

*Stories of*  
★  
LIGHT  
& LIFE

*Daily Reflections for  
Advent 2019*



*In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*

**John 1:4-5**

We are so desperately in need of light and life in our world, aren't we? It's far too easy to become consumed by deadness and darkness that is all too present.

In these December weeks, I want you to see this little booklet as a gift, but not a gift that you simply open and consume. It's a gift that will shape our church if we are willing to sit with it, with one eye on the page and one eye looking for the Spirit. This booklet took time and energy, and more than a little trembling, for the many who created its contents. Many times these stories don't fit into neatly defined categories. But these are *our* stories, as we learn to wait on Jesus and trust his coming among us (that's what "Advent" means). They are indeed stories of light and life.

But they are also unfinished. Some of them speak to the longing for light, even though only a flicker seems to be present in the now. Some are poems, some are stories, some are scriptural reflections, some are visual art. Some are short, some are long!

Each one, if we sit with it, will allow us to see the beauty of God and the beauty of one another in a way that brings life. So allow this flimsy little booklet to become weighty in your hands. Jesus is coming into the world. The word is becoming flesh. We both look backward to celebrate that, and forward in hope to celebrate it fully. Light is shining in the darkness, and the darkness is no match, I assure you. So keep careful watch for Jesus in these pages, because *He is not far from any one of us* (Acts 17:27).

**Peace,  
Keith**



## **December 1st**

*Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.*

### **Matthew 2:2**

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I love Christmas songs. I'm not talking about the newer ones, but the old timey hymn-like songs like O Come, O Come Emmanuel or Angels We Have Heard on High. There is a deep theological truth in many of these songs.

I also love punk rock. There is something amazing about the DIY ethic and speaking truth to power structures that are often apparent in punk rock.

Imagine my surprise to find a Christmas album by the punk band Bad Religion. The Christmas songs that I love mixed with the punk. And a band named Bad Religion proclaiming Christ through non-watered down religious lyrics. I'm finding light in unexpected places.

*"This, this is Christ, the King. Whom Shepherds guard and angels sing. Haste, Haste to bring Him laud. The Babe. The Son of Mary!"*

### **Adam Winters**

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*Jesus, keep me open to the surprising ways you are drawing me to you this season.*

## **December 2nd**

*Jesus looked at him and loved him.*

### **Mark 10:21**

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#### **"In This Circle"**

In this circle  
I see you  
seeing me  
as I am  
as you are.

I am the only one here I cannot see  
and the same is true for you:  
we see only intimations of ourselves in the eyes of each other  
like shadows cast by firelight on the walls of the cave.

Beyond this circle, behind us, is another  
of our families, our friends, our lovers.

And beyond that another,  
our ancestors who came before,  
encircling us all.

In this circle  
is the mountain air  
and the sound of the wind in the high spruce branches.  
In our circle is the shine of sunlight on the still pond,  
ice around the edges,  
the call of a teal, the flight of the heron;  
And in our circle the old, low mountains,  
stands of willow and lodgepole pine  
the voices of the river and the thrush,  
the sun, the moon and all the stars.

And also within this circle  
are the other, smaller circles we have formed,

as we gathered  
around tables with plates of food,  
around hot drinks,  
or before the roaring fire  
or hiking the hillsides and riverbanks  
together and alone,  
or matched up across the net, at battle!

In this circle  
I see you  
seeing me  
as I am  
as you are.

In each of us is the Spirit,  
the flame we shelter from the wind,  
the fire of your courage.

As we make our way back from this,  
as we rejoin our circles,  
as they welcome us home  
and we take up the challenge and toil,  
keep your place here  
in your mind  
in your heart  
in this circle.

**Rob Seward**

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*Gracious God, thank you for the light of Jesus that I can see in those around me.*

## **December 3rd**

*For you are the fountain of life,  
the light by which we see.*

### **Psalm 36:9**

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*How to Do Mountain Pose in Yoga:*

*It might look like you're just standing there, but Mountain Pose — Tadasana— is an active pose that helps improve posture, balance, and calm focus. Tadasana is the foundational pose for all standing yoga postures. The alignment, muscle movements, and mindset you learn in Tadasana are applied every time you do a standing yoga pose. (<https://www.yogaoutlet.com/blogs/guides/how-to-do-mountain-pose-in-yoga>)*

After a long season of same old same old, I started to feel a sense of discontentment in September. I thought perhaps God was calling me to something new. Maybe a new job, or a new artistic adventure, or a new house. With the intense stirring I was feeling, surely it was something big.

So, I asked for wisdom and I heard God telling me to stand firmly grounded with my hands open like Mountain Pose (Tadasana). This image became my prayer as I waited. And waited...And waited.

There were many times over the past few months that I thought perhaps I had found "the thing" I was waiting for, but time and time again, every potential opportunity slipped out of my hands. All the maybes became nos and things I started to hope for, came to naught.

But in the midst of all of these disappointments, and probably as a result of some of them, God began shaping me. I found myself searching the scriptures and reconnecting with Jesus in new and life-giving ways.



In recent years, I had become complacent, comfortable, and competent as a Jesus follower. But it wasn't until I began to listen for the gentle whisper of the Spirit that I realized what I'd lost sight of... Connection. Communion... Rootedness, if you will.

When I first felt the call to Tadasana, I assumed being rooted was a given. My life was *built* on a relationship with Jesus, so I just had to wait for the sending. But, I was wrong. God had so much more in mind. He was inviting me to reconnect with his heart and find a place of true peace and fulfillment in him. Come what may.

My season of Tadasana is not over. But it is no longer about waiting until something bigger and better comes along. It is an "active pose" and God is doing important work in my life as I learn how to do it correctly.

**Bethany Miller**

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*Jesus, keep me grounded in hopeful relationship with you today.*

## **December 4th**

*Do not rejoice over me, O my enemy. Though I fall, I will rise; though I dwell in darkness, the Lord is a light for me.*

### **Micah 7:8**

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I have struggled with grief, depression and anxiety over the years. These emotions can swallow a person whole. They can make you feel as if you're sitting in the bottom of a dirt hole, dark, cold and alone.... When I fall into these holes, my friends will gather around the rim and speak comfort, but they can't quite reach me and, at times, their kindness sounds like a drone of noise.

As my friends pray for me, a warm light begins to shine and, by the light of their prayers, I notice there is a ladder on the other side of the hole, a way out; but I am too weak to climb, so I sit. The Lord has never rushed me through this period.

In time, I recognize that I am not alone down in the hole. There is a presence, aiding, comforting and strengthening me. Sometimes I can see Him. Sometimes I only know He's there by the effects on me. Tears flow again, bible verses come to memory and warmth fills me. In time, I can stand; standing on the hope and strength promised in the Bible. I know that He will never leave me nor forsake me; that when I cast my burdens on Him, He will sustain me. With more time, patience and faith I walk across the hole and climb up the ladder.

I know that the woods I walk in, have many more hidden holes which will open unexpectedly. Many of us walk in woods like mine but, as followers of Christ, we walk without fear, even through the valley of the shadow of death because we know that He is with us! Emmanuel, the Creator and Savior of the world walks with me and walks with you. These woods are scary at

times, knowing I will fall into a hole of depression again is scary, but I also know that I have a Savior who is the greatest comforter and healer. That knowledge inspires me, to keep moving.

**Kristi Meadows**

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*Jesus, thank you for bringing life, even when my body and spirit are weary.*

## **December 5th**

*You meant evil against me but God used it for good.*

### **Genesis 50:20**

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Joseph is talking to his brothers when he makes the statement above in Genesis. It's an interesting story if you ever want to give it a read. Adapted from this passage, you might have heard some version of this statement: "What the enemy meant for evil, God uses for good."

I've always been nervous about tying God's motive to anything because I've heard that happen in really damaging ways in the past. I don't believe our good and loving Father *causes* harm so that we can learn some great lesson. I *do* believe in the incredible, transformational, death-defeating power of God. That power brings beauty and light out of desperate and dark situations. I have experienced it first hand.

When I was 11 years old, someone I trusted became abusive. And I probably wouldn't have said a word. I was in counseling at the time, dealing with some big feelings about parents in separate homes and other kid challenges. I didn't tell the therapist. I had even tucked the experience away in my head as a dream.

That summer, without any clear indication from me or other circumstances, 2 of my "safe big critters" asked me a fairly direct question about whether anything had ever happened to me. "I don't know," I said at first. "It might have been a dream, but this weird thing happened..." and I told my secret.

That night, my whole life changed. I was literally saved from what would have undoubtedly continued to be an awful situation. I began to get help - with a new therapist that I really trusted. The abuser was prosecuted and went through an extensive treatment program, so that hopefully other little girls won't be at the same risk. I had encouragement on a regular basis for the first time in my life to explore the faith that had been stirring

inside me in my childhood. That led to a deep and life-changing relationship with Jesus as a young teen and into my adulthood.

Light broke through. The darkness did not, can *not* overcome it. Jesus continues to use this painful-turned-powerful part of my story to help others. He did not intend for the evil to come, not in my life, not in yours. As you see the lights up this Christmas season or light a candle in your home, remember the beautiful light that shines clearest in the dark places of your past, your family, or your heart that can now beautifully mirror His redemptive power.

**Jess Sinarski**

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*God, we praise you because there is no darkness into which you cannot bring light, and there is nothing in our lives beyond the reach of your redemption.*

## **December 6th**

*And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."*

**John 20:22**

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For most of my adult life, I've chased the idea of being a runner.

I would work hard and be committed for a couple months. But every step was a slog. I never found the rhythm runners describe. Running simply never became easier. When every breath feels like you are trying to breathe through a drinking straw, running feels like torture. So I'd give up.

Recently, someone lovingly told me what I was experiencing wasn't normal. The pain I had learned to live with shouldn't happen. I shouldn't be gasping for breath. I finally took myself to a doctor and got a lovely diagnosis of asthma and an inhaler.

The first run was pure freedom. I was able to run – and keep running – without gasping for air like I was drowning. Because my body was getting the oxygen it needed, everything else was easier; my legs didn't tire as quickly, and I didn't have an ache in my chest for an hour after I ran. I felt energized.

During that run, I thought about how the Holy Spirit can breathe new life into us giving us the energy, stamina, and patience we need to love others, serve faithfully, and become more like Jesus. Sometimes we don't know that we aren't living with this gift. We may believe that we are doing fine and the exhaustion and frustration we are feeling are normal aspects of the Christian life.

My friend, I am lovingly telling you that it isn't. Working without His breath supporting us isn't what God wants for us. But, He can't help us if we stubbornly slog through life without drawing close to him. We need to stop. Pray. Ask for help. Tell

Him what is troubling you. Lather, rinse, repeat. Sometimes every hour; sometimes every minute. Because as helpful as my inhaler is to me, it does nothing if it sits on the shelf.

God promises us that he will be there, but we must be the ones to stop, turn around, and ask again for help.

*Breath of heaven  
Hold me together  
Be forever near me  
Breath of heaven  
Breath of heaven  
Lighten my darkness  
Pour over me your holiness  
For you are holy  
Breath of heaven*

**Melissa Davenport**

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*Jesus, breathe life into my spirit today.*

## **December 7th**

*For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

### **2 Corinthians 4:6**

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I've seen the light. Plenty of times.

When I was confused and You spoke truth and guided me, Your light replaced the darkness.

When I was ashamed and You told me I was of profound value to You, again, the darkness fled.

When I was bitterly angry and You filled me with mercy, light triumphed over the dark.

But now it's dark again. I am surrounded by fear right now.

Life does this. I cross a line in victory only to find myself moving around the track again, a new lap in an old race. I've inched forward through darkness by faith, only to find Your radiant flood lights switch on and illuminate the track so that I could fly.

How I celebrated the light!

But it's hard to keep on going when the darkness descends anew.

Perhaps I need to stop straining my eyes against the dark, looking hopefully for the floodlights I hope will click on.

I carry LIGHT within me, the transforming Spirit of Jesus. When I intentionally shine the light within me onto those around me (a kind word when I am irritated, a helping hand when I am tired, a sacrificial gift when I was planning to treat myself, a choice to forgive when they really don't deserve it), the path in front of my frightened feet lights up revealing the yards of track ahead of me. I can navigate my race through obstacles that otherwise would land me flat on my face.



I don't have to, of course. I can wait for supernatural lights to help me from outside. The wise message spoken in a sermon. The right song coming on the radio. The perfect word shared with me by a friend. The provision I need from an unexpected source. I won't be left in darkness forever.

But I can choose to partner in the process by sharing with others the light that is Jesus in a world of darkness. And in so doing, my own path grows visible before me, and maybe (just maybe) I will find I can fly in spite of fear!

**Sabrina Justison**

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*Help me, Jesus, choose to spill your light onto all the paths I encounter.*

## **December 8th**

*Victory was in Your right hand, Your arm, and the light of Your face, for you loved them.*

### **Psalm 44:3**

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A few years ago I grew less and less able to cope with the pressures of my job. One of the first indicators to me was that my sense of humor would disappear, followed by the disappearance of my patience. Every thought that came to me hit me with a sense of urgency so that my normal daily planning and review were not calm, reflective exercises, but produced anxiety. I was becoming a mess.

I repeatedly sought unsuccessfully, to return to my normal, regular feelings about a job that I had enjoyed very much. I called out to God to be brought out from under the cloud that spread to my outlook on life. Sometimes it felt like I was gaining control and God was listening, but there were periods that it felt like I was losing ground and I was on my own. The times when I had it together became shorter and farther apart. I felt like I had been thrust into uncharted territory. To complicate things, I mostly keep my thoughts to myself so I didn't know how to talk to anyone but my wife (and that very little) about what I was feeling. She knew I was in trouble and prayed for me.

I found strength in my wife's love, support and prayers, and God's provision through scripture and examples of the encouraging attitudes of other people (who weren't aware of my predicament.)

God's answer, when I could listen, was in the form of the Psalms and their solid reliance on God's faithfulness, and passages like Luke 2:46-55 where Mary extols God's power to restore things to rightness. Again and again I derived strength from David's Psalms about his enemies so I could engage in my own mental and spiritual battle. He spoke of flesh and blood enemies - my

enemies were inside me: my depression, doubts and confused thinking. David's laments about his foes became mine; his thanks for victory and praises to God resonated within me as I claimed God's strength and His provision for my well being. Mary's praise to God is far more expansive than my situation, but on my very personal level He has done great and merciful things; I have had proudly wrong thoughts corrected and have been filled with innumerable good things.

**Henry Neufeld**

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*When my thoughts are dark, Jesus, I choose to remember that Your love is light.*

## **December 9th**

*Then their eyes were opened and they recognized Him..."Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road?"*

### **Luke 24:31-32**

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I was having a problem with another person. I kept praying about it and trying to do what I knew was right, but day after day, the situation just seemed to deteriorate.

I started to feel desperate for a breakthrough, and I reached out to others for help. I asked my meal community to pray for me as I dealt with this situation. I kept expecting God to fix it!

Then at the Ladies Retreat, someone read the story of the Road to Emmaus (found in Luke 24: 13-35). In that story, two men were talking about the crucifixion of Jesus as they were walking to Emmaus. On that road, Jesus appeared (but they did not recognize him) and asked them what they were talking about. How could he not know? The crucifixion was all everyone was talking about! Then Jesus started from Moses and the Prophets and explained to them what the Scriptures said about himself. The men wanted to explain to Jesus what he had missed, but instead, Jesus explained what all the events meant!

After the retreat, that story kept speaking to me. And the problem with the other person still wasn't resolved.

So, I decided to try a new prayer, "Lord, you already know everything. You know what has been done and said. You know what I've tried and how hard I have worked to resolve this situation. But I'm obviously missing something. So, just like on the Road to Emmaus, instead of me explaining it to you, can you please explain it to me?"

The next day, I recognized the issue. IT WAS ME. The entire time, I thought the problem was the other person's actions and I was

working so hard to get the other person to change. However, I learned what I had done to contribute to the circumstances, and I saw clearly what I needed to do! And when I did it, the problem reached a resolution.

That experience changed how I pray. Jesus doesn't need my explanation or my perspective. He doesn't need a recap of events. Instead, I need to be willing to learn the rest of the story.

**Lori Poff**

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*Jesus, I'm listening. What's the rest of the story?*

## **December 10th**

*The unfolding of Your word gives light.*

### **Psalm 119:130**

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It's the end of a long day, and my husband reminds me about writing an advent piece. I ask, what is the theme again I'm supposed to write about? He says light and life. I sarcastically chuckle and reply with "I'm seeing mostly dark right now, but I'll try to think of something."

It's been a season of trials and testing both at home and at work. Sometimes when you're in the thick of things, it's hard to have hope that things will change. Then when you are at your breaking point, God shows you a glimpse of light. That happened for me this past week. It started with Josh shaving his head, then taking down the ceiling fan and then breaking a gift that was given to Bill. These were just additional incidents on top of the everyday tearing his T-shirt's, poking our dog's eye, and dropping the F bomb.

Normally I would've been able to handle that kind of week but we've been short staffed at work and I've been in charge of hiring someone, at the same time expected to pick up the slack. Needless to say I was relieved to have a break this past weekend as the kids went to stay their dad. They normally come back Sunday evenings between 7-9 pm. I was out enjoying the Eagles game with Bill, and I texted Rylee at 7:00 to ask when they were coming home. She tells me that they have been home since 5:00. I jumped up and said we need to get home! Who knows what Josh is up to, knowing that Rylee would be up in her bedroom. I run into the house and start looking for Josh. I opened the door to the dining room and there he is sitting at the table playing scrabble, putting letters together to spell names of Veggie Tales videos. I was stunned! He was actually doing something appropriate and non-destructive. There weren't even any swear words on the scrabble board:)

This was the light I needed to see! The hope that had been lost. The verse that comes to mind as I share this is one of my favorites: Hebrews 6:19 "We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."

When I found myself focusing on the storm and waves that were overtaking me, I wasn't able to see the light, the hope, the anchor that was being thrown to me.

Phil 4:8 "Keep your minds on whatever is true, pure, right, holy, friendly and proper." It takes work to change your mindset. It's a daily conscious decision that can't be done without Jesus. My prayer for you is that you ask him for that rope, that anchor. He will show up, even if it's in a small way.

**Kristen Heider**

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*I'm asking, Jesus; anchor my soul to the hope I have in You.*

## **December 11th**

*But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.*

### **Lamentations 3:21-23**

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Living a relatively long life makes you tend to look back and realize what a miracle it all is! I feel I've learned a lot. It involves so many stages, and "is a series of thousands of tiny miracles. We need to notice them." (Quote I saw on Facebook)

After going through my most recent difficult years (the care of and resulting loss of my lifelong partner, my husband of 54 years), I was plunged into a new role: learning to be independent for the first time ever. Thankfully, the Lord has helped me all along the way, but only recently have I given the Holy Spirit the credit for pulling me through the stresses of life. "The God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, support, strengthen, and establish you." (1 Peter 5:10)

I probably made the biggest change ever, deciding to sell the house we built and move 500 miles away from lovely North Carolina to northern Delaware. My wonderful daughter and her children live here, and that drove the decision to live closer to them all. It has been a wonderful time, learning to be independent, making new friends, learning to drive with all of you everywhere!! No accidents yet, thankfully, only a warning for holding my phone!! Made me buy a dash/window unit to hold my phone when using GPS.

Always remember to ask for help and guidance for decisions. God's will for us rules! Give Him credit, keep Him first!

**Jan Poff**

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*Jesus, thank you for continuing to lead me through the years.*



## **December 12th**

*The people walking in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of deep darkness  
a light has dawned.*

### **Isaiah 9:2**

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I find it ironic that sunlight powers stormy weather. I associate so many positive feelings with light. It's gentle, warm, and life-sustaining. It's a medium through which I experience the world's vibrance. Yet it's also responsible for driving harsh, cold, and sometimes life-threatening storms.

A lot of Christian history has been stormy. My story is no exception. I grew up with a toxic view of God – as merciful, but somehow judgment-obsessed. I do not blame my family or any church for this; it's simply the reality of my past. My understanding of God manifested itself in strange ways. I ardently tried to bring out the best in myself, but my efforts were always accompanied by a sense of anxiety and shame. It was like I perceived the world through a blue-tinted light, while my heart longed for the real thing.

By grace I journeyed beyond that worldview. I can appreciate why I need a God who is both just and merciful, who embodies grace and truth. There are certainly storms in my life, and there always will be. But I find hope in remembering that, beyond the storms, a light continues to shine.

### **Chase Herman**

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*Jesus, may I look forward to light, in pure brilliance, entering the world this Christmas.*

## **December 13th**

*Behold! I stand at the door and knock.*

### **Revelation 3:20**

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In the summer of 2017, I found myself in a seemingly enviable position: Having been out of full-time work for over a year, an old contact called me out of the blue to offer me a permanent job. The catch? I needed to make a decision over the next few days, and I would have to move from Connecticut to D.C. within two weeks.

This was not the first interesting "turn in the road" I had faced in my job search. Just a couple of months prior, I had accepted a job in Richmond, Virginia. In the midst of salary negotiations, housing arrangements, and farewells to friends, the rug was pulled out from under my feet when the job offer was rescinded due to external factors. While I didn't doubt at the time that God would ultimately provide, there were a number of weeks in which I felt deeply uncomfortable about not knowing what would come next, a frustration that fostered a belief that God unnecessarily left me "in the dark."

Months removed from that incident, I had worked to erase those memories of "darkness." After all, God had provided: I was doing contract work on a fulfilling project, and the relationships I had built with my Connecticut family had only grown stronger since the job rescission scare. So, encountered with a new situation, I found myself dreading the "darkness" that I would again have to face. I wanted the decision-making process to be quick and painless; if it was to be the "right" job for me, I wanted to know the effort of making a sudden move to D.C. would be worth it. My prayers, therefore, focused on God giving me a quick answer. The more I prayed on this, though, the more I felt God stonewalling me. I grew increasingly frustrated, "knowing" that I "needed" a timely decision from God.

During one prayer session, however, I was unexpectedly given a vision of God opening a door for me. He asked if I'd be okay if He told me to walk through the door. I answered, "Yes." He then asked if I'd be okay if He told me not to walk through the door. The vision seemed odd, but it quickly got the message across: I wanted simplicity and clarity, a knowledge that if God opened a door, I should walk through it because it meant He was providing for me. Yet, God was telling me that neither the door, nor what was on the other side of it, mattered; rather, what was important was whether I would listen to He that was holding the door open. I had never envisioned God in this way before. Knowing that God could open a door and tell me not to walk through it fully embodied my fear of the "dark."

What's ironic, though, is that God wasn't asking me to focus on "darkness" at all; He was asking me to admit what I thought "light" was. To me, "light" was the sunshine streaming through the open door, the clarity of making decisions by comparing what I have now to what I could have in the future. If I continued to believe that "light" could only be present with an open door, I would never understand why the Light, embodied, would open a door and tell me not to walk through it.

Not focusing on the "darkness" lingering in front of me ultimately helped me make the job decision on fairly mundane, practical grounds (I ended up not taking it). But the vision of an open door with God's hand on the knob continues to stick with me as I've continued to face big decisions since that time. And the question I face, with each decision, remains the same: Do I focus on the light coming through the door or the Light gently asking me to listen?

**Ian Yue**

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*Jesus, thank you for open doors, and the faith to know you are on the other side.*

## **December 14th**

*The Lord is my light and my salvation.*

### **Psalm 27:1**

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I was in the darkness of grief when my father died in 2016. The only peace I felt was knowing that he was in heaven. How do I move forward from this devastating loss? At one point, I attended "Grief Share" which is a grief recovery support group where I found help and healing. Slowly, I began to recover from my loss and rebuild my life. God met me along this path of darkness. He brought a ray of light and hope into my life.

Then I began to struggle at work in a toxic environment. Suddenly I felt the darkness return and felt hopeless. At one point, I was suicidal and wanted the misery to end. My co-worker advised me to see my doctor. I was diagnosed with Bipolar Disorder. I left my job temporarily on short-term disability. Life was difficult, it was a struggle to even get out of bed. "Jesus, please help me", I would pray. I knew He would take care of me and move this "mountain."

Eventually I was given the proper dosage of medication. I accepted the fact that I will see my Dad in heaven someday. Now, I work in a positive environment. The Lord brought light into my life and saved me. God worked all of these things together for good. I felt afraid as I walked through the darkness. The good news is...God stayed beside me with every single step I took. I cried out for strength to endure the loss and overcome the hopelessness. I praise God for renewing my hope, letting me see the light in the darkness, and for saving me. God knows you and loves you. He is your light and your salvation.

**Robin Lathem**

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*Jesus, help me notice and respond to the light you are bringing into my darkness.*

## **December 15th**

*If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another*

**I John 1:7**

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I have been a part of the LifePath community for 4 years. I entered into covenant 3 years ago. But the demands of a shift-work job have kept me off to the side, unable to connect to others and build relationships. I wanted to have real, deep relationships with brothers and sisters in my church, but over the years that connectedness just wasn't growing. It was lifeless.

I'm not sure how aware I was of that lifelessness until the men's retreat last weekend, a retreat that came just a couple of weeks after I retired from my job so that I was actually able to attend. The time with brothers in prayer, in discussion, in fellowship, and even on the volleyball court brought new life to my connection to my church family.

None of us is healthy and growing if we are isolated; discipleship on our own is nothing like what it can be when we are in relationships with other people who are following Jesus. I am so thankful for this new season in my life where the demands on my time are not so crazy, and where I can grow alongside others at LifePath. I want to be encouraged by them, and be an encouragement to them. The pressures of job, family, finances, and more will kill our joy and peace if we are not careful to protect them. The Bible says that "iron sharpens iron" (Pr. 27:17) and that we should "bear one another's burdens." (Gal. 6:2) I look forward to being that kind of brother to my church family.

**Fred Justison**

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*Jesus, open my eyes to see ways to connect to others today.*

## **December 16th**

*When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

### **John 8:12**

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I just left an MC gathering and oh how I feel full of light and life. I've been to so many iterations of community groups, bible studies, prayer meetings, life groups. Different names, but the result was always the same: uncomfortable, exhausting, out of place feelings. Sometimes I would learn something, sometimes I would feel a little comfortable. But I never found Light or Life in them. I kept trying and trying, but I never found it. (I'm not blaming those groups or the churches that supported them. It was mostly me and my heart.)

I've found it now. As we gather around a kitchen table, half the group not present but in our hearts, Light and Life fills the room. Our conversation naturally turns toward Jesus, towards faith, towards hope, toward living out the Light and Life we've found in Jesus. There's ease, comfort, joking (but a few less than normal, because Adam isn't there). Jesus is there with us. What once felt dry and empty now feels full and meaningful. It bursts with Light and Life. And naturally, I too burst with Light and Life.

### **Melanie Winters**

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*Jesus, thank you for the promise that if we seek your kingdom, we will find it.*

## **December 17th**

*I am the Lord, your God, who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, "Do not fear; I will help you."*

### **Isaiah 41:13**

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It had seemed impossible to find any real peace with this sorrow when it lives side by side with all our joy. At different times throughout the year, I feel it, see it, hear it everywhere, and then it fades again to a whisper. Then it comes again. Side by side, joy and sorrow, for now seems to be a feature of our lives, unpacked each year especially for the holidays. A friend gave me a quote once that has stuck with me: "Sorrow carves out more room for joy." I've quoted it to myself and others, but so far that hasn't given me the comfort I hope for.

Last year through Advent and Christmas as I felt the familiar aching, always most piercingly in the Christmas story. I found myself wanting some sort of concrete visual of this inescapable truth for Rob and me, for my family, for my friends, for the whole beautiful but still suffering world.

One morning as I let water run over my hands, I cupped them together, thinking of holding the joy and the sorrow together, but they do not seem to occupy the same space. I tried pressing my hands palms flat together, thinking of how inseparable they seem for us now; that's just the way it is. So how do I have peace with that? With water still running and warm, I realized that if I let my fingers lace, one and then the next, that was the visual I needed to help me through these excruciating seasons. What I wanted was there for me in my very own hands, something I learned as a child, fingers folded together, just like the sorrow and the joy, hands clasped, all of it side by side, and held in prayer.

**Cami Seward**

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*Jesus, help me lace my fingers through Yours when I am hurting.*

## **December 18th**

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

**Romans 12:2**

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**Original collage piece by Rachel England**

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*Jesus, with all that is pulling at my heart and mind today, transform me by directing my mind toward You.*



## **December 19th**

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

**John 1:14**

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"And so the Light became alive

And manna became Man"

The incarnation fills me with hope. The imagery of the quote above is so rich. The pillar of fire in the desert became a man; God's provision of daily bread became a man. Emmanuel, God's presence with us. Jesus' life on earth showed us the way to live that brings life, the radical way of life that spreads like a mustard plant. When love drives out hate, when peace defeats war, when selflessness is strength, vulnerability is growth, compassion is greater than profit, when heaven touches earth: these are the moments we see glimpses of the Kingdom.

In the times when the Bible was written, other religions had gods who stood above and apart from humanity. They didn't bother themselves with the affairs of people, or when they did, it was to use humans for their own gain. Our God, in contrast, became man to show us the way, the truth, the life. When we see light casting out the darkness, heaven on earth, it is when we see Jesus in people and in their actions. We were shown the way to live from God himself dwelling with us as Jesus. Now, the church is heaven on earth. We are the tabernacle, we are the temple, we are the pillar of fire. It is through us that God interacts with humanity. It is the Church who shows compassion for the brokenhearted, who clothes the poor, gives people a place to stay, who feeds, loves, never judges, is humble, studies the mysteries of God, teaches the truths of God's love. We tell the story of a people loved by God, called by God, sought out by God. A story where heaven can be silent or loud, a story that gives us goosebumps and brings us closer to the light.

**Ben Meeder**

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*Jesus, bring the Light into my life and stir us, your Church, to tell your story.*

## **December 20th**

*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*

### **Ephesians 4:32**

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Last Sunday I was running late for church. (Cami was not with me so I wouldn't be able to blame her this time!)

I was at a stop light. It turned green. The car in front of me did not move. I waited a polite amount of time, then beeped my horn, thinking, "Get off your phone and drive!" They started through the intersection, then BAM! I was hit from behind, rear-ended. I slammed the steering wheel with both hands, filled with a flash of rage, and cursed loudly. I would never make it to church now.

When I got out of the car and looked back I saw an older small sedan with a young woman still at the wheel, her hands over her mouth and tears falling. She got out and said, "I am so sorry, it just happened, I'm so SORRY!" I started to feel less angry and blaming. I introduced myself, and asked her name. Neither of us was hurt, and I told her over and over that it was O.K., no one was hurt, it would be O.K., just a bunch of paperwork. She was a student at the University, and her dad had insurance on the car. She was shaking. I felt for her. I recalled my first collision. I knew I could hear Keith's sermon on the podcast tomorrow. (Thanks to Melanie!)

Another man, a campus cop, stopped and talked to her while I dialed 911. When the police officer came he talked to her and she finally started to calm down. We moved our cars. A friend of hers came and brought her driver's license. The officer was chill, ("You didn't have to drive over, you could have sent a photo of it to her phone.") While he filled out the report in his cruiser, I sat in my car reading stuff on my phone. She stood by her car talking to her friend, I assume about the accident and what would happen as a result.

The officer brought my copy of the report and said I could go, and went over to the two young women. But I went over too, just to say goodbye and leave on a friendly note. I reached out to shake her hand and she again said, "I am SO sorry!" Without thinking I held out my arms wide and said as clearly as I could "It's O.K.! I forgive you!" and turned to get into my car and leave her life forever. I thought she might need that to remember later, if she had bad feelings. It was the least I could do.

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**Rob Seward**

*Jesus, thank you for constantly shaping us toward your image.*

## **December 21st**

*When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.*

### **Luke 2:17-19**

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About 18 months ago, my life completely changed when Beckett entered the scene. I'd dreamt and longed for the day I would become a mother pretty much my entire life.

Right before Beckett was born, I remember thinking, "what if I don't like motherhood? What if this thing I've been waiting for my entire life ends up being one huge disappointment?"

I'm so happy to share that motherhood has been so fulfilling for my heart and my soul. I truly believe that it is what I was created to do. But it hasn't come without incredible hardship and dark times. You see, the most rewarding part of my life has also brought some of the darkest moments of my life.

My sweet baby boy, who has brought me to the absolute end of myself, is also the one who completed me.

My sweet baby boy, who has tested my patience, is also the one who has shown me the grace that I have within me.

My sweet baby boy, who's defiance can make me so upset, is also the one who's smile can bring me to my happiest place.

My sweet baby boy is Jesus' light in my life. And it just makes me think - if Beckett is Jesus' light in my life, who's life is Jesus lighting up through me?

**Allison Bulbuk**

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*Lord, the darkest nights can help us to notice the power of the light. Fill me with purpose as I look backward and look ahead.*

## **December 22nd**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

### **2 Corinthians 5:17**

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A few years ago Kristen started a blog she named "Barn Door Dreams" It grew out of desire to share some of the projects that she and I have worked on. The initial project was an RV renovation. It involved lots of paint, wallpaper, old singer sewing machine base (for a dining table), tractor trailer flooring (for the counter top), and, you guessed it, barn doors.

This passion for barn doors has exploded since we bought an old farm house earlier this year. The previous owner left behind a stack of old doors. 2019 has seen us take this stack of cast off doors and breath new life into them. They now decorate our home as kitchen cabinet doors, pantry doors, bath room shelves, and, most recently, a dining room table. (Anyone who reads this is welcome to come see our home during the Christmas season.)

Why this fetish with old doors? It's not really about the doors. It's about a larger passion that we both share for redemptive living. What we have done with these doors is to see beauty in things left behind, forgotten, considered of no value and give them new life.

Who knew doors could be a metaphor for the gospel.

Revelation 21:5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

What's true of doors is true of each of us. Christ is making us new. How has he made you new in 2019?

**Bill Heider**

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*Jesus, you are the great redeemer. Continue to make me new each day.*

## **December 23rd**

*I have loved you with an everlasting love.*

**Jeremiah 31:3**

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I am attempting to incorporate a practice of waking up early and spending time feeling loved. I find that I have access to that feeling fairly easily, but it takes a conscious awareness on my part. It's a state of mind I can enter: I see an image of a bright, consuming light that I can turn toward. I see its light and feel its warmth, and I am able to know that I am loved already, without reason, without limits, without qualifications. I find that when I more consistently spend this time with God, basking in His divine love and light, I am more in tune with and aware of His Spirit through the rest of the day.

When I was growing up, I was taught that good Christians will read the Bible and pray every day, and this practice was usually referred to as a "devotional time." Though the intention of this teaching was admirable, my younger self took my devotional time as either a source of pride at my "goodness" or, much more frequently, as a source of guilt at my failure.

When I set aside time with God, not as the legalistic ritual of my youth, but with the understanding that Jesus came as Immanuel, God with us, and then he sent us his Spirit at Pentecost, then what was a guilt-inducing practice becomes a source of life and a small taste of heaven on earth.

**Tori Meeder**

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*Thank you, Jesus, for every moment of being loved by you.*

## **December 24th**

*But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

**Luke 2:10-11**

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**Art Piece by Lindsey Bryant**

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*Jesus, help me create space to sit in the good news of You entering the world.*