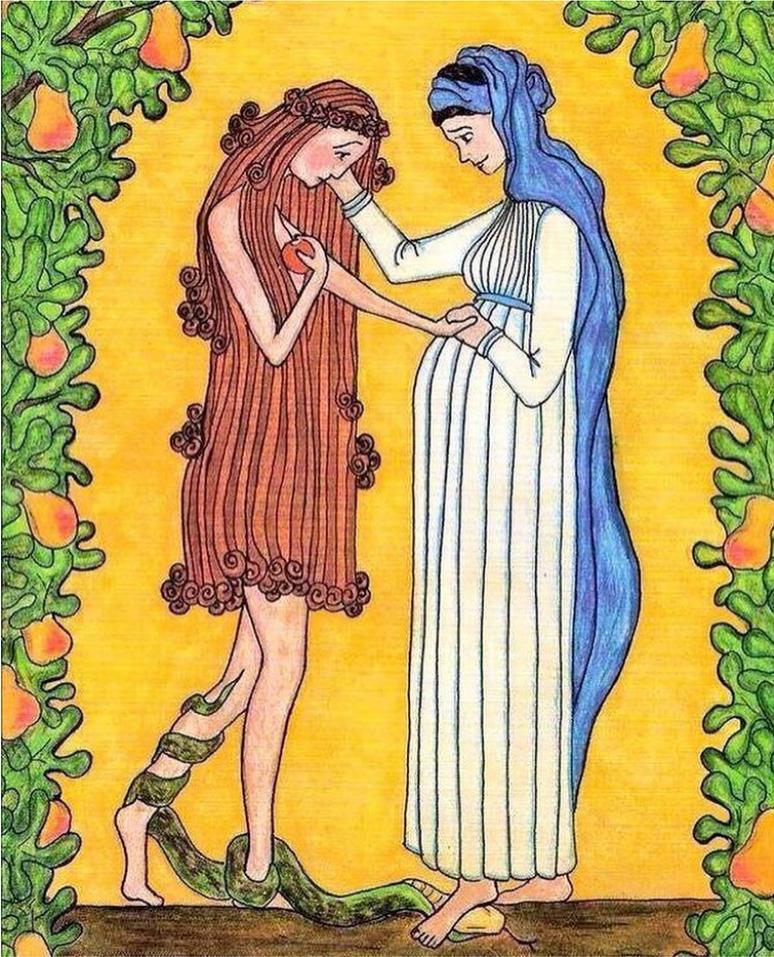
And most importantly, they were generous with their hearts, by openly welcoming our new family and all of the challenges, joy, and appetites that come with it. -Gina Judy

Lord, let us never tire of doing what is good and giving of ourselves.

December 17th

And I will cause hostility between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel. -Genesis 3:15

But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. -Galatians 4:4



December 18th

Do not judge other, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven. Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back. -Luke 6:37-38

Our house is one of those that is always open—I love to have people in, but I don't really ENTERTAIN. I'm the type of hostess who says, "Yeah, there's stuff in the fridge...help yourself!"

But each Thanksgiving I try to do things with a little more class. A few years ago, I was hosting the traditional turkey dinner for Fred and me, our 7 kids + 2 significant others, my parents, and my sister Allison's family of 5. Eighteen people, if I'm doing the math correctly, so I made two turkeys and oodles of sides. We had some serious food going on!

Allison is the classy entertainer in our family, and she very generously asked what she could do to help. I assigned her various dishes to bring, and she also offered table linens, and early arrival to help with the cooking, but I assured her that I had it all covered.

At the last minute, I talked to my friend Kym whose family of 6 was in limbo. A sick mother-in-law and out of town travel confusion had left them uncertain about the best place to celebrate Thanksgiving.

"Come to our house," I said. "The more the merrier!" I assured her I had enough food for an army. So now our numbers were at 24, but my mountain of mashed potatoes was more than sufficient for the challenge.

Unfortunately, I forgot one thing. After most of my family had arrived, I realized that I didn't have enough silverware. Or dishes. (Gravy doesn't really serve well on paper plates.) My mother laughed at me. Hostess-extraordinaire Allison looked horrified. And Fred offered to go find a store and buy new stuff.

I decided on humility. I grabbed my phone and called Kym's cell just as they were pulling out of their driveway. "So, Kym, this is a little awkward... remember how I invited you guys to join us for Thanksgiving dinner? Well, I kind of need you to bring your own plates and silverware. Or plan to eat with your fingers directly from the serving platters. Whichever you prefer." She managed to stop laughing long enough to answer that they would, indeed, go back in the house and get plates and silverware, and when they arrived, we all had a splendid time.

Will I win a Martha Stewart Living award for that Thanksgiving dinner? Not hardly! Did I mean well when I invited extra guests to our table? Yep. Did it require a generous helping of grace on Kym's part to just stay flexible and make the situation work for everyone? Sure did. And will I always remember it with a grateful smile? You bet! The table was all the more beautiful for the presence of mismatched plates and borrowed silverware, because that was a table made by community. -Sabrina Justison

Lord, help us to be generous in all things, at all times, even when it's uncomfortable.

December 19th

He loves whatever is just and good; the unfailing love of the Lord fills the earth. -Psalm 33:5

How do I see the generosity of God? I see it in the fall leaves, splashing a green canvas with reds, oranges, and yellows. I see it in a child's smile, just when I think I can't continue on. It's in the stars, millions of stars spread across the night sky. Bats eat mosquitos, and that is generous of God. His generosity is in the still small voice that moves me. It's in the laughter of my loves. God's generosity resonates in music, and it's in lilies and daffodils and daisies. God's generosity shows up in a hot cup of tea and a good book. Have you walked down a forest path as snowflakes lightly fall? Have you studied the human mind and its capabilities? God is generous. God is giving. God is brilliant and kind and He shares His brilliance and kindness with us. We who are mere blips on a large, busy planet in a much bigger and busier solar system are deemed worthy through the grace of God to exist, to live, to love. We are deemed worthy of the gift of God's humanity, the gift of a small baby born in a stable, quietly, mostly unnoticed, except for the large group of angels that appeared to a group of shepherds in a field, heralding the Savior of us fools. -Melanie Winters

Lord, Your generosity fills this world. Help us to learn from Your example.

December 20th

And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded. -Matthew 10:42

Carol

My grandmother, Carol, kept a jar of water in the refrigerator. She remembered the iceman and felt that ice water was quite the luxury. She kept a dish of chocolates on her shelf in the kitchen. I always liked going to see her, she was always kind.

I thought that every grandmother kept chocolates and a jar of ice water. I used to think everyone had a kindly Carol, and that she had always been old, always kindly, and always with chocolates.

Tonight, I remembered her when I put a jar of water in the fridge. My grandchildren are seven and four. I never had put up ice water before. But there are chocolates in a bowl, and if they want to eat them, I say, "Yes! You may. Have another!" -Rob Seward

Lord, may we always be kind, thoughtful, and giving to those around us.

December 21st

We know what real love is because Jesus gave us His life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sister. If someone has enough money to live well and sees a brother or sister in need but shows no compassion—how can God’s love be in that person? -1 John 3:16-18

This summer, my family and I made the trek to Maine for the first time for some adventure. We hiked, read books, ate amazing food, and saw whales at sunset.

During the week, however, a dark cloud began looming on the horizon. Hurricane Harvey seemed poised to hit our home state of Texas. As always, the weatherman promised doom. We tried to keep the weather watching to a minimum, but there seemed to be days where our bodies were climbing a mountain while our hearts and minds were thousands of miles away.

Driving home from vacation, I was chatting with family and friends who had lost so much with a conflicted heart. After brainstorming with a couple friends, the idea of a gift card fundraiser was born as a way to help when so far away. I initially set the goal of \$500 in my own heart. \$500 of relief and peace of mind.

Word of the fundraiser spread quickly. Our neighbors set a box out at their Quaker Meeting. The meeting where we are caretakers spread the word. It was shared on the radio, on Facebook, and in person. The love and the care that people showed to us and our little town was more than I could have imagined when we started. These were people who could not have picked Danbury, TX out on a map and many had never even met me. There was no vested interest in our town other than just the simple desire to help.

Over a period of three weeks, \$4010 was sent to a church in Texas who distributed the funds. The final total still shocks me as it completely blew my initial goal out of the water. People's generosity brought hope to my heart. If people could love this exuberantly, how much bigger is God's love for us?

-Melissa Davenport

Lord, You give us even more than we can ask or think. Help us to dream big.

December 22nd

You know the generous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Though he was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, so that by His poverty He could make you rich. -2 Corinthians 8:9

The first year I found myself preparing for Christmas as a single mom, I had no extra money with which to buy gifts for my four children. I was also facing a huge emotional trial as the kids were not allowed by the courts to see their father at all until a month after Christmas. The pressure was enormous.

I remember wanting so much to just throw caution to the wind and run up my credit card with all kinds of presents. After all, didn't my poor, stressed-out kids deserve a bunch of awesome gifts under the tree at my house at least?

God stayed my hand as it reached for my wallet, and instead as I prayed He gave me creative, deeply personal ideas that would give gifts to my children's hearts with very little financial cost.

For my writer, Sam, a notebook in which to write an amazing story for publication. He still has that notebook to this day, filled with stories and screenplays he has written over the years. For my funky girl, Bekah, a bedspread I made with the help of a borrowed sewing machine from inexpensive fabric in vibrant colors she loved. I have no sewing skills to speak of, but that simple bright orange polka-dot/bright purple paisley reversible bedspread turned her bedroom into a personal statement that she loved. For my duct tap obsessed Jake, a three-roll pack of duct tape and permission to cover his jean jacket in duct tape as he'd been wanting to do for ages. He wore that crazy jacket for another two years before he outgrew it. For little guy, Jonah, at Goodwill I found a Toy Story sleeping bag (oh, how that kid loved Buzz Lightyear!). I washed it again and again in hot water at my parents' house until I could feel okay about him sleeping in it. That sleeping bag finally went into the trash seven years later.

There are countless books and websites telling you how to create gifts on a shoestring budget, and they are terrific resources. But even more importantly, I think we need to go to God in prayer in our poverty, and ask Him for inspiration. The gifts He guides us to will be in line with our loved ones' hearts. More than just giving something, we will bless their very being with a God-inspired gift.
-Sabrina Justison

Lord, help us to use whatever resources we have to bless others.

December 23rd

See how very much our Father loves us, for He calls us His children, and that is what we are! -1 John 3:1

Nothing has taught me about generous, ever-giving love the way that motherhood has. From the very first moments of new life, motherhood is pouring yourself out for the benefit of another: body, time, finances, emotions, control. I have found this generous love to be an enlarging, expanding experience. In my most healthful, whole moments, my experience of motherhood has not been to lose myself, but to begin to find my true self, to be stretched, grown, and expanded into more love, generosity, and kindness to others. This is not the case for all people, and it's certainly not always the case for me, because I have a brain that's wired towards anxiety. Sometimes it feels like my soil is depleted of nutrients, and I have nothing left with which to grow myself, let alone to share with others. Generosity with myself, or self-care, is a means of adding nutrients back into the soil. Recently, I began waking up before my children to spend time reading, writing, praying, and meditating, and this has been one of the healthiest, most nourishing things I've ever done. And ultimately, of course, spending time with God opens us up to hear his voice of love in our lives. One night last winter I was in the process of getting the girls to bed. I was tired and had already checked out a bit, but something pulled me back into the moment with them, and I saw them for the delightful creatures I mostly find them to be, and my heart squeezed with love. And then, something new happened, the silent impression on my mind of the phrase, "You know how you feel about *your* children?" Thinking about that question, and all the implications of divine love it contains, can still, a year later, draw me into feeling God's presence and his generous love for me, my family, and the world. And it is out of my experience of God's love that I can be most generous to the world. -Tori Meeder

Lord, your generous love sustains us.

December 24th

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying, "Glory to God in highest heaven, and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened and what the angel had said to them about this child. All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them. **-Luke 2:1-20**