

Jay Simmons



HE CAME NEAR:

**AN ADVENT OF INCARNATE HOPE
(AND HOW WE LEARN TO COME NEAR TOO)**

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Acknowledgment

To the One who came low enough to find me,
walked close enough to steady me,
and stayed long enough to change me.
Jesus, thank You for incarnating Yourself into my life
and teaching me how to do the same for others.

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INTRODUCTION

“He will be called Immanuel — God with us.”
— Matthew 1:23

Before the manger.
Before the angels warmed up their choir voices.
Before shepherds rubbed their eyes and wise men started packing
snacks for a long trip — there was loneliness.

The quiet ache of hearts built for companionship wandering in a world
that felt too big and too empty at the same time.

We tried religion.
We tried striving.
We tried to build ladders tall enough to reach Heaven — and wound up
dizzy, disappointed, and dangling halfway up.

So Heaven came down.

We were lonely —
and Heaven got tired of shouting from a distance.

God could have sent a memo.
He could have texted grace, emailed salvation, or livestreamed
redemption.
Instead, He slipped into skin and showed up at our front door
whispering,
“I’m not sending love. I **am** love — and I’m moving in.”

The Incarnation isn’t just a doctrine — it’s the wild, wonderful scandal of
a God who refuses to remain far away.
A God who traded the throne room for a womb, angels for animals,
glory for gravity.

Christmas is not God's grand announcement.
It's **His arrival.**

Advent is not pretending He isn't here yet.
It's training our hearts to remember what He's still doing:

Coming close. Drawing near.
Choosing presence over power and proximity over performance.
And here's the part that will stretch your soul in all the right directions:

He didn't just come near to us.
He came near to make us a people who come near.

Jesus didn't incarnate so we could admire Him from afar —
He incarnated to teach us how to love with skin on, to walk into rooms
carrying peace instead of pressure, and to show up in a world starving
for presence.

This Advent guide is an invitation to do just that —
to slow down, wake up, laugh a little, breathe deeper, and become a
person who shows up like Jesus shows up.

Not perfectly. Not theatrically.
But humbly. Joyfully.
Emmanuel-ish.

God with us.
And, by grace, **us with others.**

So light the candle, warm your heart, loosen your shoulders, and step
into the season.
Let's walk together toward the God who walked toward us.
He came near — now we get to practice coming near too.

Welcome to Advent.
Let's incarnate some joy.



PART I

THE ACHE AND THE ANTICIPATION

We were lonely — and Heaven got tired of shouting from a distance.

Before angels sang and shepherds ran, there was longing.

A holy ache.

A homesick humanity whispering into the dark,
“Lord, come close.”

Advent begins not with celebration, but with yearning —
and the God who hears yearning like a prayer.

Prayer:

Lord, awaken our longing.

Teach us not to numb the ache but to let it guide us back to You.

Meet us in the hunger, the waiting, the not-yet.

Draw near to hearts that dare to hope again.

Amen.

DAY 1 - THE GOD WHO WALKS TOWARD US

"They heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden..."
— Genesis 3:8

Before we ever searched for God,
God was already walking toward us.

Not floating.
Not thunder-clapping.
Walking.
Feet on earth.
Steps in the dust.
Presence in motion.

Even after humanity did the world's first spiritual face-plant, God didn't storm the garden with lightning and fury.
He didn't send an angelic "I told you so."
He **came near**. On foot. At a walking pace.
Heaven's first instinct was not judgment —
it was **proximity**.

He didn't shout from the sky,
"Figure yourselves out and then we'll talk."
He stepped into the shadows and asked, softly,
"Where are you?"

Not because He didn't know.
But because He wanted them to know **He was still coming after them**.

Advent begins here:
with a God whose footsteps are still echoing through history,
moving toward wandering, hiding, scared-to-admit-we-need-Him
hearts.

You don't earn that kind of God.
You just don't run from Him when He shows up.
And look — if you've ever tried hiding from God, congratulations,
you're in good company.
The first humans did it.
Every prophet tried it.
Peter did it mid-ministry.
Jonah tried so hard he booked a cruise in the opposite direction.

We are expert hiders.
God is the undefeated Seeker.

He finds us not because we're good at being found,
but because He refuses to stop coming.

And that, my friend,
is where Advent begins —
with a God who walks toward the ones who walk away.

Embodied Practice

Take a slow walk — even 5 minutes. No headphones. No hurry.
Every step, whisper: "You come toward me — I come toward You."
Let your feet do the talking.

Prayer

Lord, thank You that You don't shout salvation from a distance.
You walk toward me.
Teach me to stop hiding,
to slow down,
and to walk with You again. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where am I hiding from God right now, and what might it look like to let Him walk toward me?

DAY 2 - THE ACHE OF EXILE

"How can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?"
— Psalm 137:4

Homesickness isn't just what college freshmen feel after two weeks of cafeteria food and laundry disasters.
It's the human condition.

Something in us knows —
this world is beautiful, but it's not quite home.
We feel it in quiet rooms.
We feel it when the holiday lights go out.
We feel it even on good days, that subtle tug:
"There's supposed to be more than this."

Theologians call it "exile."
Poets call it longing.
Most of us just call it... life.

From Eden to Babylon to the Bethlehem road, the story of Scripture is one long ache for home — not a place on a map, but **a Presence.**

Absence hurts because we were built for Communion, not isolation.
Not scrolling companionship.
Not "I liked your post, does that count as relationship?"
Actual *with-ness*.

And here's the honest confession:
We try to fix exile with everything except God.
We collect experiences.
We chase success.
We cling to comfort like it can save us.

(Spoiler: comfort can't resurrect anything except your couch cushions.)

Meanwhile, the ache keeps humming in the background like a holy alarm clock reminding us:

You were made for Someone.

You were made for Presence.

Advent gives us permission to feel it.

To name the homesickness instead of numbing it.

To stop pretending we're perfectly fine and say,

"Lord, I miss You."

The manger didn't appear because the world was doing great.

It arrived because we were not.

And God didn't shame us for longing —

He answered it by showing up.

Embodied Practice

Let yourself feel homesick today. Not for a place — for Him.

At some point, whisper aloud: *"Lord, I miss You. Come close."*

That's not weakness. That's worship in its rawest form.

Prayer

Lord, I feel the ache —

the not-yet, the almost, the longing.

Thank You that You did not leave the world lonely.

Come near again today.

Find me in my exile and walk me toward home.

Amen.

Reflection Question

Where do I feel "not at home" in my life — and how might that ache be a call to God's presence?

DAY 3 — PROMISES IN THE DARK

“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...”

— Isaiah 9:2

God has a habit of making promises in the dark.

Not when life is tidy, faith is tidy, circumstances are tidy, and your prayer life looks like a curated Instagram reel of spiritual confidence.

No — God tends to whisper hope
when the night is thick,
when hearts are heavy,
when circumstances refuse to behave,
and when you're wondering if heaven misplaced your address.

Israel didn't receive the promise of Immanuel during glory days.

They got it when they were exhausted, exiled, disappointed, and praying prayers that felt like they were bouncing off the ceiling like confused birds.

Sometimes faith isn't fireworks and goosebumps —

sometimes it's **a single candle in a long hallway**.

A little light God refuses to let blow out,

even when we cup our hands around our doubts like wind.

We often think maturity means being unshakable.

But Advent faith is humbler, truer, softer:

Not “I have no fears,”

but “I will keep hoping even here.”

Even in the waiting rooms.

Even in the uncertain years.

Even in the nights when prayers feel thin and the only thing you know for sure is that you want God — and you hope He still wants you.

Advent teaches us this:
God doesn't just *fulfill* promises —
He **holds us** while we wait for them.

Sometimes that holding feels like a whisper.
Sometimes like a hand on your shoulder.
Sometimes like silence — but never absence.

Heaven's clock may run slower than your nerves prefer,
but its timing is never cruel.

If you're in the dark, you are not defective.
You are exactly where the promise first collided with humanity.
Light loves to begin where shadows think they're winning.

Embodied Practice

Tonight, light a candle. Stare at the flame for one minute.
Pray simply: "Lord, shine here."
Don't fix anything.
Don't figure anything out.
Just let the light be enough for now.

Prayer

Lord of promises and midnights,
I carry hopes I cannot see yet.
Meet me here.
Hold me here.
Thank You that darkness is never the final word —
light is coming, and so are You.
Amen.

Reflection Question

What promise of God feels dim right now — and will I dare to hold it anyway?

DAY 4 — THE GOD WHO HEARS US CRY

"I have indeed seen the misery of my people...I have heard them crying...so I have come down."

— Exodus 3:7-8

Babies cry.

Adults pretend they don't.

But Advent isn't Instagram faith —

it's real, raw, tear-salted humanity and a God who refuses to shame us for sounding human.

In Egypt, God didn't say,

"Be strong and silent and I'll consider helping."

He said,

"I heard you... so I came down."

Heaven's rescue mission didn't begin with trumpets —

it began with tears.

And here's the quiet miracle:

God doesn't roll His eyes at weakness.

He doesn't say "calm down first."

He doesn't wait for our prayers to be polished.

He listens for honest sound.

Sometimes the holiest prayer you'll ever pray sounds like:

"Lord, I can't."

or

"Jesus, help."

or

ugly-crying into a sleeve because words won't form.

And God says,

"I hear that. I'm on My way."

We don't follow a God who sits on a cloud like a disapproving guidance counselor.

We follow a God who enters the ache,
wraps Himself in skin,
and cries too.

The Incarnation isn't God showing us how strong He is —
it's God showing us He isn't afraid of our weakness.

The manger wasn't decorated with confidence.
It was filled with cries.

So if today finds you weary, wobbly, or leaking emotion like a toddler dropped at preschool for the first time — congratulations.
You are deeply loved,
and wildly normal.

Advent means this:

Your tears are not lost on Him.

They are magnets that draw Him close.

Embodied Practice

At some point today, let yourself **feel**. No toughness. No tidy. No "I'm fine." Whisper a simple prayer out loud — even if it's messy: *"Lord, I need You."* Then, don't fix yourself. Just let Him come.

Prayer

Lord who hears what I can't articulate,
thank You for never being embarrassed by my humanity.
Teach me to trust You with the fragile parts, the tired parts,
and the tear-streaked parts.
Come close when I cry —
and help me come close to others too. Amen.

Reflection Question

What pain am I tired of carrying alone — and can I let myself be honest with God about it?

DAY 5 — HOLY WAITING

"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits..."

— Psalm 130:5

If God had a E-Harmony bio, it might include:

"Loves long walks, slow growth, and character development. Not in a hurry."

God created time...

and then immediately started taking His sweet time with everything.

We want microwave spirituality —

God prefers the Crock-Pot.

Abraham waited decades.

Israel waited centuries.

Zachariah and Elizabeth waited until AARP mailers started arriving.

Mary waited nine months while her ankles vanished.

Heaven seems convinced that waiting doesn't weaken us — it *wakes* us.

Waiting isn't punishment;

it's preparation.

Waiting isn't wasted;

it's womb-time.

And yes, womb-time is cramped, uncomfortable, and occasionally makes you want to punch a stuffed shepherd in a nativity scene.

(Just me? Okay.)

But here's the Advent secret:

God does some of His finest work when nothing seems to be happening.

Waiting stretches hope.

Waiting trains trust.

Waiting loosens our grip on control and tightens our grip on God.

And sometimes, waiting simply teaches us that God is not Amazon Prime.

He doesn't do "two-day shipping" on breakthroughs.

He's forming something far better than fast results —

He's forming *you*.

When you can't see progress, God is often building roots.

Invisible, powerful, stubbornly growing roots of faith.

So if you feel stuck, stalled, delayed, detoured, or spiritually on hold listening to elevator music...
take heart.

You're not behind.

You're becoming.

Jesus is coming —

and so are you.

Embodied Practice

Today, do one thing **slowly on purpose**:

- Eat slowly
- Walk slowly
- Fold laundry like a monk in a monastery
- Drink coffee without multitasking
- Actually chew your food (stretch goal for some of us)

At least once, pray: "Lord, make me patient with Your pace."

Prayer

Lord, You are never late

and I am almost always early.

Teach me to trust Your timing

more than my timelines.

Let waiting soften me instead of sour me.

Fill the quiet places with You.

Form roots where I cannot see them. Amen.

Reflection Question

In which area of my life do I need patience — not resignation, but hope-anchored waiting?

DAY 6 — GOD’S SNEAKY, SUBTLE, HOLY WHISPER

“After the fire came a gentle whisper. And when Elijah heard it...”
— 1 Kings 19:12–13

You’d think if God really wanted our attention,
He’d use skywriting, subwoofers, or at least one well-timed bald-eagle moment.

Instead, Elijah gets wind, earthquake, fire...
and then — a hush.

Cue the whisper.

Apparently, Heaven likes quiet.
(Annoying, right? We prefer fireworks.)

But here’s the good news:

If God speaks in whispers, it means He’s close enough to whisper.

Close enough to lean in.

Close enough to hear your heartbeat.

Close enough to put His forehead gently against yours and say,
“I’m here. I never left.”

We often fear silence because we assume it means absence.

But in Scripture, silence is usually **stage lighting before revelation**.

God loves to arrive quietly:

- A baby, not a battle cry
- A manger, not a marble throne
- A whisper, not a war horn

Real presence rarely shouts.
It simply *stays*.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing you'll do this Advent
is stop talking for a minute and let the silence breathe.
Not forced quiet. Not "holy productivity."
Actual peace.

God isn't hiding — He's hovering.
And His whisper may be the most revolutionary sound in your
winter.

Don't worry if you miss it at first.
He's patient.
He'll whisper again.
And again.

Embodied Practice

Sit in silence for **two minutes** today.
(A heroic feat in modern life. Gold star for you.)
When thoughts race, just smile at them like toddlers with sticky
hands and return to this simple prayer: "Speak, Lord. I'm here."
Don't strain to hear. Just be near.

Prayer

Lord of quiet miracles,
thank You for drawing close enough to whisper.
Teach me not to fear silence.
Meet me in stillness.
Tune my heart to hear Your gentle voice
in the soft places,
the small moments,
the everyday air. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where do I need to turn down the noise to hear God again?

DAY 7 — REST: BECAUSE EVEN ANGELS DON'T HUSTLE

"Be still, and know that I am God."

— Psalm 46:10

Sabbath isn't God's way of saying,

"Please stop being productive for a few hours so you don't explode."

Sabbath is God's way of saying,

"Child, put the world down. I've got it."

From the beginning, God built rest right into the rhythm of the universe.

Six days of creative genius — one day of "let's sit and enjoy the goodness."

And note this:

God didn't rest because He was tired.

He rested because being present is holier than being busy.

We treat hustle like a virtue.

Heaven treats it like a health hazard.

Sometimes the most disobedient thing we do is refuse to rest.

And sometimes the most faithful thing we do is take a nap without guilt.

Jesus did. He literally napped during a storm.

Sabbath is the weekly reminder that we are creatures, not machines.

Souls, not software.

Loved, not leveraged.

The world won't fall apart if you stop.

And if it does, good news — you weren't holding it up anyway.

Advent rest isn't laziness —
it's defiance against the lie that your value equals your output.
You don't rest because everything is done.

You rest because **God is the One who does the holding.**

Busyness makes us feel important.

Rest reminds us who *is* important.

Let your shoulders drop.

Let your breath deepen.

Let the world spin without your supervision for a moment.

Sabbath doesn't say "do nothing."

It says **do the right kind of nothing.**

The kind that heals.

The kind that delights.

The kind that whispers, "I trust You, Lord."

Embodied Practice

Do one thing today that nourishes, not achieves:

- Nap without apology
- Sit with a warm drink and call it holy
- Turn off notifications for an hour

Then say aloud: "God, I am not the Savior — and that's a relief."

Prayer

Lord of rest and rhythm,
teach me to stop without fear,
to be still without guilt,
to enjoy without earning.

Let Sabbath soften me,
and remind me who holds my life.
It's You. Always You. Amen.

Reflection Question

What would true rest look like for me right now — not escape, but restoration?



PART II

GOD SHOWS UP (TINY AND TREMENDOUS)

The Almighty arrives... squishy, sleepy, and spitting up..

Before angels sang and shepherds ran, there was longing.

A holy ache.

A homesick humanity whispering into the dark,
“Lord, come close.”

Advent begins not with celebration, but with yearning —
and the God who hears yearning like a prayer.

Prayer:

Lord, awaken our longing.

Teach us not to numb the ache but to let it guide us
back to You.

Meet us in the hunger, the waiting, the not-yet.

Draw near to hearts that dare to hope again.

Amen.

DAY 8 — THE WORD BECAME FLESH

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

— John 1:14

If you’ve been a Christian long enough, “Incarnation” might sound like a fancy theology word, the kind seminary professors say while adjusting their glasses and stroking imaginary beards.

But underneath the doctrine is something utterly outrageous: God got a body. A real one.

With toes. With hiccups. With a heartbeat.

With skin that bruises and sweat glands that actually sweat.

The One who spoke galaxies into existence
learned how to swallow, blink, burp, and breathe.

Heaven traded throne room acoustics
for the muffled cries of a newborn.

And here’s the kicker:

He didn’t beam down glowing and regal like some cosmic superhero.

Just... a baby.

Fragile, wrinkled, needy, adorable chaos wrapped in cloth.

The universe’s Author wrote Himself into His own story —
not as royalty, but as one of us.

Not aloof. Not hovering.

Not shouting encouragement from a safe celestial distance.

He **moved in**. Dwelt. Lived.

Swept sawdust off His clothes.

Got hungry. Got tired.

Got close enough to feel our breath on His cheek.

Christianity is not a religion of escape-from-the-world.
It is the wild declaration that God **entered** it —
fully, joyfully, bodily.
And if God didn't despise our humanness, why do we?

The Incarnation means this:
Your ordinary life is not beneath God.
Your humanity is not an embarrassment to Him.
Your body is not an obstacle to holiness —
it is a carrier of His presence.

He came near enough to touch —
so we could learn to love near enough to matter.

Embodied Practice

Do one act today that honors your God-given body:

- Breathe deeply outdoors
- Eat something nourishing and actually taste it
- Go to bed early (scandalous, I know)

Say: "Thanks for becoming flesh. Thanks for giving me mine."

Prayer

Jesus, You did not send salvation from far away.
You entered the story.
You took on skin and bone, weakness and laughter, hunger and hope.
Teach me to honor my humanity,
to meet You in the ordinary,
and to show up in the world like You did —
present, humble, and full of love. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where have I been treating my body like a burden instead of a gift from God?

DAY 9 — MARY'S YES

"I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled."
— Luke 1:38

Mary didn't get a detailed plan.

No timeline.

No budget.

No spreadsheet or PowerPoint or strategic angelic rollout roadmap.

Just one wild, bewildering announcement:

"The Holy Spirit will do something impossible inside you.

Also, congratulations — you're going to raise God."

And this teenage girl, probably still learning how to braid her own hair and cook a decent meal, responds not with a contract or clarification or "Umm Lord, could You explain that part again about overshadowing?"

She says,

"Yes."

A trembling, wondering, heart-in-throat yes.

A yes without full understanding.

A yes that risked her reputation, her relationships, her future.

A yes that could cost everything.

Sometimes obedience feels like heroic clarity.

More often, it feels like **holy confusion held by trust.**

Mary didn't know how this story would unfold — she just knew Who was writing it.

That's what makes her "yes" so stunning.

It wasn't passive surrender — it was **courage wearing humility's clothing.**

Faith isn't always knowing where God is leading.

Sometimes it's just knowing Who's leading — and deciding that's enough.

And here's the quiet beauty:

The Savior didn't enter the world through ability, power, or planning.

He entered through **availability**.

God didn't look for the most impressive vessel —

He looked for the most open one.

Mary teaches us this:

You don't have to understand the whole picture to trust the Artist.

You just have to whisper "yes" where it matters most.

Even when your knees are shaking.

Even when your future feels fragile.

Even when the plan looks, frankly, bonkers.

The world was saved by a yes.

Maybe today a small yes is what heaven is waiting for again.

Embodied Practice

Say yes to something small, simple, and sacred today:

- A gentle inconvenience
- A need in front of you
- A nudge you've been ignoring
- A person you could bless quietly
- A moment of prayer instead of hurry

Pray: "Lord, I am Yours. Whatever You say, my answer is yes."

Prayer

Lord, make my heart like Mary's —

receptive, brave, surrendered, joyful.

Teach me to trust You more than my plans,

to say yes without needing to understand everything,

to believe that Your impossible is better than my possible,

and to offer You my whole life, not just my safe parts.

Amen.

Reflection Question

What small "yes" could I offer God today, even without seeing the full plan?

DAY 10 — JOSEPH: QUIET STRENGTH OF STAYING

“Joseph... did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him.”
— Matthew 1:24

Joseph doesn't get enough airtime.
Mary gets a song, angels, centuries of paintings, stained-glass glory.
Joseph?
He gets... a dream. A very confusing situation.
And a choice:
Walk away quietly, or stay loudly.

This man had plans.
A life mapped out.
A home ready.
A wedding on the horizon.
And suddenly — boom.
His future detonates in scandal, whispers, and a story no one would believe without a supernatural tolerance for plot twists.

Imagine trying to explain this to your friends:
“So... Mary's pregnant.
No, not like that.
Yes, I'm sure.
No, really — it was the Holy Spirit.”

Sure, Joseph. Bless your heart.

And yet — he stays.
Not angrily.
Not resentfully.
Not as a martyr with sighs and eye-rolls.
He stays with integrity and tenderness.
He protects Mary's dignity.
He carries shame that isn't his.
He steps into a role he didn't choose but was chosen for.

He isn't loud.
He isn't flashy.
He doesn't preach a sermon or write a psalm.
He just **shows up faithfully**.

Sometimes holiness looks like heroic miracles.
Sometimes it looks like holding the line, keeping your promise, and loving the people God gave you — even when the story gets messy.
Joseph reminds us:
Faith isn't just saying yes to God.
Sometimes it's saying yes to the consequences of obedience.

He teaches us that righteousness isn't just about purity — it's about **presence, protection, and perseverance**.
The Savior of the world needed a man like Joseph — steady, humble, dependable, brave in the background.
There are no small roles in God's story. Only quiet ones.
And quiet obedience still shakes kingdoms.

Embodied Practice

Do one act of **quiet faithfulness** today nobody else will notice.

- Serve someone without being seen
- Encourage without needing credit
- Choose patience instead of proving yourself

Whisper: "Lord, make me faithful in the quiet things."

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Joseph —
for his humility, his courage, his steady love.
Teach me to stay when it's hard,
to protect what You entrust to me,
and to choose obedience over applause.
Make my faith deep, not dramatic —
strong enough to hold others,
soft enough to honor You. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where is God asking me to stay steady, even if no one sees or applauds?

DAY 11 — BELLY-BUMPING JOY: FAITH FINDS A FRIEND

“When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.”

— Luke 1:41

Before social media, before prayer chains, before Bible apps and study guides, there were two women in a humble home...
and the Holy Spirit threw a party.

Picture it: Mary, overwhelmed and probably nauseous, knocks on Elizabeth’s door.

Heaven holds its breath.

Elizabeth opens it...

and instantly, joy detonates.

John kicks.

The Spirit fills the room like warm sunlight.

And Elizabeth basically screams,

“Girl, you are BLESSED!”

Two wombs. Two miracles.

Two women who shouldn’t be pregnant but are — because God loves holy plot twists.

Mary didn’t get confirmation from a committee.

She got it from a cousin.

Sometimes what we need most is not clarity, but companionship.

Incarnation doesn’t bloom in isolation.

It grows in **shared wonder** and whispered encouragements and
“me too — God is doing something in me as well.”

No theological debates.

No “let me fix you.”

Just presence, joy, recognition, blessing, and maybe snacks.

Elizabeth didn't envy Mary.
Mary didn't overshadow Elizabeth.
Each celebrated what God was doing in the other —
because kingdom friendship sounds like **blessing without comparison**.

We don't just need faith;
we need people who **awaken our faith**.
People who see what God is forming in us and say,
"I see it. I believe it. I rejoice with you."

In a world that often critiques or competes,
Elizabeth teaches us to **celebrate and confirm**.
And Mary teaches us to run toward safe people when God stirs
something new.
Faith jumps when it hears a voice of blessing.
And sometimes the holiest sound in the world is someone else's
"yes" to what God is doing in you.

Embodied Practice

Reach out to someone who stirs your faith.
A friend, mentor, sibling in Christ — someone safe.
Send a message like: "I see God working in you. I'm grateful for you."
Encouragement is contagious. Spread some around.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Elizabeths —
for friends who bless instead of compare,
who confirm instead of question,
who rejoice instead of compete.
Make me that kind of friend.
Give me eyes to see Your work in others
and the courage to celebrate it loudly. Amen.

Reflection Question

Who in my life sparks faith in me — and have I thanked them lately?

DAY 12 — THE MANGER: HOLINESS IN THE HAY

“She wrapped him in cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

— Luke 2:7

If you or I were planning the arrival of the King of the Universe,
we’d book a suite.

A nice one.

Fresh linens.

Soft lighting.

Maybe a tasteful harpist in the corner.

Instead, God chose... a feeding trough.

A wooden box where livestock slobbered yesterday.

This is either the strangest marketing strategy in history —
or the clearest one.

Because God wasn’t trying to impress us.

He was trying to **reach us**.

He didn’t need marble halls;

He wanted human hearts.

The Incarnation teaches us this shocking truth:

God is allergic to elitism.

He isn’t intimidated by dirt floors or messy lives.

He isn’t waiting for us to tidy up before He enters.

He goes where real life happens —

stables, sweat, straw, noise, inconvenience, and unfiltered
humanity.

If God didn’t mind being placed where animals ate,

He’s not nervous about the mess in your life.

He’s not frowning at your imperfections;

He’s lying down right in the middle of them, saying,

“I am not ashamed to be here.”

The manger whispers what grace shouts:

He comes low so no one has to climb.

Every detail of the Nativity is God saying,

“I don’t need fancy — I just need available.”

“I don’t need grand — I need real.”

“I don’t need space perfected — just space offered.”

Your heart doesn’t need to be a palace.

It just needs to have a little room.

Even if it smells like hay and hope and humanity.

Especially if it does.

Embodied Practice

Clear one small space today — a corner, a table, a chair.

Not perfectly.

Just intentionally.

As you do, pray:

“Lord, I make room for You — here and in me.”

Small room. Big King. Same miracle.

Prayer

Jesus, You chose the manger.

Not status — presence.

Not luxury — love.

Teach me to value what You value.

To welcome You without pretense,

to stop waiting until I feel “ready,”

and to trust that You enter humble places by choice.

Make room in me, Lord.

Even if it looks like straw.

Amen.

Reflection Question

What humble place in my life might God want to fill with His presence?

DAY 13 — “NO ROOM”: THE GOD WHO KNOCKS ANYWAY

“...there was no room for them in the inn.”
— Luke 2:7

Every nativity scene has that little innkeeper in our imagination — arms crossed, shaking his head, pointing somewhere behind him like,
“Stable’s that way; try not to step in anything.”

But let’s be real:

We’re the innkeeper more often than we’d like to admit.
Not malicious. Not hostile. Just... full.

Schedules packed, hearts crowded, emotions preoccupied, souls cluttered, notifications chirping like caffeinated sparrows.
Not rejecting Jesus —
just *busy*.

Holy things rarely get blocked by rebellion.
They get squeezed out by **hurry**.

And yet — here’s the wonder:
God doesn’t storm the inn.
He doesn’t shame.
He doesn’t fire off a celestial Yelp review.
He quietly finds another way in.
He doesn’t demand room —
He looks for willingness.

Grace doesn’t quit because the door is closed.
It finds the back entrance, the side door, the awkward space where nobody expected glory to land —
and settles there.

If your heart feels crowded, overrun, stretched thin like a holiday budget —

you're not disqualified.

Jesus is startlingly good at being born in inconvenient places.

Spiritual renewal doesn't always start with us managing life better;

sometimes it begins with us sighing deeply and saying,

"Lord... I don't have much room.

But what I have, You can have."

The inn was full —

but the stable was available.

And God always does His best work in the places we never thought were sacred enough.

Embodied Practice

Take **five minutes** today to clear space — not externally, but internally.

Turn off your phone. Sit.

Breathe once, slowly.

Pray simply: "Lord, here I am. I have room for You."

Even if that room feels small and a bit messy.

Prayer

Jesus, I confess — my life gets crowded.

So many good things steal space from the best thing: You.

Thank You that You don't stop knocking,

don't shame my limits,

and don't require perfection — just room.

Make space in me again.

Even if it's small, even if it's humble,

it's Yours. Amen.

Reflection Question

What needs to be cleared or simplified in my heart to make room for Jesus this season?

DAY 14 — SHEPHERDS FIRST: GOD'S FAVORITE NOBODIES

"The shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go... and see this thing that has happened.'"

— Luke 2:15

If you were announcing the Savior of the world, who would you tell first?

Influencers?

Kings?

Priests & scholars?

At least someone with a LinkedIn profile?

God chose... shepherds.

Night shift workers.

Unimportant, unpolished, unbothered by prestige.

People who smelled like outdoors, campfire smoke, and sheep breath.

They weren't networking.

They weren't preparing résumés for spiritual leadership positions.

They were just doing their regular, quiet, faithful work when **heaven exploded over their heads.**

Angels didn't visit Caesar.

They visited guys wearing scratchy wool and carrying sticks.

Why?

Because God always moves toward the humble faster than He moves toward the exalted.

He is allergic to arrogance and magnetically drawn to the overlooked.

The first people to hear "good news of great joy" had dirt under their fingernails and zero social clout.

They weren't trying to be amazing — just present and available.

And they *went*.

They didn't overthink. They didn't debate theology.

They didn't check if they were worthy enough.

They just said: "Let's go see Jesus."

Sometimes the greatest act of faith is simply **showing up to where God is moving.**

If you've ever felt unseen, unimpressive, or overlooked — good news:

You are exactly the kind of person heaven hands invitations to.

The Incarnation doesn't enter VIP rooms first.

It sneaks into fields, into quiet jobs, into the kind of lives no one live-streams.

The Kingdom starts low so it can reach high.

And it starts with nobodies so nobody ever gets to brag.

Embodied Practice

Notice someone today who may feel invisible:

a barista, custodian, cashier, delivery person, caregiver, co-worker, neighbor, teen, elder, or quiet kid on the edge.

Honor them. Smile. Thank them. Say their name if you know it.

See them. Whisper in your heart: "*Shepherds first.*"

Prayer

Lord, thank You for loving the unseen ones.

For valuing presence over polish, humility over hype.

Make my heart like the shepherds' —

awake to wonder, quick to move when You call,

unconcerned with status, delighted to simply be near Jesus.

May I see those the world overlooks, because You always have.

Amen.

Reflection Question

Who around me might feel overlooked — and how can I honor them like God does?



PART III

WE SHOW UP TOO

God moved toward us — now we move toward others, socks on and hearts open.

Incarnation is invitation.

The God who came near now sends us near —
to rooms we'd rather avoid, to hearts that need
tenderness,
to ordinary moments bursting with divine possibility.
We do not save the world; we simply show up like
the One who did.

Prayer:

Lord, make our love tangible.
Give us courage to be present, patient,
interruptible, and kind.
Let our presence carry Your peace and our steps
echo Your compassion.
Amen.

DAY 15 — SENT ONES: AS HE CAME, WE GO

“As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you.”

— John 20:21

Jesus didn’t just arrive.

He *arrived on mission*.

He wasn’t wandering Bethlehem like,

“Well... here I am. Anybody need a miracle? Anyone want to chat theology by the sheep pen?”

He came with purpose:

to draw near, to heal, to love, to redeem, to restore.

And then — in a move both thrilling and terrifying —

He hands that mission to us.

“As the Father sent Me, I’m sending you.”

Meaning:

As I showed up, you show up.

As I loved, you love.

As I made room, you make room.

As I walked into broken spaces, you walk into them too.

Jesus did not call us to admire Him from afar;

He called us to **embody Him up close**.

This isn’t “be Jesus” — that’s above your pay grade.

But it *is*

carry Jesus, reveal Jesus, remind the world what He’s like.

Not through grand gestures, but daily presence.

You weren’t saved to sit; you were saved to *show up*.

There is someone in your life right now who doesn’t need your brilliance, your advice, or your theological chart.

They need your **with-ness**.

Your presence. Your listening.

Your patience. Your steady.

Your “I see you” and “you matter.”

The Incarnation didn't end in Bethlehem.

It continues wherever His people show up full of His Spirit.

In kitchens and cubicles, hospital waiting rooms and school pickup lines, quiet text threads and late-night front porch conversations.

Christ is still showing up —

in us.

And sometimes the most heroic thing you'll do in the Kingdom of God today

is get off the couch and choose to love someone on purpose.

Be the presence you long for.

Be the arrival someone is praying for.

Because Jesus didn't just come to us —

He is still coming through us.

Embodied Practice

Ask God:

"Who needs me to show up today?"

Then do one small, concrete thing:

- A text of encouragement
- A voice memo prayer
- A moment of eye contact and genuine attention

Show up *somewhere* today.

Doesn't have to be dramatic.

Just faithful.

Prayer

Jesus, You came for me —

now send me for others.

Make me attentive to needs, gentle with hearts,

and bold enough to step toward people, not away from them.

Let my presence carry Your peace,

and may someone feel seen today

because You live in me. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where is Jesus sending me today — even in a small, ordinary way?

DAY 16 — THE MINISTRY OF SHOWING UP

“Do your best to come to me quickly.”

— 2 Timothy 4:9

When Paul was weary, discouraged, and near the end,
he didn't ask Timothy for a sermon outline,
a powerful prayer,
or a list of inspirational quotes.

He said, basically:

“Please... just get here.”

Even apostles need warm bodies in the room.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is show up —
no answers, no agenda, no cape, no brilliance — just **you**.

We tend to think Kingdom impact lives in:

- impressive words
- solved problems
- dazzling faith

But more often, the Kingdom shows up in:

- chairs pulled close
- hands held
- “you're not alone” spoken without saying a word

Jesus healed with words sometimes...

but He also healed just by being there,

touching lepers,

eating with sinners,

lingering with the lonely.

Showing up isn't glamorous.

It won't trend.

Nobody gives trophies for quiet presence.

But the devil fears Christians who refuse to abandon people in pain.

You don't need a degree in counseling;
you just need a heart stubborn enough to sit and stay.
When we show up, we echo Bethlehem:

God arrived — so I arrive too.

And here's the miracle:
every time you show up to love someone,
Jesus shows up again in you.
Incarnation, round two.

Embodied Practice

Ask yourself: Who might feel alone today?

Then do one simple act of presence:

- Sit with someone
- Call instead of text
- Visit someone discouraged
- Go to the funeral, the hospital room, the kitchen table
- Drive over. Knock. Be there.

You don't need magic words.

Just be a warm body with a warm heart.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for showing up for me —
not just once in Bethlehem,
but again and again in ordinary moments.
Make me a person who arrives,
who stays,
who listens,
who doesn't flinch at pain or hurry past hearts.
Wherever I go today,
go in me. Amen.

Reflection Question

Who needs my presence more than my advice?

DAY 17 — LISTENING LIKE JESUS

“Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding...”
— Luke 2:47

Jesus didn’t just preach brilliantly.

He *listened* brilliantly.

Before Jesus taught in the Temple at age twelve,

He sat among the teachers,

listening and asking questions.

Imagine that —

the omniscient God of the universe

leaning in, nodding slowly, saying, “Tell me more.”

He didn’t bulldoze conversation.

He dignified it.

He didn’t rush to correct.

He cared enough to understand.

We often think speaking well is a sign of wisdom.

But in Scripture, **listening well reveals wisdom** even more.

Anyone can talk. Only love listens.

Most people don’t need a problem solver — they need a witness.

Someone to sit in the experience with them

instead of fixing it from a distance.

Jesus listened to the Father.

He listened to the hurting.

He listened to the desperate.

He listened to people others had already dismissed.

He listened with His whole presence —

not planning His rebuttal,

not scanning for exit doors,

not multitasking,

but *entering their world for a moment.*

Listening is incarnation practice.

It is saying with your ears:

“You matter. I’m here. I’m not in a hurry.”

And sometimes the most healing phrase you’ll ever speak is silence wrapped in warmth.

God gave us two ears and one mouth —
not because we needed a math lesson,
but because presence begins with attention.
In a world screaming for attention,
be someone who gives it.

Embodied Practice

Have one conversation today where you:

- put your phone face-down,
- resist interrupting,
- ask gentle questions, and
- let silence breathe without panicking.

Simple prompts: “How are you, really?”

“What’s the hardest part right now?”

“Tell me more.”

Listen like you're holding something precious — because you are.

Prayer

Lord, tune my ears like Yours.

Slow my tongue, soften my heart, sharpen my attention.

Make me curious instead of judgmental,
patient instead of hurried,
present instead of distracted.

Let someone feel seen today —

not because I said the perfect thing,

but because I stayed long enough to hear their heart. Amen.

Reflection Question

Who is God calling me to listen to with patience and tenderness?

DAY 18 — TOUCH, TEARS & TABLE

“Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man...”

— Matthew 8:3

“Jesus wept.”

— John 11:35

“While they were eating...”

— Luke 22:14

Jesus didn’t love from afar.

He loved **up close**. He touched lepers.

He cried with friends. He ate meals at messy tables.

This is Incarnation 101 —

love with **skin, tears, and forks**.

He could have healed from the clouds.

He could have comforted via cosmic newsletter.

He could have said, “I’ll pray for you” and teleported away.

Instead:

He *touched* the untouchable.

He *wept* with the grieving.

He *ate* with the outcast.

His ministry often looked like:

- A hand on a shoulder
- A tear shared instead of avoided
- A seat pulled up at a table already crowded

Jesus wasn’t trying to stay dignified.

He was trying to stay near.

In a world addicted to distance — emotional, physical, digital —

Jesus reminds us that love requires showing up in 3-D.

You don’t have to be profound to be Christlike.

Sometimes following Jesus is as simple as:

- Patting a back someone thought nobody cared about
- Letting your eyes water when theirs do
- Passing the bread before passing judgment
- Laughing loudly because joy is holy too

Incarnation didn't happen in theory —
it happened in *touch*.

In *tears*.

At *tables*.

God shared our humanity so we would share His heart.

The world won't be saved by clever Christians.

It will be healed by **present ones**.

Hands that bless.

Hearts that break.

Tables that welcome.

This is the gospel — with fingerprints.

Embodied Practice

Pick one today:

- Offer a comforting touch (shoulder, handshake, hug)
- Cry *with* someone instead of fixing them
- Eat deliberately with another person — no rushing, no phones
- Invite someone to your table (or share a coffee if that's the current capacity!)

Whichever you choose, do it with warmth and slowness.

Let your presence preach.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for loving in the flesh —

for touching the unclean,

for weeping without shame,

for sharing tables instead of thrones.

Make me tender.

Make me present.

Make my love interruptible, embodied, real.

Let my hands comfort,

my tears honor,

and my table welcome.

Amen.

Reflection Question

Who needs comfort, presence, or a seat at my table this week?

DAY 19 — INTERRUPTIONS: HEAVEN IN DISGUISE

“But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’”

— Luke 10:29

Most of Jesus’ miracles didn’t happen on His schedule.

They happened on His **way to do something else**.

On the way to Jairus’ house — a bleeding woman grabs His robe.

On the way through Jericho — a blind man yells His name.

Trying to teach — ceiling tiles break and friends lower a paralyzed man in.

Trying to rest — crowds show up hungry and whiny.

Jesus’ life was basically a holy parade of “*Well, that wasn’t the plan...*” moments.

And here’s the wonder:

He didn’t treat interruptions like obstacles.

He treated them like **assignments**.

We often pray,

“Lord, use me!”

And then life says,

“Here’s a person who needs you right now,”

and we reply,

“Not like that. I meant later. When I have margin. Ideally after a latte.”

We want purpose without inconvenience.

But love rarely schedules itself.

The Samaritan in Jesus’ story wasn’t planning to be a hero that day.

He was planning to get from Point A to Point B without dying in the desert.

But compassion rerouted him — and history remembers his detour.

Interruptions aren't interruptions.
They're **invitations**.

Little Bethlehem moments tucked inside the ordinary:
the coworker who lingers in your doorway,
the child who wants to tell you a story for the 9,000th time,
the stranger who looks more tired than you're willing to admit,
the text you "don't have time" to answer today,
the ache in someone's voice you almost rushed past.

Sometimes the person you think is slowing you down
is the person God sent to speed up your becoming.
Jesus never missed a divine appointment because it arrived
disguised as inconvenience.
Neither should we.

Embodied Practice

Today, **welcome one interruption** as holy instead of annoying.
It can be tiny — a pause to listen, a moment to help,
choosing patience instead of hurry,
or simply putting your phone down when someone speaks.
When you feel the urge to rush, try praying:
"Lord, this pause may be Your purpose."

Prayer

Jesus, interrupt me —
and make me more like You in the pause.
Give me eyes to see people,
ears to hear need,
and a heart that trusts Your timing
more than my plans.
Turn inconveniences into holy encounters,
and make my agenda flexible enough to let love lead. Amen.

Reflection Question

What interruption today might actually be an invitation?

DAY 20 — THE INCONVENIENCE OF LOVE

“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...”
— Mark 10:45

Love sounds poetic until it interrupts your plans.
We love the *idea* of love —
gentle, glowy, Instagram-filtered compassion with worship music in the background.

Then real life strolls in like:
“Hey, I spilled my emotional cereal everywhere — can you help clean this up right now?”

And suddenly love looks less like a Hallmark movie
and more like tired eyes, rearranged plans, and “Well... so much for my evening.”

Jesus didn’t come to earth because it was convenient.
He didn’t wrap Himself in skin because He had nothing better to do.
He didn’t endure hunger, crowds, children sticky with fig juice, and disciples who constantly asked the wrong questions because His calendar had openings.
Love brought Him here.
Love kept Him here.
Love moved Him — repeatedly — into situations none of us would voluntarily join without caffeine and divine intervention.
Incarnation is the ultimate proof that love shows up **even when it's wildly inconvenient.**

And in our lives, it usually means this:
Showing up when you'd rather check out
Listening when you're tired
Helping when no one sees
Holding your tongue when irritation tap-dances on your nerves
Reaching out first, even if you didn't withdraw first
Loving someone who doesn't make it easy today (bless them... truly)

Spiritual maturity is not measured by how well we plan to love —
but how willing we are to love **when plans change**.

When love costs you time, comfort, energy, ego...

that's usually when love actually becomes love.

Bethlehem wasn't convenient.

Neither was Calvary.

Jesus never once said, "This really works for my schedule."

He simply said,

"I am here for you."

And that changes everything.

Embodied Practice

Say yes to one small, inconvenient act of love today:

- Pause when someone needs attention
- Offer help without being asked
- Respond with patience instead of irritation
- Let someone else go first (parking spot, grocery line, etc.)
- Give up control in a conversation (breathe... breathe...)

When it annoys you, smile quietly and remember:

This is holy ground disguised as inconvenience.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,

thank You for loving me when it cost You everything.

Teach me the holy art of inconvenience —

to serve without grumbling,

to show up without fanfare,

to love even when it stretches me.

Make my interruptions sacred,

my sacrifices joyful,

and my heart willing.

I don't just want to admire Your love —

I want to live it.

Amen.

Reflection Question

Where can I choose love over comfort, even if it costs me a little?

DAY 21 — STAY LITTLE, STAY LOW

“Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”
— James 4:10

Incarnation wasn't God going undercover.
It was God going **downward** — on purpose.
He could've come towering and thundering,
arriving like,
“Hi yes, I'm here to fix everything, please form a line
alphabetically and bring snacks.”
Instead, He came tiny.
Fragile.
Dependent on teenage parents and borrowed space.

Christ did not shrink Himself because He had to.
He shrank Himself because **love chooses low places**.
We live in a world allergic to smallness.
We want big platforms, big moments, big purpose, big visibility.

Meanwhile, Heaven keeps whispering,
“Lower... smaller... quieter. That's where the good stuff happens.”
Humility isn't thinking less of yourself —
it's thinking of yourself *less often*.
It's choosing:

- Presence over prominence
- Faithfulness over fame
- Quiet obedience over loud posturing

It's remembering that the first throne Christ laid on was a manger,
and the last one was a cross.
In God's Kingdom, the way up is always down.
And before you panic — no, humility doesn't mean becoming a
doormat or playing small out of insecurity.
It means confidence rooted in God,
not performance rooted in you.

It means not needing to be the main character,
because you trust the Author.
It means being interruptible, blessable, leadable.

And yes — kneeling might burn the thighs,
but it strengthens the soul.
Humility isn't weakness.
It's the spiritual strength training that makes Heaven applaud.

Jesus became small so we could become whole.
So take heart —you don't have to be impressive today.
Just faithful. Just present.
Just low enough for Jesus to lift you.

Embodied Practice

Do one humble act today without angling for credit:

- Let someone else speak first
- Clean something nobody sees
- Choose kindness instead of cleverness

Let smallness feel sacred, not shameful.

Prayer

Jesus, You chose smallness.
You chose hiddenness. You chose downward love.
Make my heart like Yours —
content to be unseen when necessary,
joyful to serve without applause,
willing to kneel so others can rise.
Lift me in Your time, Your way —
but until then, keep me low, keep me kind,
and keep me like You. Amen.

Reflection Question

How might humility look in one specific relationship or moment today?



PART IV

MAKE ROOM, MAKE HOME

He tabernacled in us — now we tabernacle in the world.

Bethlehem wasn't ready, but it was visited.

Glory came where there was space — even humble, even noisy, even unexpected.

Advent ends with invitation:

not to perfect our hearts, but to open them.

Christ comes where He is welcomed.

Prayer:

Jesus, we make room for You.

Expand our hearts, soften our homes, widen our welcome.

Dwell in us and through us,

until love feels at home in every corner of our lives.

Amen.

DAY 22 — CHRIST IN YOU (HE DIDN'T JUST VISIT)

"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

— Colossians 1:27

It would have been enough — more than enough — for Jesus to come to us.

To walk our roads. To breathe our air. To sit at our tables.

But God doesn't stop at **with**.

He goes all the way to **within**.

Not God near you.

Not God around you.

God in you.

We don't just admire the Incarnation.

We **become locations of it**.

That's wild.

You woke up this morning a walking sanctuary — even if you also woke up with bedhead, crusty eyes, and morning breath that could stun a small farm animal.

He knew exactly who He was moving into — and He still said yes.

God didn't just check into the Bethlehem Inn;

He took up residence in the human heart.

Not because we're impressive —

but because He's merciful.

Not because we always feel holy —

but because He *is* holy and He loves to live where love is still learning.

He doesn't rent space in your life.

He owns the deed.

He's not a visitor — He's a **resident Redeemer**.

And here's the quiet mystery:

Christ in you isn't a feeling — it's a fact.

Even on the days you feel like a spiritual cardboard box with duct tape on the corners.

He is in you in weakness. In doubt.

In laundry-folding Tuesdays and traffic-jammed Thursdays.

In the school pickup line, the work Zoom call, the late-night kitchen prayers.

And because He is in you,

hope is never somewhere else.

It's already here — glowing quietly inside you like a candle God refuses to let go out.

God didn't just come to earth;

He came to **stay in you.**

The world doesn't need perfect Christians.

It needs *occupied ones*.

Embodied Practice

Find a quiet moment today — even one minute. Put your hand over your chest and pray: “Christ, thank You for dwelling in me. Live through me today.”

Then go do something ordinary — and let it become sacred because He goes with you.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for moving in,
for choosing my heart as Your home,
for loving me from the inside out.

Let Your life animate mine.

Let Your peace govern me, Your love shape me,
Your presence steady me.

Wherever I go today, go in me. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where do I forget that Christ lives in me — and how would living from that truth change today?

DAY 23 — ABIDE & BEAR FRUIT (NO VINE, NO WINE)

“Abide in me, and I in you... Apart from me you can do nothing.”
— John 15:4–5

Jesus did not say,
“Work harder and impress Me.”
He said, **“Stay close and I’ll grow you.”**

Christianity isn’t a performance — it’s a **connection**.

Fruit doesn’t strain and grunt and shout,
“Watch this, everybody, I’m about to produce some grapes!”
Grapes just... happen
when the branch stays plugged into the vine.
Meanwhile we’re over here
sweating, striving, setting spiritual New Year’s resolutions,
wondering why holiness feels like trying to run a marathon in church shoes.

Jesus has a simpler plan:
Stay with Me. Stay near Me. Stay aware of Me.
Abide — a word that sounds gentle, slow, rooted, patient.
Which is inconvenient, because we are people who like efficiency,
speed, and measurable progress.

But vine-time isn’t clock-time.
God isn’t building machines —
He’s growing gardens.
And gardens take time, sunlight, storms, pruning, patience...
and more patience...
and occasionally someone standing there saying,
“Anything happening? Any change?
Lord, I swear if this is another character-building season...”
Yet fruit comes.
Not through hustle, but **through staying**.

Abiding looks like:

- Returning to Jesus again and again
- Letting Him steady your anxious brain
- Choosing prayer before panic
- Reading Scripture like bread, not like homework
- Sitting with Him, even when you don't feel anything
- Trusting that roots grow in the quiet

Jesus never asked you to be spectacular.

He asked you to be **connected**.

No vine, no wine.

But with the vine?

Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness.

Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control.

All the things you've been trying so hard to manufacture.

Abide, beloved.

He'll handle the fruit.

Embodied Practice

Choose one simple abiding act today:

- Sit with Jesus for 5 quiet minutes
- Read a psalm slowly
- Whisper "I'm with You, Lord" during your day

Roots before results. Presence before productivity.

Prayer

Jesus, keep me close.

Not busy for You — present with You.

Teach me to rest, to trust, to remain,
to sink my roots deep into Your love.

Grow in me what I can't grow on my own.

Make my life fruit I could never manufacture —
fruit only You can produce. Amen.

Reflection Question

What helps me stay close to Jesus — and what pulls me away?

DAY 24 — MAKE ROOM

“Do not neglect to show hospitality...”

— Hebrews 13:2

The night before Christmas is famously busy —
lists, wrapping paper, last-minute grocery runs, hunting for tape
like it's the Holy Grail.

Chaos with twinkle lights.

But if the Incarnation teaches us anything,
it's this simple, stubborn truth:
God comes where He's welcomed.

He didn't choose the palace.

He chose the place that had space.

Not perfect space.

Just available space.

The spiritual life isn't mostly about competence.

It's about *capacity*.

The ones most likely to encounter Jesus?

Not the most religious.

Not the most organized.

Not the most impressive.

The most **open**.

Hospitality in the Kingdom isn't Pinterest tablescapes and
seasonal centerpieces.

It's “Here I am, Lord — and there's room for You here.”

It's also,

“There's room for people here — even if they chew loudly and ask
awkward questions.”

Making room means:

- Room in your schedule for a human interruption
- Room in your attention for someone else's story
- Room in your pride to ask forgiveness
- Room in your budget to bless
- Room in your spirit for God to surprise you

Spiritual maturity looks less like "I have everything figured out" and more like "I've saved You a seat."

The world gets loud. Our hearts get crowded.

Life becomes a full inn faster than we realize.

Tonight, on the edge of glory breaking in again,
we practice Bethlehem hospitality.

We say to God — and to real, messy humans He loves:

"There's room."

Even if it's just a corner. Even if it's humble.

Even if it's hay-covered. He can make a throne out of straw.

Embodied Practice

Do one small act of hospitality today:

- Light a candle and pray, "Come, Lord Jesus"
- Text or call someone who might feel alone tonight
- Offer warmth — a smile, a seat, a listening ear

You don't need perfection. You need **welcome**.

Prayer

Jesus, make my heart a manger.

Simple, available, open.

Teach me to welcome You without performance,
to welcome others without fear,
and to see holiness in humble places.

Fill what little room I offer — and turn it into glory. Amen.

Reflection Question

Who — or what — do I need to welcome with fresh hospitality?

DAY 25 — THE KING HAS COME (AND HE STILL COMES)

“For unto you is born this day... a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”

— Luke 2:11

Look around.

Lights glowing. Voices laughing. Wrapping paper chaos.

Cinnamon in the air. Joy peeking out even in tired corners of the heart.

He came.

Not as a concept.

Not as a theory.

Not as a mood or a moral lesson.

As a **Person**.

A squirmy, warm, wrinkled baby with lungs full of God and milk breath on His lips.

The angels didn't sing for a philosophy.

They sang for a **Birth**.

The world wasn't changed by inspiration.

It was changed by **Incarnation**.

Jesus didn't just bring salvation —

He *is* salvation, bundled and breathing and swallowing the universe in miniature.

And here is the mystery so tender it can melt even grief's hardest edge:

He didn't stop coming.

Bethlehem was only the first knock.

He comes again and again:

- In ordinary mornings and messy kitchens
- In worship so humble you can barely whisper the words
- In your little acts of love and faith
- In quiet courage
- In forgiveness breathed through clenched teeth
- In choosing kindness when nobody claps
- In every moment you say “yes” again to being His

Christ was born in flesh —
and is born again in hearts that welcome Him.
He is Emmanuel not once, but always:
God with us. God in us. God for us.

Christmas isn't merely remembering His arrival.
It is **receiving Him again.**
So breathe. Smile.
Let hope get loud inside you.
Christ has come — and Christ still comes.

Merry Christmas.
Glory has entered the room.
And if you sit still long enough,
you may just feel the earth hum with it.

Embodied Practice

Sometime today — before gifts, after meals, in a quiet corner, or while the house finally rests — pause. Place your hand over your heart and whisper: “Welcome, Jesus. Be born in me again today.”
Then look around — someone near you needs the love you’ve received.
Give it freely. Jesus is here, and you carry Him now.

Prayer

Jesus, child of glory, King in straw,
Savior with tiny fingers and eternal power — thank You for coming.
Thank You for staying.
Thank You that today isn't just memory —
it's mercy. It's miracle. It's You.
Fill me fresh.
Live in me, live through me, and let my life sing like angels over fields:
Christ is born.
Christ is here.
Christ will come again. Amen.

Reflection Question

Where have I seen Jesus come close this season — and how can I share that joy with someone else?

EPILOGUE PRAYER - LET CHRISTMAS STAY

Jesus,
Child in straw,
Savior on a cross,
King who conquered death with love instead of force —
thank You.

Thank You for coming — really coming —
not as an idea, not as a memory,
but as Presence, as Person,
as God-who-walks-with-us still.

We have followed the star,
held silence,
waited in longing,
felt the ache and the joy,
and we have knelt again at the manger.

Let what You stirred in us here
not fade like wrapping paper and calendar pages.
Teach us to carry Christmas
into the dull days,
the heavy days,
the quiet Tuesdays in February
and the complicated Thursdays in June.

Let the humility of Your birth
shape our pride.
Let Your joy
interrupt our cynicism.
Let Your nearness
slow our hurried hearts.
Let Your tenderness
soften our edges.

Let Your presence
anchor us when storms come —
and they will come.
But so will You.

You always do.
You came once.
You come now.
You will come again.

So keep us attentive,
keep us alert,
keep us awake to wonder.

Make our lives small mangers —
places You are pleased to dwell,
rooms where weary souls can find rest,
tables where sinners and saints sit side by side
under the warmth of Your grace.
As we leave this holy season,
don't let us leave **You**.

Stay in us.
Shine through us.
Lead us forward into the life ahead —
with courage, joy, patience, and praise.
And may we walk each ordinary day
with the quiet miracle of knowing:
Christ has come.
Christ is here.
Christ will come again.
Let Christmas linger in us, Lord —
until all the world feels it.
Amen.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jay Simmons is a husband, father, pastor, and soul-care companion learning to follow Jesus by becoming deeply present to God and people. Formed by years in ministry and shaped by both sorrow and resurrection hope, he walks with individuals, families, and leaders as they practice the sacred art of incarnational love—being with God, and with one another, in real life.

Jay believes the gospel is not only proclaimed but embodied; not merely studied, but lived; not loud, but faithful. He is convinced that small acts of presence, kindness, and courage ripple farther than we see. He writes and serves to remind weary hearts that Emmanuel still means God-with-us—here, now, always.

See more at www.thewaysoulcare.com