Waiting WITH Hope

AN ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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Preface

We live in a culture of fast food, express lanes, same-day delivery, and the whole world at our fingertips. Technology has taken most of the waiting out of life, and we're glad for it. At best, waiting feels like an inefficiency to be managed. At worst, it feels like an enemy to be eliminated. But the Bible sees waiting very differently.

From beginning to end, Scripture has much to say about waiting. In Genesis, the elderly Abraham and Sarah wait for God's promise of a son, through whose descendants the whole world would be blessed. For centuries, Israel waited for the promised Messiah, until a baby was born in Bethlehem. And in the closing verses of Revelation, the Apostle John cries out, "Come, Lord Jesus!"

Waiting has always been part of life for God's people, and it will be until Jesus returns. We're given no timetable, but we are given this promise:

> *They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*
>
> *— Isaiah 40:31*

Advent is a season of expectation and waiting. I hope these devotionals, written by members, clergy, and staff of Truro, will remind you that you're in good company with others who wait. Most of all, I hope they remind you that the Lord "waits to be gracious to you" (Isaiah 30:18), and that He is with you always.

Jamie Brown
Rector

Relaxed-Ready

NOVEMBER 29

By default, when I think of someone waiting, I picture something rather passive. But when Peter wrote to the scattered Christians across the Roman empire, he told them what it would look like to "set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you" (1 Peter 1:13). He was telling them to put their hope on something that was coming to them. They could not go out and fetch this grace, but it must instead be carried to them. It would arrive "at the revelation of Jesus Christ"—the very thing we still set our hope on today, and which we remember especially during Advent.

So what does it look like, this waiting? Is it the passive version of hoping that I often imagine? Peter describes two ways of setting our hope on future grace. The first is "preparing your minds for action." Apparently, hoping and preparing for action were not contradictory activities to Peter, but complementary. I love the more literal picture in the King James Version here, which uses a striking mixed metaphor: "gird up the loins of your mind."

The image is one of a warrior strapping a sword to the thigh. Only it's not a literal sword and thigh, but a mental sword tied to the mind—the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. Setting our hope looks like taking God's promises to us in Christ and actively binding them to our minds until they are within a finger's reach at a moment's notice.

The second way we set our hope on future grace is by "being sober-minded." Imagine now that our girded-up warrior has to keep the night watch on the city wall. He knows that reinforcements are coming, and that relief will be brought to him with the coming of the king's armies at dawn. In the meantime, then, he needs to stay clear-headed.

Sober-minded here means that he cannot be so wired that he will be too easily startled, shooting his arrows at every slinking fox or rustling tumbleweed. Neither can he be so indolent and dull that a real enemy spy can sneak in during the night.

A friend of mine who works in law enforcement recently told me about the phrase "relaxed-ready" that describes the ideal state before a raid. Preparation, alertness, being ready for action is essential. But so is appropriate calm. This is the kind of hoping Peter calls us to, as we await the coming of the king.

... be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion ...

— 1 Peter 5:8

But we can be relaxed-ready while we wait, because grace is coming to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. It comes in part even now, as God reveals Christ through the Spirit every time we gird up the loins of our mind with His word. And it will come in full when Jesus relieves us of our watch, face-to-face.

Ryan Shelton



Waiting on God in Many Areas of Life

NOVEMBER 30

Waiting is not an easy thing. I have struggled with waiting on God in several areas of my life.

I was a stay-at-home mom for many years when my kids were younger. I started out working after school then lost my job and failed to get another one, so I stayed home and took care of our family. However, it took me a long time to accept.

I would spend hours looking for opportunities, crying out to God and praying for a job. Eventually, it dawned on me that I was where God wanted me to be, and doing what He wanted for me at that time. It ended up being such a blessing and privilege.

When my family first moved to the U.S., I quickly jumped into looking for a job. No job materialized until once again I realized, God still wanted me at home to support my family, especially as we adjusted to settling here. So, I continued to stay at home for a couple of years. When our youngest went to high school, I decided to go back to school. As he graduated from high school, I graduated from nursing school and started working.

Recently, I started a business, and two years down the line it has not taken off. I am still waiting on God.

These are just two examples of waiting on God in my life – there are many more. Waiting takes patience and getting out of your comfort zone because many times it is counterintuitive. It goes against your thinking and expectations.

One scripture that has encouraged me in the waiting times is:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.

— 1 Peter 5:6

We know that God loves us, and His timing is perfect so let us rest under His mighty hand, waiting for Him to come through for us. He knows what we need and when we need it.

Another scripture that has encouraged me is:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil to give you a future and a hope.

— Jeremiah 29:11

Be encouraged and take heart as you wait on the Lord's coming and breakthrough in your life. It might seem to delay, but as sure as the dawn comes in the morning, the Lord will come.

Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

— Psalm 30:5b

Michelle Shalita



The God Who Waits

DECEMBER 1

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

Isaiah 30:18

One of my daily pet peeves is traffic lights. They seem to conspire to turn red along my path, especially when I'm running late, robbing me of time that I'll never get back. I'll admit that I deliberately ran a red light back in 2002. I was serving as an associate pastor. Elizabeth was pregnant with our son James, whose due date was January 30, 2003.

However, in the middle of the night on December 18, Elizabeth woke me because she had an indication that something was wrong. Even though it was no more than a seven-minute drive to the hospital, I refused to cede a nano-second to a red signal at a deserted crossroads.

Once at the hospital, the doctor who examined Elizabeth asked, "Do you feel any pain?" She said no. Surprised, the doctor declared, "Well, you're in labor." As James had not yet reached the critical 37-week mark, Elizabeth was put on a solution to stop the contractions and was admitted to the hospital on bed rest.

Meanwhile, I returned to work, visiting her each evening for nearly a week and clutching my flip phone for the slightest vibration, even while participating in a memorial service. When she at last called, I made it—without running any red lights—to the delivery room for James' arrival in the early hours of December 24.

It was a Christmas like no other.

As difficult as the waiting was for Elizabeth and me, it was necessary for James'

sake. The doctor told us that those last few days enabled his lungs to develop more fully so that he could thrive.

I have no doubt that God has used seasons of waiting in my life to grow me spiritually. But maybe those wait times have had very little to do with me. Could it be that all that time at life's red lights may be part of God's plan of allowing others to flourish?

While I sit idle watching the cross-traffic, others are on missions of mercy—taking supplies to the Lamb Center, comforting the grieving and lonely, tutoring an at-risk student, or getting to the hospital for life-saving treatment. Some unawares may even be on a Divine appointment to experience the love and grace of Jesus for the very first time.

The prophet Isaiah tells us that "the Lord waits to be gracious to you." He knows what it's like to wait. Moreover, He waits for us—for our sake! He waits because He is merciful and loves us. When we wait for others, we reflect His merciful and loving heart for the world.

This Advent, may our prayer be this:

Jesus, our Immanuel, thank You that You wait for us
and are with us in our waiting.

Chris Hammond



Being Still in the Waiting

DECEMBER 2

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

— Psalm 46:1

A few years back, after years of waiting, I finally felt as though I had received a "yes" from the Lord. We celebrated, we planned, we thought "Perfect timing; God knew all along." The people in our lives felt relief and joy for us.

Then the storm came.

Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

— Psalm 46:2–3

I remember sitting in a doctor's office, my foot tapping against the cold ground. The clock read 1:31 a.m. I could almost hear my heart beating in my chest. I looked at the clock again; it felt like hours had passed. It was only 1:34. I wanted to move, to run, but I had to be still.

God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.

— Psalm 46:5

"I'm sorry, there is no longer a heartbeat," the doctor said.

The weeks and months that followed were filled with questions. Why had we waited so long only to lose our baby? Why would God allow years of hoping and praying to lead to such disappointment?

The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

— Psalm 46:6–7

A few months later, on a cold January day, I sat on the steps outside our home. I stared into the icy pink sky. The hope of snow on the horizon. A chill on my arms echoed the chill in my heart. I asked God to give me peace. And the words of Psalm 46:10 came to mind: *"Be still, and know that I am God."*

I breathed in.

Be still.

And I breathed out.

Know that I am God.

A little while later, I walked around the lake near our home. Snow had begun covering the ground, and the sun dipped below the horizon. There was quiet in the air and darkness on the path. As I walked, I felt peace I hadn't felt in a long time. Nothing about my circumstances had changed. I still didn't know what God was doing. But I knew He was near, and I knew He was in control.

The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

— Psalm 46:7

Months went by, and for a while I wasn't sure if God would answer my prayer as I hoped. But I had awareness that if He said no, or if waiting continued for years before he said yes, He would be with me. I just had to be still and know that He is God.

Rachel Hansen

Waiting for a New Home

DECEMBER 3

My times are in your hand.

— Psalm 31:15

My husband and I met and married at Truro. As older newlyweds, we'd learned much about trusting God's timing—or so we thought. I was excited to marry Carl but sad to leave Virginia. I joked, "The good news is I'm marrying a man who owns a house; the bad news is it's in Maryland." Our church commute from Silver Spring was okay on Sundays, but difficult during the week.

I'd always liked the Truro Preschool and Kindergarten (TPK) and, when our daughter was born, I proclaimed we had three years to move to Fairfax so she could attend TPK. We spent Sunday afternoons driving through neighborhoods, dreaming about where we might raise our family.

Our Maryland house was small. When our second daughter arrived, she slept in a crib at the foot of our bed and had a closet shelf for her clothes. As I pushed our stroller on walks, I thanked the Lord for our growing family and the home He had given us, and then prayed for our new home. Whenever I saw an addition on a house, I'd ask if our new house could have extra rooms, too. When I washed dishes, I read an index card I'd set above the sink:

He brought me out into a broad [spacious] place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

— Psalm 18:19

Nearly four years after our wedding, we began house-hunting in earnest. Our daughter would start at TPK in September, so it seemed we had plenty of time. We worked with an agent and toured homes twice a week.

That spring, we bid on a quirky house within walking distance of Truro that had sat empty for a year. When the price dropped, we jumped. Before submitting the contract, we asked the Lord to block the sale if it wasn't the house He had for us. To our dismay, someone else got it.

Although I believed God had a good plan, I was frustrated by how long things were taking, and I often wanted to settle on less-than-ideal homes. In August, we bid on a second house. It was outdated, but had a great yard and was near an excellent school. Once again we prayed for the Lord's leading. Our contract was accepted, but when the inspection revealed many problems, we backed out. I was devastated. Had we misheard the Lord?

September arrived. On the first day of preschool, I drove the Beltway in rush-hour traffic, lamenting that we still didn't have a house in Fairfax. Then, that afternoon, we found a spacious house in our desired neighborhood. It even had a nifty spice drawer (also on my wish list), and wonderful neighbors. It cost less than many houses I'd wanted to buy. Nearly 30 years later I still rejoice in the Lord's gracious gift, and I'm reminded to trust His timeline.

Lawson Sperapani

Actively, Purposefully Embracing Waiting

DECEMBER 4

Seems like so much of life is about waiting—not a fun discipline but a necessary one. It's much of the reason I absolutely love Advent; it's all about waiting. Advent gives me permission, even encouragement, to actively, purposely embrace waiting. Because of that, it actually feels like I'm doing something holy. The historic Book of Common Prayer for the 2nd Sunday of Advent reads:

> *...Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ...*

To me, this looks like the waiting for healing with my sisters, for praying daily to be okay with the not knowing of how things are going to turn out. I aim to choose hope intentionally over despair when the circumstances seem despairing and outcomes before me look bleak.

This turn of heart, this perspective then can help me to act in hopeful ways. The faith under me of the belief in God's presence, consolation, and provision can motivate me to make the phone call, write the note, do the work, or on some days even just get up and begin.

A lot of this waiting and hoping became even more real for me at the beginning of Lent this year when I participated in a morning retreat at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land near Catholic University in Washington, DC. During one of the prayer/reflection times in the sanctuary, which is full of icons and beautiful remembrances to draw us to reverence, I came across an angel holding Christ after His brutal death on the cross.

It poignantly reminded me that, at Christ's bidding, we are held by angels just as He was, and so He sympathizes with us completely. We are literally held up by Him in our times of suffering and waiting. And this is a huge consolation.

The final thought here is that Christ embodies our **hope** and **consolation.** That God sees me is enough. It's like having that assurance that we aren't doing this life alone. He is all-knowing, and He affirms me and is rooting for me.

So yes, I am choosing **hope** in God's full story of His provision and assurance.

Judi Deatherage



Waiting with Hope and Trust

DECEMBER 5

> *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*
>
> *— Romans 8:24–25*

There is a strong link between waiting and hope. We naturally understand this. When an engaged couple with a ring and a date says, "We hope to get married!" they are using the word hope in its strong biblical sense. They are waiting for something that is definitely going to happen. It just hasn't happened yet. But the waiting can be hard.

Likewise, a pregnant lady may say, correctly, I hope to give birth. She is also using the word in its strong sense. A baby is coming; the birth has not happened yet. But the waiting can be hard. We humans can be so impatient.

Advent is a time of hoping. Christmas is coming—it just hasn't happened yet. And we wait, and count the days, and empty the Advent calendar. But Advent is designed to set that four-Sunday patient waiting for the Coming of the Christ in the light of the Second Coming of the Christ, which will likely take us through many more than four Sundays.

The great plan of God for the salvation of humankind has brought the impatient patience of His people through the ages. Who has not wondered at the patience of Abram and Sarai as they waited for the promised child well into old age; this child that would be the first generation of the line that would be as numberless as the stars?

What about the Promised Land? In Acts 13, the Apostle Paul recounts the 40 years God "put up with" His people in the wilderness, and then the 450 years it took them to fully claim their inheritance.

Matthew charts in the first chapter of his Gospel the (presumably more than) 42 generations that extend from Abraham to Jesus.

Peter reminds us that:

> *...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.*

He continues,

> *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*
>
> *- 2 Peter 3:8–9*

This promise extends through thousands of years, but it was accomplished in three special days of Jesus Christ, His Passion and Resurrection.

So here is the context of our Advent course on waiting. The Lord is not slow; He is patient; and He is also waiting for us to develop that trust in Jesus that leads to repentance and eternal life.

As we wait for Christmas this year, let these four Advent Sundays teach us about God's timescale. He has acted to save us and invites us to wait while that salvation is extended on a vast scale.

Richard Crocker



Looking for God in the Waiting

DECEMBER 6

With enthusiasm, and prepared for whatever challenges would come my way, I boarded a plane to Uganda for a one- to two-year missionary service. Unbeknownst to me, in the time it took me to cross the ocean, a simmering conflict had erupted and spread across the border of Congo and into Uganda—just five miles from my mission hospital.

On Easter morning, the bombing was so loud we couldn't hear ourselves singing, and the colorful rocket flares flew endlessly across the sky. Rumors of the road being land-mined and hospital workers being kidnapped were rampant. There was a mixture of opinions among the seasoned missionaries—some opting to leave immediately and others saying, "It's nothing to worry about, just a few drunken soldiers." As for me, I had just arrived. This wasn't what I had expected, but I also wasn't deterred.

That night, my sister who had traveled out with me was supportive. "Well, at least you feel peace about staying." I agreed, however that night a sick feeling began to grow in my stomach. By morning, I realized that I didn't have peace, and eight hours later I was in the capital, Kampala.

In the missionary guesthouse I waited for a new assignment. Of all the challenges I had prepared to face, waiting was not one of them. I had already done that—waiting to raise support, waiting for training, waiting to be placed. I was ready to serve and felt frustrated that I couldn't. I just wanted to get where I was supposed to go.

But as days grew into weeks, I was forced to lean harder onto God and to find that He had some lessons for me in the waiting.

For example, Ruth, the missionary I was staying with, would go to the post office in town once a week to buy stamps and I'd go with her.

She didn't just pay a few shillings, grab her stamps and go, but really looked at the stamps, admiring the beauty and artistry of each before selecting them. That time to slow down, appreciate beauty, and make sacred the simple things, taught me to notice God's beauty in the mundane.

Another was about ministry, such as the ironing needed to be done after each drying to kill the chiggers that would make their way into the hanging clothes.

One day, when I felt especially useless, I was asked to iron skirts for a visitor to the guesthouse. I willingly did it, but as I was ironing, I realized that Christian service doesn't always look like evangelizing, or nursing. Sometimes, it's simply doing the small, ordinary thing that needs to be done.

Eventually, I was placed, but that time of waiting remains formative for me. Psalm 38:15 says,

But for you, O Lord, do I wait; it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

It's God's presence and lessons I've learned to look for now, in the waiting. He is always there.

Alice Strenglein

Trust God's Timing

DECEMBER 7

Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore he exalts Himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for him.

— Isaiah 30:18

Few of us are good at waiting. We wait for exam scores, job interview results, never-ending election returns, medical test outcomes. We get nervous, anxious, and resort to distractions.

As we wait for Christmas to arrive, we are not so nervous or anxious; we already know the outcome—and a glorious, life-saving outcome it is!

We need only to count off four weeks by our Advent calendars before the day arrives. The Hebrews had already waited hundreds of years in anticipation of the birth of Messiah, which had been predicted in biblical prophecies for them. And every Jewish family knew those scriptures. But even after they encountered Jesus, many didn't believe He was the one the prophecies pointed to.

Consider Moses and the Israelites, who wandered 40 years in the desert before they obtained what was promised. Consider Abraham, who was as good as dead before his promised child was born. Or consider Zechariah, who spent months without speaking until the Lord gave him voice. God's timing is not our timing.

Blessed are all those who wait for him.

How many of us have cursed the timing of events only to discover later that God's timing was indeed a blessing?

Blessed are all those who wait for him.

God's timing is always right. Christmas is proof God always keeps His promises. We just need to be patient and wait.

Ray Fleming

Learning to Trust God When Waiting

DECEMBER 8

For many years of my life, I lived with anxiety. I was always rushing, constantly worried, and never truly satisfied with anything in life.

God has worked so much in my life, and things are different now.

Things started changing when I heard a pastor say that anxiety is a consequence of fear, and that those who live in a constant state of fear struggle to trust in the love and power of God. After hearing that, my perspective on life and the way I approached my circumstances began to change.

If I live by faith, I know that I have a God who loves me, wants what is best for me, and has everything under control. He is also my Father, and a father takes good care of his children. Therefore, I don't have to be consumed by worry about the things happening in my life because I can trust my God.

Several months ago, someone I loved, and whom I still admire and respect greatly, decided to walk away from my life. At that moment, I felt very sad. However, I have a merciful God who knows exactly what I need. Just a few days after receiving that difficult news, I heard a powerful message at church. It reminded me that money, relationships, and our jobs are not where we find our joy. Our joy is found in Jesus.

That message was a great blessing from God because it helped me understand that I don't need anything else to experience the greatest joy in life. I already have it in Jesus.

As I continued my journey, I became familiar with Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9–12. Through this prayer, I learned that God reveals His power in our lives.

What amazes me about this prayer is that God's power is reflected in our ability to endure all circumstances with patience and joy, while giving thanks to the Lord.

Now, whenever I feel discouraged, I remember this prayer and give thanks to the Lord for His goodness.

Waiting hasn't been easy for me. However, God has given me the gift of knowing Him more each day, and that has taught me to trust Him. I can now trust that the world is in His hands, that He wants what is best for me, and that even though I make plans, He directs my steps. All I have to do is abide in Him and trust Him, and He will take care of the rest.

Today, I trust in my Lord, and that trust has given me peace, joy, and rest. I can now focus more on the present, work hard to be faithful with the things He has entrusted to me, and wait patiently, knowing that he has good plans for me, as he says in Jeremiah 29:11:

For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord,
"plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future
and a hope.

Nahiroby Olivas



Deeper Revelation in the Waiting

DECEMBER 9

Two weeks ago, I fell and hurt my back.

I had an x-ray which showed nothing broken, praise God. But my back still hurts and I can't sit up for very long. I can't do the things I want to do. I am in a holding pattern until the pain goes away and I can resume the "important work" of my life. So what is the Lord teaching me in this time of pain and waiting?

One of my favorite songs is "While I'm Waiting" by John Waller. It starts,

> *I'm waiting, I'm waiting on you, Lord, and I am hopeful, I'm waiting on you Lord. Though it is painful, but patiently I will wait.*

To be honest, I haven't been all that patient. I have been doing a lot of complaining to the Lord, moaning, and feeling sorry for myself. Finally, the Lord showed me that this waiting is not wasted time. The pain in my back has caused me to reflect on what Jesus must have suffered as He was whipped by the Roman soldiers. My pain cannot compare with that. I praise Him that His pain allows me to "suffer with Him in order that we [I] may also be glorified with Him." (Romans 8:17)

In the busyness of doing my work for the Lord, it is easy to forget to involve the Lord in it. I rattle off my prayers like a machine gun and then run out the door to do His work. How ironic is that? Sometimes, I think I hear a still, small voice saying, "Wait, don't you want to hear what I have to say to you?"

I look at this as a time for me to slow down and to reconnect with Him, to spend some time listening instead of talking, and to worship Him in this "down time."

The Lord gave me this verse:

> *... but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*
>
> *— Isaiah 40:31*

I now see this as a time to renew my strength for something that lies ahead. Will I spend the time moaning and groaning, or will I take time to be still and know that He is God? He whispers to me, "I AM waiting for you."

This Advent, my prayer for you is to take time in the craziness of the season to worship the Lord who loves us. To be still and know that He is God. He is waiting for you, too.

Mary Springmann



He Carries the Weight of the Wait

DECEMBER 10

Ahhh, waiting, everyone's favorite pastime. Who doesn't like a nice long line at the grocery store while someone pays in cash and coupons–does that even happen anymore? The smile we have when we merge onto the highway to join a parking lot of cars. Popular memes often depict "waiting" with a picture of a skeleton. In this world, we are conditioned to hate to wait. No matter how long the wait is, it feels like eternity, it feels like a waste of precious time.

That same frustration is often applied to the difficult things we wait for which impact life far more than a few minutes here and there: marriage, the right job, treatment, recovery, the salvation of those we love and care for, dire circumstances to simply change.

Three and a half years ago I was two weeks from finishing my six rounds of an 18-week chemo treatment when I was told to stop and wait. My blood wasn't healthy enough to continue the treatment schedule. My treatment didn't just change my life as I knew it, it impacted those I loved most, what a burden. I was ready to be done–for me, for them, for all of us. The truth behind those waiting memes and funny scenarios can be pretty devastatingly painful in real life.

In my waiting I experienced the uncomfortable truth: I am not in control. But, I was pointed to the One who is. Good news: God is utterly good, patient, wise, and perfect in all of his ways. And He has given us promises to hold on to during our times of waiting.

It's easy to assume, as we wait, that matters are only getting worse. In our finite knowledge, waiting equates with valuable time being wasted or lost, needless suffering continued–right? No. He is doing things in our times of waiting that are absolutely necessary and absolutely worth it. I may not see, feel, or understand it. That's okay, because when I relinquished my illusion of control to Him, I also relinquished the burden of responsibility to Him. He carries the weight of the wait, not me.

I cannot control treatment schedules or what the doctors are going to say. Nor can any of us truly control most of life's happenings–that burden is crushing. Even keeping up the illusion that we are in control is crushing. Don't be crushed. Trust in what he has done, what he is doing, and what he will do.

I encourage you to embrace your waiting at the throne of grace, where He sits desiring you to come and surrender to Him those crushing, yet precious situations in your life. There, you will receive all you need for your waiting and more.

Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:16

Lauren Ranson



Waiting With Anticipation

DECEMBER 11

As a person who highly values efficiency and productivity, waiting often feels challenging for me. We wait all day in varying ways. We wait at traffic lights, wait for the oven to preheat, wait for a page to load when the internet is slow, wait for someone to respond to a text message, wait for the next series on Netflix. I can feel frustrated if I think time is being wasted or used inefficiently.

While time is a beautiful gift not to be wasted, it also belongs to the Lord. God, the author of time and space and all eternity knows my days, the plans He has for me, and the treasure He has stored up for me to discover in the waiting.

As a child, I experienced deep separation anxiety and panic attacks being away from my mother. This continued into my teen years and sabotaged a lot of the carefree nature of childhood and the experiences that others would find delight in. If my mom went out, I would panic and then wait by the window watching for her return. I was completely focused on the farthest spot I could see down the street as I waited for her return—waiting for just a glimpse of her so my nervous system could reset to calm.

I tried to work every angle of control I had access to as a child to prevent her from leaving, to find a way to have her return quickly or try and calm myself, but it felt impossible. I felt alone, and I felt out of control. I watched the clock and I watched out of the window. Wait time felt like an enemy. It felt unsafe. The continuous tick of the clock reminded me that I was abandoned and alone.

God has been so gracious to help me heal and know that he was always there, even when I was in a panic as a child. I was never alone. Jesus was close. In this realization and growing trust in the Lord's closeness and care for me, I am moving away from the instinct to control, and I am finding that many beautiful things happen in seasons of waiting and moments of waiting.

I am learning to value His timing and have discovered that growth, connection, and intimacy with him develop as I lean into Him. I am learning to be expectant in the waiting time because here I find he has good gifts for me even when circumstances haven't changed. I get the greatest gift now and into eternity for He has promised me Himself, and there is nothing better.

Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord.

— Psalm 27:14

Fiona Bracy



Praying While Waiting

DECEMBER 12

My husband, Evan, ruptured his patellar tendon on September 5th. Because of the way it ruptured, he is facing a six- to 12-month recovery time. Working harder will not equal healing faster. There have been many frustrating days where I have longed for his body to be restored to where it was before his accident. I long for him to no longer be in pain. I long for him to not be restricted when trying to simply walk or sit.

I praise the Lord that Evan is healing and that his recovery has not had any setbacks, but the six- month mark still sits in March 2027. I was comforted when I heard Evan's name mentioned in the prayers of the people multiple Sundays after his injury. I have been encouraged by people praying with me and others telling me they are praying. I have been reminded of just how many of us are waiting for healing.

Even waiting for something "expected," like Evan's recovery, is still waiting. Knowing that others are praying for his recovery reveals, in a way, how God is working to heal his body. It has also challenged me to be diligent in praying for others who are waiting. Praying brings to the front of my consciousness, God's power, His love, and His care, which in turn, brings me His peace.

God can and does heal, even if I don't pray. But prayer has helped God's work feel more tangible to me. God has used it to grow my faith. It affects my overall outlook, my view of God, and my daily hope.

So as I wait for Christmas, where we celebrate the birth of our Savior and wait for His return, I am reminded to pray for these things, too. I want to live in a way that my reality is affected by the truth that God sent His Son into the world 2,000 years ago and that one day, Jesus will return. Spending time in prayer about this doesn't bring it about faster, but does affect my overall outlook, my view of God, and my daily hope.

Amy Patterson



Living While Waiting for Jesus' Return

DECEMBER 13

Life is full and complicated! So many opportunities, duties, decisions! So many things that "can be seen" that it's hard to look at what cannot be seen.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

— 2 Corinthians 4:18

No wonder that young or old, individuals or communities, we constantly need reminders. So twelve stones were piled up in the Jordan. Passover was instituted. Jesus told his followers to "do this in remembrance of Me."

And now we observe the season called "Advent." Not just for a few weeks each year do we confidently wait for Jesus' return to fully establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. But a special season encourages us to give our habitual longing more conscious, prayerful attention. We have special prayers, music, ceremonies, symbols (e.g., Advent wreath) to help us and, above all, we have the Spirit of Truth, who will guide us into all truth (John 16:13).

As we each ponder our own waiting for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home, we ask, with that guidance, "What sort of person should I be", and what should I be doing, while I wait? (2 Peter 4:11-13).

Many parts of both testaments give us answers; here are two, from Jesus:

But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only ... Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

— Matthew 24:36 and 44

Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

— Matthew 24:45-47

While we wait, our calling is to faithfully obey what God has given each of us to do. For all of us, of course, loving God with all we are and have, and loving our neighbors as ourselves; doing justice, loving kindness, and walking humbly with our God (Micah 6:8); seeking God's kingdom, His righteousness, more than daily necessities (Matthew 6:33).

The details of these general principles will be different for each of us: school teachers, CEOs, custodians, judges, bus drivers, parents, spouses, singles, neighbors. And the details of our faithful obedience change over time. But we persevere, by God's grace, as we seek to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who is at work in us, enabling us both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Philippians 2:12-13). As one well-loved hymn puts it,

Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.

George Huttar

Waiting for Another's Salvation

DECEMBER 14

In 2010, my sister and I had the privilege of caring for our mom as she struggled with cancer. With just months to live, she expressed her desire to die at home with hospice care so we had more support. Her hospice nurse was incredible in every way, and she and our mother became fast friends, both sharing the same great sense of humor and directness. She understood, like we did, that when our mom said, "I'm ready to die," she meant it.

So we waited. As the months wore on, I prayed more urgently because my mom had been very concerned when I became a Christian and had never been willing to consider turning to Christ herself. She'd had a hard childhood and believed that God liked some people and not others, including her. He was not to be trusted. As her suffering increased, she became especially irritated with God because she was so ready to go. I prayed for the sensitivity and wisdom to know exactly when to bring up the subject again.

As the waiting wore on, we could see the toll the cancer was having on every part of her, not just her physical body, even though her pain was being controlled with medication. One day, I asked the hospice nurse what to expect. She replied, "It can take a long time for a person's body to shut down, even when they are as sick as your mom. Is there anyone she might be waiting to see?" I told her, "No, she's said good-bye to all the people who mean the most to her." So we waited. At times it was excruciating.

Then, the day before our mom lost consciousness, I sensed the Lord prompting me, "Ask her now." At that point, I was alone with her and said, "I know how you feel about Jesus, but you're getting close and it would mean the world to me if we could be together in heaven one day. Will you turn to Jesus? He really does love you." She whispered, "Yes." The grimace on her face disappeared as she became calm and peaceful. Two weeks later, she passed.

I was so thankful to God for His mercy, and thought of 2 Peter 3:9:

> *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*

And for the first time, I truly understood the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard in Matthew 20:1-16. It was the extravagant kindness of God to give the same wages to the laborers who came later as he gave to those who came earlier. Although my mom didn't have the joy of getting to know Jesus while she was on earth, it gives me tremendous comfort to know that she's with him now and fully free.

Cindy Olland



Waiting for Physical Healing

DECEMBER 15

A few years ago, I struggled with severe sciatic back pain that flared up twice in the same year. The pain grew increasingly worse. It was excruciating. I couldn't sit or lay down for five days. I spent the nights walking around the house, restless, uncomfortable, and unable to get any relief. To alleviate the pain, I went to a doctor, the emergency room, and even tried pain medication; nothing touched the physical pain.

Day and night, I spent time listening to and reading God's Word. I held on to verses and prayed them out loud. Isaiah 40:31 especially blessed me:

> *...but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.*

God's Word and praise and worship music filled my time in a beautiful way. I cried out to God to relieve and release the muscle that was holding a tight grip on my back. I heard Him say, "This pain is a physical manifestation of a spiritual problem." I then spent an intense hour confessing my sins and asking for His forgiveness.

Physical relief did not come immediately, but spiritual and emotional release did. This became a wonderful week as I spent concentrated time with God in prayer and praise. I realized that I had allowed the spiritual state of my heart to be twisted by sin and held by darkness. The sin and deception that had gripped my heart had been revealed to me.It was humbling. However, God's Spirit is not harsh. On the contrary, His Spirit is gracious.

God is good and He loves me. He knows what it takes to get me to hear His heart for me. I focused on scriptures about the Holy Spirit, and I waited for a total healing. The days became a blessed time of life-changing, teachable moments.

On the sixth day, I felt a release as I told God that He was the only remedy I needed. That night for the first time in a week, God let me lie down and I knew my days of waiting were over. The pain was miraculously gone.

Ten years ago, while waiting on God's timing, I learned that prayer, confession, and personal worship can make it easier. I came to realize in a profound and deep way the difference between having a head knowledge of God (Scripture and how I should live) and having a heart knowledge of God and His deep love for me.

That week, I rededicated myself to God, to walk in obedience to His perfect will with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I wouldn't trade the experience of those days for anything. God is a loving Father who wants my heart. He may cause us to wait and to learn in the meantime about His goodness and His provision for our good. All glory and honor to Him!

Mary Rinaldi



The Weight of Waiting

DECEMBER 16

Wait for the Lord; be strong and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

Psalm 27:14

If we're honest, most of us hate waiting. From waiting for a bus, train, or plane to waiting for a job or a promotion; to waiting for a marriage partner or for a child. Waiting is not easy.

While waiting varies in intensity, the longer it takes, the heavier it becomes. Waiting for a breakthrough, especially after months or years of prayer, can be a very heavy load to carry.

Waiting for the Lord can also be hard because you never have the full story. Sometimes, you can only hold on to a promise, but other times you're not even sure that you heard God right.

When we were having one of our children, it was a very difficult pregnancy. My wife had severe preeclampsia, posing danger to her and the baby. A couple of weeks before her due date, they monitored her blood pressure by the hour and as soon as it went down to an acceptable level, she was taken to the operating room for an emergency C-section.

I knew this was a dangerous operation where anything could happen. The doctor had made it clear that we may lose one or both of them. We had prayed earnestly for months but now came the moment of truth. For three hours as I prayed, pacing up and down the delivery ward, I asked God for strength and courage, and mercy on my wife and unborn child.

When after three hours a nurse came towards me, God had given me the grace to take whatever she would have to say. The kind of bravery I had was the kind described in the psalm.

It was not about being fearless. It was about knowing and trusting that God knew best what to do. It was about the courage to surrender to God's will, trusting in His faithfulness.

So, when the nurse told me, "It's a boy! Mother and baby are alive, but it will be a while before they come out." I just looked at her and shouted, "Praise God! Thank you Jesus!" And suddenly, the weight of waiting fell and hope rose up. We named our son, "Praise"!

Waiting is the classroom of faith. It's where we learn humility and trust. While we wait on God, the reality is that He's the one waiting on us. He waits for us to surrender to His will and to His plan for our lives. It takes courage to wait. It takes bravery to wait. It takes humility and surrender to wait patiently.

To everyone who is waiting—for a breakthrough, a miracle, an answer, a word of comfort—be encouraged. An eternal weight of glory awaits. I like the way Psalm 27:14 is articulated in The Message:

Stay with God! Take heart. Don't quit. I'll say it again:
Stay with God.

Steven Shalita

Waiting Throughout Scripture

DECEMBER 17

Approximately 400 years stretched out between the Old and New Testaments during which a great silence ensued. In the Old Testament era, God spoke to His people through prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, and Nathan, who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to serve as His messengers. Then the prophetic voices ceased, and generation after generation had to learn to wait.

Waiting must have become woven into the culture of God's people. The opening pages of the New Testament reveal that they continued to worship, pray, keep the Sabbath, study Scripture, and serve in the temple according to the laws God had given through Moses. They did not give up hope. When I consider that our nation is only 250 years old, a 400-year wait seems almost unimaginable. Yet God's people persevered through centuries of silence.

Then, in a sacred moment and sacred space, the silence was broken. Heaven opened, and the angel Gabriel appeared to the priest Zechariah. The first chapter of Luke records this extraordinary conversation between a heavenly messenger and an ordinary man. Gabriel announced that Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, would have a son who would prepare the way for the Lord.

Sadly, Zechariah responded with doubt. Looking at the facts instead of God's power, he questioned how such a promise could be fulfilled in their old age. As a consequence, Zechariah experienced a different kind of silence. He was unable to speak until God's promise came to pass and his son, John, was born.

We, too, are familiar with waiting. We wait for answers, healing, opportunities, relationships, and countless other things. Like Zechariah, we may question God's promises when circumstances seem impossible.

We ask, "How much longer, Lord?" or "Why must I wait?" Sometimes we grumble; other times, by God's grace, we offer a sacrifice of praise. Waiting is uncomfortable. Yet waiting also shapes our character and deepens our trust in God.

Throughout Scripture, God addresses this universal human experience. He gives us examples of people who waited faithfully and others who struggled along the way. From their stories we learn an enduring truth: In seasons of waiting, hope is always available.

Our God is worthy of our trust, and hope helps us focus less on the how, when, and why of God's promises and on the One who made them. Hope fixes our eyes on the God who is faithful and actively at work on our behalf.

Near the end of the Old Testament, the prophet Micah expressed this confidence:

But as for me, I will look to the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.

— Micah 7:7

May our hearts be encouraged and sustained in our times of waiting through the examples God provides for us, and may we always wait with hope in Him.

Molly Andreson



Waiting for God's Harvest Season

DECEMBER 18

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:7-9

I love agricultural metaphors in Scripture that explain spiritual realities. Though a city kid who grew up in Los Angeles, many of my favorite memories are of my grandmother's country garden. This passage reminds us that when we obediently do the work we are given to do in love, we will reap a harvest at the right time.

We need this reminder because oftentimes the "due season" of our harvest may not be exactly the time we hope or anticipate. Frequently, God's harvest season does not arrive at the time that we may like, and waiting for God's timing can be very challenging. Often, God has to build capacity in us, in order for us to effectively carry the harvest He is bringing.

I recently attended a baby shower for my dear friend, Jessa. She grew up in Manitoba, Canada, and studied nursing. As a labor and delivery nurse, God has sent her around the world through medical missions, where she has ministered to countless moms, babies, and children for the past 20 years. Certainly, she had been sowing to the Spirit for a long time.

However, three years ago, I met up with Jessa in Tokyo, and she was very discouraged. She was just ending a dating relationship that was going nowhere, and she felt helpless, having always wanted to get married and have a family.

Jessa assumed that God would lead her to marry a fellow missionary, but that had not come to fruition and she'd grown weary of waiting while she was doing good in Japan. We cried and prayed, and she surrendered her life to God again. I told her, "God is still writing your story," and got on a flight back to Washington.

Shortly thereafter, Jessa met a handsome American Navy medic stationed in Japan who loves the Lord. At first, she was flustered because her harvest season had suddenly arrived and her life was changing at a very fast pace. He wasn't a missionary—"was this from God?" she wondered.

Happily, I attended their beautiful and God-centered wedding in Manitoba the following August, and as I write this devotional, Jessa is in labor in Okinawa, and will soon deliver her first baby.

Have we also grown weary while doing good or waiting? Remember, God is still writing our stories, too! If we don't quit, we win.

... but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

Isaiah 40:31

Krystyn Carey



God's Promise in the Ordinary

DECEMBER 19

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

— Colossians 3:17

I can get so caught up in what is next: the stressors of the days ahead, the what-ifs, the things on my to-do list, or simply all that seems to demand my attention. It's easy to spend so much time thinking about what is ahead that I overlook what God is doing right in front of me.

I notice this especially on Sunday afternoons. As the weekend begins to wind down, I can find myself thinking about Monday and all that the coming week will bring. Rather than being fully present and enjoying those last few hours of the weekend with my husband, my thoughts have already moved on to what comes next.

In looking ahead to the week before it has even begun, I miss the gift of the time I have been given right now. God is faithful in the everyday. He is faithful in the familiar routines and in the moments that might otherwise go unnoticed. Washing dishes, folding the pile of laundry that never seems to end, making dinner, running errands, and going through the familiar routines of another day. Sometimes these things can feel mundane, even a little monotonous.

But what if God is just as present in these moments as He is on a Sunday morning?

In her book Liturgy of the Ordinary, Tish Harrison Warren writes, "The place of formation is in the small moments of each day." The ordinary tasks of our everyday lives are not separate from our walk with God, but opportunities to recognize His presence, both in the moment and as we wait for Him to act in our lives.

As we enter Advent, we remember that God's people waited generations for the promised Messiah. They lived in the space between God's promise and its fulfillment, trusting in the hope that He would come. And He did. Jesus came near, entering into the ordinary rhythms of human life. The God of the universe chose to dwell among us.

Today, we find ourselves waiting, too. We wait for prayers to be answered, for circumstances to change, and for things we hope will come. But while we wait, God is not absent. He is present in the familiar routines, the unfinished chores, and the ordinary days that make up so much of our lives. His faithfulness isn't something we have to wait for. It is something we can recognize today. Here is my prayer:

Lord, help us to slow down and notice Your presence at all times. As we wait with hope for Christ's return, help us to be faithful in the days You have given us. Keep us from becoming so focused on what lies ahead that we miss the gifts of today. Open our eyes to your nearness and faithfulness in the ordinary moments. Amen.

Autumn Frivold



Waiting for our Transformation

DECEMBER 20

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

Philippians 3:20-21

As we enter this Advent season, I have been reflecting on these verses, which remind us that our citizenship is in heaven and that we eagerly await our Savior, Jesus Christ. This truth has brought deep comfort to my heart during a year marked by profound grief, loss, and abrupt change.

This summer, my dad was admitted to the emergency room and spent four weeks in the hospital before transitioning to a skilled nursing facility. Though we were blessed to celebrate his 79th birthday together as a family, his physical and cognitive health declined rapidly. On August 14, he passed away.

The grief of losing him has been overwhelming, but I take comfort in knowing the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit. I also believe that Dad is with Jesus, and that in the Resurrection he will have a transformed body—one that can't be destroyed by sickness, sin, or death. That gives me such hope.

Alongside losing my dad, our family has also navigated a difficult transition with my mom, whose dementia progressed significantly over the past year. During my father's hospitalization, it became clear that she needed full-time support, and on July 10, we moved her into a memory care community. In many ways, it feels as though I have lost both of my parents in a very short time.

But I take comfort in Hebrews 4:15–16:

> *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

Jesus understands the difficulty of entrusting his mother's care to someone else. On the cross Jesus directs the disciple whom he loved to take his mom into his home and care for her (John 19:26-27). He knows how I feel.

So I chose to trust that God will provide grace, strength, and compassionate caregivers to support my mom. Jesus deeply empathizes with our weaknesses and pain. I encourage you to go to Jesus with whatever you need. He will give you mercy and you will receive his grace.

As Christmas approaches, I know this year will feel starkly different as our family navigates new traditions. I am not sure how things will go, I'm a planner by nature, so this feels uneasy and uncomfortable. But one thing will not change: Our hope remains anchored in Jesus Christ, our Savior and High Priest, who makes all things new.

Ellen Gross

A Long-Awaited Morning

DECEMBER 21

Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

— Proverbs 3:5

On Christmas Eve 1974 we were living in Darwin, Australia. A hurricane was rapidly moving our way. We were a young family of 5, George and I, with our children—ages 8, 5. and almost 1. Friends had offered their home to stay in while they were away for Christmas holidays. We were very concerned about how to take care of their home, having had no experience with hurricanes.

The radio broadcasts had given lots of warnings and lots of advice about survival: fill up your bathtub with water, sit in the hallway, not near an outside wall, put masking tape X's on all windows, cover yourselves with pillows and mattresses, etc.

But then the power went off; no radio, no lights.

Waiting.

The wind began to blow harder and harder into the evening. The noise was deafening. Sitting in the dark hallway with our children on our laps, we waited and prayed, calling out to God for protection.

Waiting.

I remember feeling frozen and helpless, longing for stillness to hear God's voice. With the high wind came debris flying through the air, then something hit a bedroom window with a crash.

We waited through the long, deafening hours that night.

Then the noise and wind lessened. We saw the light of dawn—Christmas Day! Then, we heard welcome voices outside: "Is anyone home here?" Hopefully, awaited rescuers!

We were told to walk to the school nearby where we could find shelter, food, and more help. They warned us about the live electric wires on the ground; we helped our children to step over and around them. Thanks be to God, people at the school found a corner for us to sit in, and gave us food and drink, and even toys for the children!

After more hours of waiting, friends, hoping to find us, came to the school! We were abundantly grateful to our Father for guiding them to the right place and for His presence!

This experience of waiting helped us to have greater faith and confidence in God for His constant presence, for His perfect timing in our lives.

This Advent carol about waiting is one of our favorites:

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus, born to set Thy people free; From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth Thou art; Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart. Born Thy people to deliver, born a child, and yet a king; Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom bring. By Thine own eternal spirit, rule in all our hearts alone; By Thine all-sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

Mary Huttar



Is it Going to be a Good Christmas?

DECEMBER 22

And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

— Luke 2:10–11

As a child, the days between Thanksgiving and Christmas seemed to stretch on forever. I counted down the days on our felt Advent calendar and eagerly waited for Christmas morning. Every year, I would ask my mom the same question: "Is it going to be a good Christmas?"

To me, a good Christmas meant everything would be perfect. In my mind, that meant finding the best tree at the Middleburg Christmas Tree Farm, decorating it while drinking hot chocolate, driving around to see the lights at our favorite spots, putting candles up in the windows, getting every gift on my list, and, most importantly, enjoying a Christmas free from family conflict or strife.

But just after Thanksgiving of my junior year of high school, my parents announced they were getting divorced, and my dad was moving out.

That Christmas, the excitement I once felt was overshadowed by grief. Instead of counting down the days with joy, I waited for the sadness to lift, for things to get better, and for life to feel familiar again.

During that difficult season, Advent began to take on a deeper meaning for me.

I had always loved the anticipation of Advent, but that year I began to understand what it meant to wait with a longing that Christmas morning couldn't satisfy.

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

— Luke 2:10

Those words took on new meaning for me. The joy of Christmas was never dependent on everything going according to plan. It was found in the Savior who had come to save us. Jesus entered a world filled with sorrow and brokenness to bring salvation, redemption, and a hope that no circumstance could take away.

Looking back, I see how God used that difficult Christmas to deepen my faith and reshape my understanding of His goodness. I began to learn that His faithfulness was not measured by my circumstances, but by the promise He fulfilled in sending His Son. Even when life felt uncertain, I could trust God's faithfulness.

I still love counting down the days until Christmas, decorating the house, singing loudly for all to hear, and passing down special traditions to my daughters. But now, the joy is deeper than my circumstances. Advent reminds me that the Savior we waited for has come, and the One we long to see again will surely return. There is still waiting, but there is also so much to celebrate!

So, will it be a good Christmas?

The answer is a joyful yes! Not because everything will be perfect, but because Jesus Christ has come, and that is the greatest gift of all.

Preston Hansen

Into Your Hands

DECEMBER 23

For years in the UK, my husband Ryan and I knew a decision was coming: stay long-term, or move back to the US. It sat in the background like a shadow. In our last year there, as our visa renewal deadline drew close, that decision had a hold on me like a vice.

It was agonizing. We could see two different life paths. We loved our life in the UK. We loved our family and friends in the US. There was no right answer. Just a lot of hope, uncertainty, and dreading the loss either way. Every time I leaned one way, I'd second-guess it, then lean the other way and do the same. I'd constantly research and map out different scenarios, trying to find the optimal path. I was overwhelmed with all I wanted and all I wanted to control.

During Advent, I found old notes from a leadership training at our former ACNA church in Chicago. It was about noticing what we carry: anxieties, fears, hopes, circumstances we can't control. Then, instead of managing it all ourselves, bringing it to the Lord as a spiritual practice using Jesus' own words on the cross as our own:

...Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!

— Luke 23:46

Noticing whatever is unsettled in our spirit, body, or mind, and inserting it into Christ's prayer: "Lord, into your hands I commit _____." As an act of faith, surrender, and waiting.

I grabbed that prayer and didn't let go. The decision. The not knowing. The pressure. I couldn't tell you how many times a day I prayed it. I'd notice it in my body: tension in my jaw and neck, a sick feeling in my stomach. I'd notice and then immediately pray, "Lord, into your hands I commit ...," even if I didn't exactly know what words to describe what it was.

Look at when Jesus prays it. Not from the other side of the Resurrection.

He prays this in his final moment of surrender on the cross.

About three months into praying this way countless times, I woke up one morning and it was settled. Calm and clarity. The decision could have gone either way, but I had peace. That peace has carried me through the move back to the States and everything that's happened since. Bringing that prayer into the waiting, instead of white-knuckling the situation, has given me so much freedom and contentment in a transition that could have been far more heart-wrenching.

If you're carrying something this Advent, notice it. An anxiety, a fear, a hope. Then pray, "Lord, into your hands I commit _____," and fill in the blank. Tomorrow, notice it again, pray it again. And the next day. And the next day after that.

We're held while we wait, and the One holding us already knows what's on the other side.

Charissa Shelton



Waiting for Another to Turn to God

DECEMBER 24

I find myself in a long season of waiting. In fact, it has been many years. At times, the waiting has been wearying, sometimes more so than others. It has brought deep pain and been complicated by many layers of emotion and circumstance.

What am I waiting for? I am waiting for the Lord to draw my loved one back into relationship with Him, and for my loved one to open his heart and receive that invitation.

I have prayed. I have many dear ones who are praying for him as well. I have argued, pleaded, cried, and even yelled at God on occasion. Ultimately, though, I know that God hears me and knows the depth of my anguish. He understands because He, too, longs for each of us to be in relationship with Him.

Throughout this suffering, God has been patient and tender with me. He has provided Scripture and songs to soothe my soul and remind me of His presence. One passage, in particular, has brought me great comfort:

Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth!

— Psalm 46:10

Most mornings, I treasure the peace and quiet of centering prayer. These are the moments when I practice being still and quiet before God—a time without striving, working, or trying to fix anything. And I must admit, I am quite the fixer! I think I have some pretty good ideas about how and when this situation could be resolved. By my timeline, it should have been resolved long ago. But I trust that God's plans are better than mine.

I can envision the day when my loved one fully understands and embraces the truth that he is a beloved child of God.

Psalm 139:14 reminds me:

> *I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*
> *Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.*

I imagine the day when my loved one accepts and rests in God's love. What a celebration that will be! I believe God will use his many gifts and talents in wonderful and meaningful ways. Perhaps God is preparing the path, gently working in his heart, and readying him for whatever lies ahead.

For now, I remind myself to hope for what I do not yet see and to wait for it with patience (Romans 8:25). I will keep praying, keep trusting, and keep waiting—knowing that even in this long season, God is with me.

Audra Mrini



Night into Day

DECEMBER 25

Christina Rossetti's famous carol describes the world that Jesus was born into:

> *In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan, Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow, In the bleak midwinter, long ago.*

It's easy to hear that "midwinter" as a picturesque winter scene. But it means something much deeper. The world was frozen hard under the weight of sin. C.S. Lewis pictured the same thing in Narnia under the witch's curse: "always winter and never Christmas."

That's the backdrop for Luke 2:8:

> *And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

It was night. God could have sent His angel in the morning or afternoon, but he chose the night to make a point: the precondition for the coming of the light is always darkness. Jesus shines most brightly in the night.

Then the angel speaks:

> *For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*
>
> *— Luke 2:11*

The gospel is in the details. The shepherds are standing in the dark, as night as night could be. But the angel doesn't say "unto you is born this night." He says "this day."

By human time, it's the middle of the night. By God's redemptive time, the sun has already come up!

Jesus came into the darkness of a world in rebellion and sin and bleak midwinter, and he turned it into day. Even better, Jesus still comes into the darkness of your soul and leads you into day, even when you feel stuck in your night. As Peter writes, God "called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1 Peter 2:9).

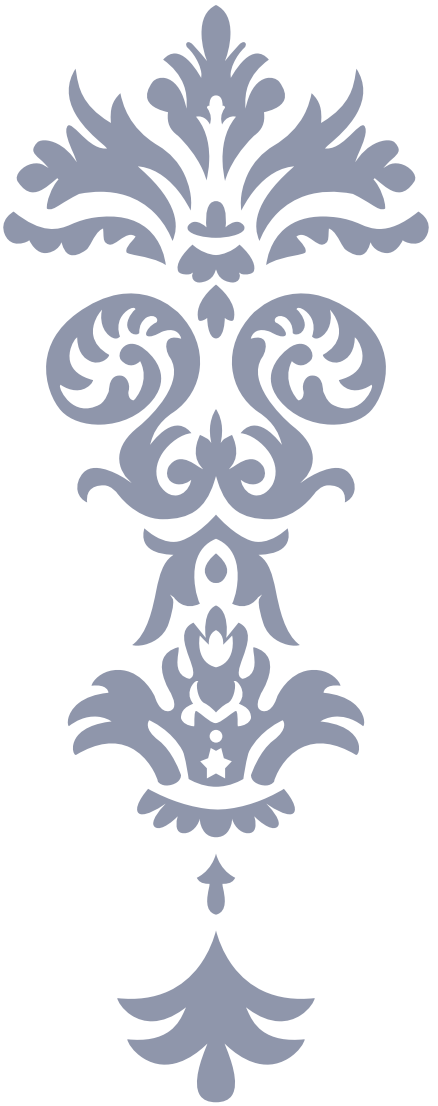
When Aslan finally breaks the witch's curse, the dwarf says it well: "This is no thaw. This is spring." The bleak midwinter of sin and death has been destroyed by the cry of a baby in Bethlehem, and once for all by the cry of our Savior on the cross. He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found. He does that in this world, and He does that in your life.

Tim Keller put it this way: "We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope." May you be reminded of that wonderful love this Christmas, and in response say:

What can I give Him, poor as I am? If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb; If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part; Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

Jamie Brown





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