Reach

DRAW NEAR

Drawn by Jesus' Presence.
Changed by His Love.

25-DAY ADVENT
PRAYER DEVOTIONAL

BY crossroads.

Reach Magazine
BY crossroads.

CHRISTMAS EDITION

2026 • VOL. 8, ISSUE 2
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PUBLISHER
CROSSROADS CHRISTIAN COMMUNICATIONS INC.

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Draw Near

Advent invites us to slow down and remember the wonder at the heart of Christmas: **Jesus came near**. God did not remain distant. He entered our world, shared our humanity, and made His love known to us through His Son.

This 25-day Advent journey brings together pastors and ministry leaders from churches across Canada who have partnered with Crossroads through **Anyone Pray,** helping bring more prayer, care, and outreach to their communities. We are grateful for their faithful leadership and for the many ways they are creating opportunities for people to encounter the hope of Jesus.

In these pages, they share personal reflections on prayer, faith, and drawing near to God. And as we draw near to Jesus, we are reminded that His love is never meant to stop with us. **His presence shapes us and moves us toward others:** to listen, pray, welcome, encourage, and make room.

Each day includes Scripture, a prayer, and simple invitations to **ponder, pray, and act.**

This Advent, may we draw near to Jesus and extend His love, becoming a light of hope to the people He has placed around us.

Come Close

"Come near to God and He will come near to you."

– James 4:8

There have been a few seasons in my life when I've felt lonely—not alone, but lonely. I longed for a close friend, a soul sister who could meet me in that season and journey alongside me.

The first time, I brought that longing to the Lord and asked Him to provide. What I didn't know was that He had already answered. The very next day, a new classmate arrived at school, and we quickly connected through our shared heart for worship. She became the soul sister I had prayed for, and today, she and her family lead missionary teams around the world.

Years later, during COVID, I felt that same longing. I was on maternity leave, navigating early motherhood in a season when people simply weren't connecting. Who would journey through this season with me?

One morning, on my way to the park, I prayed and asked God again for a friend. Within minutes, He answered—but not as I expected. I met a neighbour who was just as eager for friendship as I was. Our daughters were only weeks apart in age, and she quickly became a close friend—a soul sister in a new way.

My friend and her family don't know Jesus. The closer we've become, the more I've found myself praying for them—and those prayers have drawn me closer to God too. As I bring them before Him, I find myself depending on Him more, listening for His leading, and sharing more deeply in His heart for them.

Prayer changes things. Sometimes the first thing it changes is us. It reminds me that God hears, God is near, and He is at work in ways I may not yet see.

When I think that our girls may share decades of friendship, I wonder what God might do in all of us through years of simply loving, praying, and trusting Him. The more I've come to love them, the more I long for them to experience the hope and closeness I've found in Jesus. I pray the Holy Spirit will guide us as we bear witness, shaping our lives into a warm light of hope that, like the star at Christmas, points them toward Jesus.

This Advent, as we draw near to Jesus, may His heart shape ours—drawing us closer to Him and moving us toward those who are far from Him.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for drawing near. Draw me closer to You and give me Your heart for those who don't yet know You. Amen.

AMY LAFORET, Director of Marketing & Communications, Crossroads, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder:
Where are you feeling lonely or longing for connection?

Pray:
Invite Jesus into that place and ask Him to draw you close.

Action:
Think of one person who may feel far from God, and reach out with simple kindness this week.





Close in the Brokenness

"The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

– Psalm 34:18

Whenever ministry got a little wild, my first lead pastor and mentor would say, "Where else can you have this much fun?" It reminded me that situations we don't know how to handle are often where we watch God do what only He can do.

A few years ago, a woman rang the church doorbell wearing a baseball cap pulled over her eyes. She asked if we had any food. Normally, we wouldn't have, but there were leftovers from a meeting the night before. We gave her food, a gift card, and invited her to church that Sunday.

I didn't know if we would see her again, but that Sunday, she walked through the doors wearing the same baseball cap. Months passed, and she rarely missed a Sunday.

When we discovered she had been stealing from the church, we knew we needed to talk with her. Where else can you have this much fun? We filled a backpack with some of the items she had been taking and told her, "You're part of our church family, and family doesn't steal from family. But we know you need these things. When you need them, tell us."

She became emotional and left quickly. But the following Sunday, she came back and told my executive assistant, "Thank you for not kicking me out of the church for stealing."

She kept coming. Slowly, the baseball cap disappeared. One Sunday at a church potluck, she had changed so much that I didn't recognize her until she turned and smiled at me. Today, she is addiction-free, has a job, and is no longer homeless. She will tell you herself: God changed her life. Psalm 34 doesn't tell us that God watches the brokenhearted from a distance. He draws near.

And isn't that the story of Advent? God didn't wait for us to clean ourselves up or become worthy of His presence. He came to us in our brokenness. Jesus stepped into the mess of our world and became Immanuel—God with us. Because God draws near to us in our pain, we are called to draw near to someone else in theirs.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for drawing near when we are broken. Help us receive Your love and draw near to someone who needs it today. Amen.

MARK QUINLAN, Lead Pastor, New Life Church, Brantford, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Where have you seen God work in a messy situation?

Pray: Thank God for meeting you in your brokenness.

Action: Watch for God at work in a situation you can't fix.



Honest Prayer

"Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge."

– Psalm 62:8

I like to fix things. When there is a problem, my instinct is often to figure out what needs to happen next. I am a problem solver. I like to have a plan, have the conversation, find the solution, and move forward.

There is value in being responsible and taking action, but I'm learning that sometimes my desire to fix things can get in the way of surrendering them.

Prayer can become another place where I bring God my plan rather than honestly bring Him my heart. Psalm 62 gives us a different invitation: *"Pour out your hearts to him."*

Not the polished version or the situation after we've figured out how we want God to resolve it. Our honest, heartfelt feelings, emotions, and thoughts. These are our prayers.

Honest prayer sounds like, "God, I don't know what to do." "I'm disappointed." "I'm worried about this person." "I thought things would turn out differently." "I need You."

There is something freeing about remembering that God already knows. We aren't giving Him new information when we tell Him we're afraid, frustrated, disappointed, or tired. We are simply opening our hands and surrendering what we have been trying to carry ourselves. And perhaps that is part of what it means to draw near.

At Christmas, we remember that Jesus drew near to us. He entered the messiness and vulnerability of our humanity. We don't have to clean ourselves up before coming close to Him. We can come as we are.

Today, resist the urge to fix everything. Pour out your honest, messy, still-in-progress heart instead. Tell God what is really going on beneath the surface and then leave it in His hands. Sometimes the most honest prayer is also the simplest: "Jesus, I can't carry this. I need You."

PRAYER

Jesus, You already know what I am carrying today. Help me release my need to control the outcome and honestly surrender it to You. Teach me to trust You with what I cannot fix. Amen.

MELISSA MCEACHERN, Chief Operating Officer & Chief Content Officer, Crossroads & YES TV, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What are you still trying to fix or control?

Pray: Tell God honestly what is beneath the surface.

Action: Ask someone, "How are you really doing?" Then simply listen without trying to fix it.



Quieting the Noise

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

– Philippians 4:6–7

Have you ever felt like things are coming at you so quickly that it's as if you cannot even hear your own thoughts? Children with their deeply philosophical questions, music in the background, oven timers sounding, noisy toys, your spouse wondering where an item is. It can be so challenging to actually have a single moment where you're able to consider your own thoughts, let alone God's, when faced with responding to everything that is coming at you. These noisy times can feel like "information overload."

I wonder, did Mary and Joseph ever feel as though they were experiencing "information overload"? Mary received a life-changing message from the angel Gabriel (Luke 1:26–38), while Joseph was visited by an angel in a dream (Matthew 1:20–21). Then came the journey to Bethlehem, the census, and all the uncertainty surrounding the birth of Jesus. There must have been so much to take in.

The weeks leading up to Christmas can feel exceptionally full, making it difficult to quiet our minds or hear God's voice above the noise. The apostle Paul reminds us to bring our anxious thoughts to God in prayer and receive His peace (Philippians 4:6–7).

When we bring the "information overload" of our thoughts to God in prayer, His peace calms our minds, slows our thoughts, and creates room in our minds to distinguish God's voice from the noise. It helps us to truly experience "Immanuel—God with us" in a very practical way by meeting our anxiety with the assurance of His overwhelming peace of heart and mind.

PRAYER

Lord, help me to entrust my anxious thoughts to You so that I may experience the peace of mind and heart that only You can give. Help me hear Your voice more clearly and encourage others to seek Your peace this Advent. Amen.

REV. LORRIE-ANNE MACLEOD, Lead Pastor, The Lighthouse Church, Elkford, BC

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Where do you need God's peace today?

Pray: Entrust your anxious thoughts to God.

Action: Be fully present with someone by listening, praying, and sharing God's peace.



A God Who Listens

"'The Lord has done this for me,' she said. 'In these days He has shown His favour and taken away my disgrace among the people.'"

– Luke 1:25

One December, while praying and fasting about my role, I felt the Lord confirm that it was time for me to step away. I then began seeking Him about what would come next. I sensed Him asking me to wait and trust that He would make the next step clear in His timing. Weeks went by before I heard anything.

Sometimes we put out a prayer and get an immediate answer; sometimes not. No matter the circumstance, God is always listening, and He cares. Even His silence can draw us closer. It causes us to lean in more to make sure we are listening, especially when we really need the answer. It is like turning down the noise in a crowded room so you can hear one voice more clearly. Waiting can cause us to lean in and listen more closely for God.

In this passage, we encounter the second act of a story that began earlier in Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:5–25). Zechariah and Elizabeth were beyond childbearing years when God promised them a son. Their story echoes Abraham and Sarah's, reminding us that throughout Scripture, God often works through long seasons of waiting to accomplish His purposes (Genesis 18:10–14; 21:1–2). After years of waiting, Elizabeth rejoiced as God answered in His perfect timing. Can you relate to a season of waiting for God to answer?

Elizabeth's story reminds us that God hears every prayer, even when the answer comes much later than we expect. His timing is always perfect, and His purposes are greater than we can see. John's birth was part of God's unfolding plan, as he would prepare the way for the long-awaited Messiah, Jesus (Luke 1:13–17, 76–79).

Unlike the gods of other religions, the God of the Bible invites us into a personal relationship with Him. He is not an inanimate object, an impersonal force, or someone we call on only when life is difficult. He is our loving Heavenly Father who hears us in every season of life. He invites us to bring our joys, disappointments, and questions to Him, trusting that He is listening and will answer according to His perfect wisdom and timing.

PRAYER

Jesus, my Redeemer, I trust Your timing. Amen.

THANH CAMPBELL, Executive Director, Canadian Christian Business Federation, Palmerston, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What have you been waiting to talk to God about?

Pray: Find a quiet place or take a walk and speak honestly with God.

Action: Be fully present with one person today. Listen without interrupting or trying to fix their problem.



Trusting God's Time

"But when the set time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship."

– Galatians 4:4–5

When my wife and I were expecting our first child, I remember the mix of excitement, nervousness, anticipation, longing, and hope, all at once.

According to the inerrant Internet, the mammal with the shortest pregnancy on Earth is the "stripe-faced dunnart" (look it up, it's real!), a mouse-like creature whose pregnancies last a mere 11 days.

God, in mercy and wisdom, doesn't drop babies on humans so abruptly. While nine months of waiting can feel like an eternity, it also gives expectant parents a gentle on-ramp to prepare for new life.

While eager, we don't want the baby to come too early. Too early is scary and can mean problems. Instead, we want the baby to come at the right time so there is enough time for full development.

Galatians 4:4–5 describes Jesus coming in "the fullness of time" (ESV). Is there a better word picture for a pregnant woman?

In the fullness of time, Christ was born—not too early, not too late, but at exactly the right moment in God's plan for the promise to come to pass.

The season of pregnancy is one of hopeful waiting—longing for the "fullness" moment when a child is born. This is true of every gift and promise of God. It awaits the fullness of His perfect time.

God's people are a patient people. Whether waiting for the Messiah to arrive the first time, or the second and final time, or whatever else you may be waiting on God for—Advent calls us to wait patiently in hope. Blessed are those who wait with Him.

PRAYER
Lord, grant me the grace and strength to wait in patience, trust, and hope, for the fullness of Your time to come to pass in my life. Amen.

CHRIS WALKER, Content Manager, Impactus Men's Ministry, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What are you waiting on God for?

Pray: Ask God for patience, trust, and hope as you wait for His perfect timing.

Action: Encourage someone who is waiting today. Remind them that God is at work, even when the answer has not yet come.



God in the Silence

"Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, [...] I will rejoice in the Lord; I will be joyful in God my Saviour. The Sovereign Lord is my strength."

– Habakkuk 3:17–19

I remember I was taking my kids to the church so they could play ping pong in the gym when I got the call. We had just moved to Chatham but were not able to move into our home yet, so the six of us were crowded into this student rental home that someone in the church allowed us to stay in. We had moved to a new town at the tail end of the COVID-19 crisis, and my brother and his family had been sick for about two weeks in the US. The illness hit my oldest brother the worst and he had been admitted into the hospital.

I knew he was not well, but I had everyone I knew praying; I was praying, and with those prayers I was confident that God would answer. He would come through for my brother, his family and for me. And yet on that Friday afternoon I received the call that would forever change our lives. My brother had died. My oldest child took the rest of my children to the church, and I stumbled up the stairs into the room of this house that was not my home. I sat down on the mattress which was on the floor and cried.

God did not answer the way I thought He should have. My brother had died. God had said no. God had been silent.

It is easy to follow and trust Christ when things are going well. The true test of our faith, however, comes when He says no. It is in those moments that we must decide how we will respond.

The Israelites were in captivity, and things were not going well. Crops were failing, food was scarce, survival was questionable, and it was during this moment that the prophet Habakkuk wrote that even if the worst happens, he would be joyful in God his Saviour.

The question is being asked today. Even if everything around us is going wrong, how will we respond? Will we choose to focus on what isn't right, or even in the silence, will we trust that God is our Saviour and choose joy?

PRAYER
Lord, regardless of what our circumstances say, help us to find our joy in You. Amen.

BECKY FITCH, Connections Pastor, Evangel Community Church, Chatham, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Will you trust God when His answer is "no" or "not yet"?

Pray: Ask God to help you find your joy in Him.

Action: Reach out to someone who may need hope this Advent.



Hope Rising

"And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope.' May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

– Romans 15:12–13

Sometimes all it takes is an aroma to bring back memories of Christmas seasons past. The smell of fresh baking does that for me. I remember my mother would make a Christmas braided bread wreath with candied cherries placed throughout to look like holly berries. After making the dough, she would cover it and place it somewhere dark, so the yeast could rise before baking. I distinctly remember peeking under the covering to see if anything was changing. Immediately, I would be met with a sweet smell of something good to come. The more it rose, the more hopeful we became, knowing that eventually we would get to taste this wonderful creation.

I wonder how that hope began to grow in Mary and Joseph as they anticipated the fulfillment of all the angel had promised. I imagine the shepherds' enthusiasm rising as the good news of a Saviour being born began to sink in. For some, Christmas brings back painful memories, or the sadness of seasons lost. It's hard to embrace the world's anticipation for a day full of presents and laughter if you've received news that doesn't feel so good.

I'm encouraged to think that even in the midst of Israel's darkest time, a message from God rose in the prophet Isaiah's heart. The Messiah would spring up and bring hope to the nations. Even in our darkest seasons, God never abandons His children. He remains faithful to His promises and works in His perfect time. Can you smell it? Hope rising below the surface, even during a season of darkness. The good message of Christmas can be trusted because it brought humanity a good Saviour. He's kind, and patient, and fills the longings in our hearts for home. We can experience His peace and joy through the Holy Spirit in every season. Breathe in His presence as you await what is to come.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for providing us with a hope that is greater than our circumstances. Teach me to trust You and embrace the love of the Saviour in every season. May Your hope overflow in my life, so that others can experience Your goodness as well. Amen.

MICHELLE MERCER, Lead Pastor, Calvary Pentecostal Church, Peterborough, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Where do you see hope beginning to rise?

Pray: Ask God to fill you with His hope.

Action: Bake or buy a treat and share it with someone who could use a reminder of God's hope this season.



The Cry of the Heart

"I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith."

– Ephesians 3:16–17

The more we understand Christ's love for us, the more our hearts begin to reflect His love for others.

Curled up with a mug of hot tea by a hotel window high above Toronto's harbour, I watched the neon busyness below. I listened to the sirens wailing and watched tiny cars, like ants, weaving in and out of lanes. No matter which direction I turned, skyscrapers owned the view.

My thoughts turned to God and His awareness of all the details of life. Conscious of the great metropolis pulsing with life before me, I breathed a very simple prayer: "Lord, show me Your heart for the city."

Without warning, a great cry rose from my belly and consumed my chest. I began to weep deep, heaving, agonizing sobs. As I wept, I became aware of all the windows in the buildings around me and began to think of all the people behind them: cleaning staff mopping floors, mothers feeding babies, shift workers coming and going, prostitutes plying their trade, businesspeople working late, and addicts doing drugs. I wondered how many were unaware of the Father's limitless love for them. How could they know Him? Many were people who might never think of going anywhere to learn about His love. The cry of my heart was to get behind those windows and share with people who needed Him so desperately.

Not long after this experience, I received an invitation from Crossroads to be a guest on what was then their middle-of-the-night call-in program, Nite Lite Live. That led to seven years of hosting the program every Wednesday night—seven years of carrying the Gospel message of hope into people's homes and offices, behind the windows.

Every week as I drove down the Don Valley Parkway to the TV studio, I would look up at the windows in the skyscrapers along the way, smile, and say, "I'm coming to share the wonderful hope of Christ."

PRAYER

Lord, help me to see people through Your eyes. Fill my heart with Your love and give me courage to share the hope of Christ wherever You lead me. Amen.

DIANE ROBLIN-(LEE) RUTLEDGE, Chief Executive Officer, Lifenet Ministries, Paris, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Who needs to experience Christ's love today?

Pray: Ask God to fill your heart with His love for others.

Action: Pray for your community and look for one opportunity to share Christ's hope this week.



He Knows the Whole Story

"Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be."

– Psalm 139:16

As believers, we all like to think we trust in God's timing. But how often have we been disappointed, impatient, or even angry when faced with the reality of unfulfilled expectations?

This was never truer than when my husband and I got that most horrible call: our thirty-four-year-old daughter died unexpectedly just three weeks after giving birth to her sixth child. "But we trusted You!" was the cry of our hearts. "How could You let this happen?"

God's profound answer came from Psalm 139. He knew every day marked out for her before one of them came to be. They were already written in His book. There is no arguing with that. Somehow, we needed to trust that God knows the beginning from the end; that He doesn't make mistakes, even when we don't like the outcome.

Almost exactly one year later, we were faced with another tragedy in our small town, Tumbler Ridge—a school shooting that left innocent young people dead. God had uniquely equipped us, through our own grief journey, to minister to others in our hurting community, especially those who had lost a child. It isn't the way we would have wished, but we see the hand of God working out all things for His glory.

This is one life-altering example of trusting God's timing, but we've seen it countless times in less dramatic ways. God has always met us at exactly the right time, whether it was financial, emotional, physical, or otherwise. From finding a job to selling a house to moving across the country, God's timing has always been perfect.

He can be trusted because He knows the whole story.

PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, that Your timing is always perfect. We can trust You in all circumstances—even those that seem too hard for us to bear. Help us to put our complete trust in You as we walk life's road together, knowing that You hold all of eternity in Your hands. In Jesus' name. Amen.

TRACY KRAUSS, Co-Pastor, New Life Assembly, Tumbler Ridge, BC

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Where do you need to trust God's timing today?

Pray: Ask God to help you trust Him, even when you don't understand.

Action: Release one expectation to God today and choose to trust His perfect timing.



Listening Prayer

"I will listen to what God the Lord says."

– Psalm 85:8

One morning, I began talking to God about my concerns, my family, my responsibilities, and everything happening in my life. I said, "Amen," and then went about my day, feeling as though I had accomplished something. I've learned that praying this way is like calling a close friend, sharing your heart for several minutes, and then hanging up before they have a chance to respond. We would never consider that a real conversation. Prayer is not intended to be a monologue, but a conversation. We should pray not simply to speak, but also to listen attentively and respond sincerely.

When we think of the Christmas story, we think of baby Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, and the wise men. Yet the fascinating story of Simeon is often overlooked. There was no grand angelic host or shining star—just a still, small voice that spoke quietly to this man's heart. Scripture does not tell us exactly when or how it happened. What we do know is that the Holy Spirit was upon Simeon and had revealed to him that he would not die before seeing the promised Messiah.

That word shaped his life, gave purpose to his waiting, and guided his journey until he held baby Jesus in the temple and spoke a prophetic word to Mary.

One of the greatest values of prayer is found in listening. We are instructed to tune our ears to wisdom and concentrate on understanding (Proverbs 2:2). When we still our hearts and quiet our minds, we increase our sensitivity to the voice of God.

As we learn to listen to God, we also become better listeners to others. We will not simply hear the words spoken by those around us; we will recognize the deep inner need and the cry for help behind their frustration. Listening prayer prepares us to respond to people with the wisdom, compassion, and heart of God.

PRAYER

Father, quiet my heart so I can hear Your voice and follow Your direction. Help me listen to others with compassion and respond with Your love and wisdom. Amen.

DONNIE PERSAUD, Lead Pastor, Empowered Life Church, Toronto, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What might God be saying in the quiet?

Pray: Pause and listen after you pray today.

Action: Give one person your full attention without interrupting.



Immanuel: God with Us

"The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."

– John 1:14

Have you ever been at a funeral and struggled to find the right words to express your sympathy to a grieving family member? Most of us have stumbled through those awkward moments, wondering if anything we've said has helped at all. Then, almost unexpectedly, we hear the words, "Thank you so much for being here." In that moment, we discover something important: our presence often matters more than our words.

Presence communicates care simply by drawing close. It sets aside agendas for the sake of the moment. It chooses to leave the comfort of what's familiar and step into someone else's pain. Presence notices. Presence empathizes. Presence sacrifices.

The moment Mary became pregnant with Jesus, God made His presence known. Mary experienced the presence of God's Son within her. Even the unborn John the Baptist recognized Jesus' presence, leaping in Elizabeth's womb. A few months later, God placed a star in the sky to lead the Magi—to lead them to God's presence. Angels descended into Israel's fields announcing to shepherds that God's presence had arrived in the form of a baby.

Christmas is the story of presence—God stepping out of heaven, taking on human flesh, and simply being with us.

The heart of God is presence. He wants us to know that He is here for us—in our celebrations and in our sorrows, in our victories and in our struggles. He is with us. Could it be that God wants to continue revealing His presence through us?

When we notice someone who is hurting and choose to leave our preferred space to enter theirs, we become a reflection of God's heart. By drawing near, we bring His love. By simply showing up, we communicate one of the greatest truths a hurting person can hear: You are not alone.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for sending Jesus to be present, revealing Your heart for me. Thank You that You are always present—in good times and in difficult times. Help me to follow the example of Jesus by seeing those who are hurting and simply being present. Amen.

JEFF HILLIER, Lead Pastor, Community Pentecostal Church, Orléans, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Who around you may need your presence more than your words?

Pray: Ask God to help you notice someone who may feel alone.

Action: Show up for one person today—sit with them, listen, or simply be present.



Praying Scripture

"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth... Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given."

– John 1:14, 16

When I pray, I don't always reach for my own words first. Some mornings, I open my Bible and simply pray Jesus' words back to Him: the Beatitudes, one blessing leading into the next. Other days, it's His "I am" statements from John: *I am the bread of life. I am the light of the world. I am the good shepherd.* On the hardest days, I move slowly through the names He gives Himself to the seven churches in Revelation.

Praying Scripture isn't a formula. It's one of the ways I draw near to Jesus.

At Christmas, I'm reminded that the Word I'm praying isn't only words on a page. John tells us, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Jesus is the living Word who came near.

When I pray Scripture, I'm not reminding God of what He has said. His Word reminds me of who He is and what He has given. His grace. His joy. His peace. His love. His Spirit. His servant's heart. His very life.

That's what I've come to appreciate about praying Scripture. His Word doesn't just give me something to say; it shapes what I believe, what I receive, and eventually, what I carry into the lives of others.

Every December, we spend weeks choosing gifts for the people we love, wrapping them carefully and hoping they land well. But Jesus has already done the giving. Our invitation is to receive—to believe His peace is ours to carry, His joy is ours to experience, and His life is ours to live. What we receive from Jesus was never meant to stay with us. It was meant to be shared with others. His grace makes us gracious. His peace helps us bring peace. His love teaches us to love.

This Advent, don't just read the Word. Pray it. Receive it. Let the truth of Scripture draw you closer to Jesus until His grace, peace, joy, and love begin to overflow into the lives of others.

PRAYER

Jesus, fill me with Your Word and draw me closer to You. Help me receive all You have given and let Your grace, peace, joy, and love overflow through my life. Amen.

HENRY STEVENS, Anyone Pray Manager, Crossroads, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What truth from God's Word do you need to receive today?

Pray: Choose one verse of Scripture and pray it slowly back to God.

Action: Share that verse with someone who may need its truth or encouragement today.



Surrendered Prayer

"'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May your word to me be fulfilled.' Then the angel left her."

– Luke 1:38

Little girls often dream about their future wedding long before it happens. We imagine the details of the day, married life, children, a home, and the future we hope will unfold.

Mary may have had dreams too. She was engaged to Joseph, and in her culture, marriage and motherhood shaped much of a young woman's future.

Jewish marriage then had two legally binding steps: betrothal and, about a year later, the wedding celebration. Betrothal was similar to our engagement—but far more serious. In the legal sense, Mary and Joseph were already considered husband and wife, though they weren't yet living together. That's why Matthew 1:19 says, "Joseph had in mind to divorce her quietly."

During the betrothal, the bridegroom spent his time getting things prepared for his bride. He would work, save money, and build a home to properly receive his wife and provide for her needs. I'm sure Mary was already dreaming of what their house would be like, how many children they would have, and whether they would look like Joseph or more like her?

Understanding all this tradition makes Mary's surrender even more profound. Mary knew that saying yes to God could put her reputation, marriage, and future with Joseph at risk. She had no way to know how Joseph would respond. Would he reject her for being pregnant and not by him? She had no idea or assurance from God that He would send an angel to Joseph and explain the situation to him. She said yes, without knowing how any of it would work out or what it might cost her in future struggle. Still, she answered, "I am the Lord's servant… May your word to me be fulfilled." Mary's words carried with them a sense of yielding—yielding her plans and trusting God's purposes.

Mary's surrender allowed her to take her place in God's redemptive plan. What could your surrender do?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for providing Mary's example for me to follow. Life is full of choices to do the right thing, so help me to hold loosely my plans and have the courage to trust You enough to surrender my will for Yours. Amen.

REV. SHERRY STAHL, Anyone Pray Account Manager, Author & Speaker, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What do I need to surrender?

Pray: Ask God for strength to release your plans.

Action: Say yes to serving someone today.

"What we receive from Jesus was never meant to stay with us. It was meant to be shared with others.

– Praying Scripture, December 13

DECEMBER 15



Peace That Overflows

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives."

– John 14:27

Christmas is often described as a season of peace, but our lives do not always feel peaceful. We may carry strained relationships, anxious thoughts, grief, depression, or burdens that no celebration can make disappear. Yet the message of Christmas is not that we must create peace for ourselves. It is that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, has come near.

The peace Jesus gives is unlike anything the world can offer. The world's peace often depends on favourable circumstances: problems resolved, relationships restored, and emotions settled. The peace of Christ can meet us while the situation is still difficult. It is rooted not in our ability to hold everything together, but in the presence and power of the One who holds us.

I have experienced seasons of depression when strength felt far away. Jesus did not always remove the struggle as quickly as I wanted, but He continued to meet me within it. He reminded me that weakness is not a barrier to the work of God. The Lord told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" *(2 Corinthians 12:9).*

We do not have to pretend to be strong before drawing near to Jesus. We can come weary, anxious, uncertain, or barely holding on. He meets us as we are. His strength becomes visible where ours reaches its limit, and His peace guards us when we cannot quiet our own hearts.

When the peace of Jesus rules within us, it changes how we enter tense moments. We can pause instead of reacting, listen instead of defending ourselves, and offer gentleness instead of anger. This is not merely self-control or positive thinking. It is the power of God working through surrendered lives.

This Christmas, may we allow the Prince of Peace to rule our hearts. As we depend on His strength, His peace can overflow through our weakness and bring calm to those around us.

PRAYER

Prince of Peace, meet us in our weakness and fill us with the peace only You can give. Let Your power work through us so that others experience Your calming presence. Amen.

DAVID BAKER, Pastor, Chaplain, Police Mental Health Responder, SouthPort Church, Saugeen Shores Police Services, Saugeen Shores, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Where do you most need the peace of Jesus today?

Pray: Ask the Prince of Peace to meet you in your weakness.

Action: In one tense moment today, pause before responding and choose gentleness.

DECEMBER 16



Gratitude That Gives

"Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

– 2 Corinthians 9:7

Advent is a season of waiting, but it is also a season of remembering. We remember that the greatest gift ever given wasn't wrapped in paper or placed under a tree; it was wrapped in humanity and laid in a manger.

God's generosity toward us in Jesus changes the way we see everything, including what it means to give.

I've found that intentional generosity begins with gratitude. When I stop long enough to reflect on God's faithfulness, His provision, His grace, His patience, and His presence, I realize how richly I've been blessed. Gratitude shifts my focus from what I lack to what God has already placed in my hands. And when my heart is full of thanksgiving, giving becomes less about obligation and more about worship.

At Crossroads, I've seen how intentional generosity can become an expression of the Gospel. Whether it's giving financially, serving with our time, encouraging someone who feels forgotten, or opening our homes to others, every act of generosity points beyond ourselves to the God who first gave to us.

This Advent, I'm challenged to ask a different question. Not, "What can I afford to give?" but "How can my giving reflect the generosity of Christ?" Intentional giving isn't measured by the size of the gift but by the posture of the heart. It notices needs. It creates space for others. It reminds people they are seen, loved, and valued.

As we celebrate the coming of Christ, may our gratitude overflow into generous action. May we give thoughtfully, joyfully, and sacrificially, not to earn God's favour, but because we've already received the greatest gift imaginable.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the indescribable gift of Jesus. Fill my heart with gratitude that overflows into intentional generosity. Show me where I can give my time, resources, encouragement, and love in ways that reflect Your heart this Advent season. Amen.

JOEL BRADLEY, Crossroads Donor Advisor & Anyone Pray Volunteer Recruiter, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What has God placed in your hands that you can share?

Pray: Thank God for one specific way He has provided for you.

Action: Choose one person or need and give intentionally—your time, resources, encouragement, or hospitality.



When Words Aren't Enough

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

– Romans 8:26–27

I used to think I could pray the wrong thing.

Honestly, I still do sometimes. There's this idea in my head that if I don't say it right, I might somehow mess up God's plan for my life. Writing that out now, it sounds a little ridiculous–but that's genuinely where my mind goes some nights.

Then I read Romans 8:26–27. It says the Spirit helps us in our weakness, because we don't even know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. I read that a few times.

Not knowing what to pray is normal? I thought that was just my problem.

I'd always figured prayer was about getting the words exactly right, like there was a correct version I was missing.

But apparently when I'm tired, grieving, confused, or scared of choosing wrong–that's exactly when the Spirit steps in to help.

I don't have to hide any of it from God. I can just say what I need, what I'm afraid of, what I'm hoping for, even "I have no idea what to ask for right now."

And while I'm being honest about all that, the Spirit is quietly doing the rest, according to God's perfect will, not mine.

I don't have to choose between being honest and trusting God. I get to do both. I'm still learning what that looks like, but it's taking a lot of pressure off.

PRAYER

God, I don't have to get this exactly right. Thank You for meeting me here, even when I don't have the words. Amen.

RHIANNON MORRISON, Anyone Pray Marketing Coordinator, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: What are you carrying that you don't have the right words for?

Pray: Bring it honestly to God and trust the Holy Spirit to help you pray.

Action: Ask someone how you can pray for them today.



Interceding for Others

"I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people."

– 1 Timothy 2:1

Have you ever experienced a moment or a season where you wondered, is my prayer really making a difference? Truthfully, we've all been there. Can I encourage you? Intercession is never insignificant when Jesus is involved.

D.L. Moody wrote a list of 100 people who were not yet following Jesus. Every time one of those people decided to follow Jesus, he would cross their name off the list. At the time of his death, 96 of those people had decided to follow Jesus. How amazing is that?

Was D.L. Moody the reason for that transformation? No. It was the life-changing power of Jesus, and a revelation of His love that transformed those lives. But did he get to be a part of someone's story that revealed Jesus' glory? Absolutely.

One of the ways God invites us to be a part of His story is to intercede for others, or simply, to pray for and on behalf of others.

If you know of a need, you can intercede. If you know a situation, you can invite our Saviour.

I've seen alcoholics set free from addiction and come alive for Jesus.
I've seen pregnancies when doctors said they were impossible.
I've felt peace in the middle of painful seasons, where it shouldn't make sense.
I've seen faith rise up where fear fought to stay in control.
In every single one of those seasons and situations, someone was interceding.

So let me tell you the end of D.L. Moody's story. At his funeral, those final four people gave their lives to Jesus. What if the answer to your intercession comes after your last breath? Would it be worth it? Just like that prayer list, 100%.

PRAYER

Jesus, put on my heart those who are on Your heart. Grow in me a heart to intercede for the people, places, and pain of others so that Your glory can shine through their story. You love them, You love me, and Your desire is freedom and victory. So do what only You can do. Thank You, Jesus. Amen.

BRENT HYTTENRAUCH, Associate Pastor, New Life Brantford, Brantford, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Who has God placed on my heart to pray for?

Pray: Intercede for their needs, trusting God with what you cannot change.

Action: Reach out to one person you're praying for and encourage them today.



Faith in Action

"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

– John 3:17

A few years ago, I was walking through a restaurant when I noticed a woman sitting with her two children. As I passed their table, I sensed the Holy Spirit impressing a message on my heart that He wanted me to share with her.

Unfortunately, my immediate response wasn't faith; it was hesitation. My immediate answer was not, "Yes, Lord!" but, "Umm, no, I don't think so, Lord."

I questioned whether I had heard God correctly. What if I was mistaken? What if I was wrong?

Yet the prompting wouldn't leave me. I knew I had a choice to continue on my way or trust that God was already at work in a story I couldn't yet see. So I turned around.

I introduced myself nervously and shared what I believed the Lord had placed on my heart, and before I had finished speaking, tears began streaming down her face.

She quietly told me that she didn't know God personally, but the night before she had prayed, "God, if You are real, send me an answer." I stood there humbled and in awe. What felt like a frightening step of obedience to me had become a life-changing reminder to her that God was real, that He saw her, and that He loved her.

Isn't that the story of Christmas?

Jesus didn't remain at a distance. He stepped into our world so we could know the Father's love. Christmas reminds us that God comes near.

As we draw near to Him, He invites us to do the same. We may not cross the distance from heaven to earth, but we can cross the street, the room, the office, or the restaurant. We never know what God is doing on the other side of our obedience. Our simple "yes" may become the answer to someone else's prayer.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for coming near. Give me courage to follow Your prompting and take a step toward someone who needs Your love today. Amen.

TANIA MEIKLE, Co-Lead Pastor, Kingdom House Christian Centre, Brampton, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Where might fear or hesitation be holding you back from saying yes to God?

Pray: Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recognize His prompting and respond with courage.

Action: Notice one person God places in your path today, and take one courageous step toward them in love.



Worship That Witnesses

"Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, 'Thus far the Lord has helped us.'"

– 1 Samuel 7:12

There was a time when my teenage son needed a summer job. He had applied for many openings but received no response. We had almost given up when we sat down and prayed, "Please, God, provide something for him."

A couple of weeks later, God intervened in a way I can only describe as an "only God" moment.

A few months later, when another need arose, I remembered that moment and prayed again for God's help.

I still tell that story because remembering God's faithfulness gives me a testimony to share. Each time I tell it, others hear what He has done and are encouraged to trust Him too.

That is exactly what is happening in 1 Samuel 7. God intervenes on Israel's behalf, and Samuel sets up a permanent reminder for the people of God's faithfulness.

The Ebenezer stone symbolized what God had done. Every time the people saw it, they were reminded that their help had come from the Lord.

When they cried out to the Lord, He answered with His mighty help. God may not always answer in the way we expect, but He is always faithful.

As future generations passed by the stone, it would naturally prompt questions about what God had done. It gave the people an opportunity to tell the story of His faithfulness and encourage the next generation to call on the Lord for help.

What if remembering God's faithfulness became a way of telling others about Him?

PRAYER

Father, You are a mighty God who is active in our lives. Today, remind us of Your faithfulness and give us an opportunity to share it with someone. Amen.

KENDRA WATTERWORTH, Lead Pastor, Generations Church, Brantford, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: How has God been faithful to you?

Pray: Thank God for one way He has helped you.

Action: Write one "only God" moment on a small stone or in a journal, and share the story with someone.



Preparing the Way

"A voice of one calling: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

– Isaiah 40:3

A few days before Christmas, I took my four-year-old daughter to the grocery store. We were standing in the produce section, where there were no aisles to contain the sound, when she suddenly began to sing. She sang at the top of her lungs!

To the tune of Santa Claus Is Coming to Town, she joyfully sang, "You better watch out, you better watch out, 'cause Jeeesssuusss is coming to town!"

At first, I was a little mortified and tempted to quiet her. But then I thought of John the Baptist. Like my daughter, he announced the coming of our Saviour, Jesus Christ.

In ancient times, forerunners prepared the way for a king by clearing roads and proclaiming His arrival. John was Jesus' herald, announcing that the Saviour had come to bring salvation, forgiveness, and hope to all.

As my daughter sang that "Jesus was coming to town," I found myself silently praying for everyone within earshot. Would they consider what those words meant—not as a warning, but as good news? The King is coming. The King who loves unconditionally, sacrificed Himself for our salvation, and forgives completely.

Christ came because of His great love for you, bringing hope, peace, forgiveness, and salvation.

Are we willing to be His forerunners? Are we pointing others to Christ through our words and actions? Will we boldly "SING" about all the Lord has done? This Christmas, may we joyfully proclaim the good news: Jesus has come, Jesus is coming again, and His love changes everything.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for Your love, forgiveness, and peace. Give me the courage to point others to Jesus through my words and actions. Use my life to help others know Him. Amen.

REV. WENDY PAYNE, New Churches Network Director, WOD-Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Who could you point to Jesus this week?

Pray: Ask God to give you boldness to share His love.

Action: Look for one opportunity to tell someone about Jesus or invite them to a Christmas service.



Everyday Prayer Life

"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in."

– Matthew 25:35

Growing up, there were always people in our home. Whether it was Saturdays around the pool, Sunday lunch after church, or an unexpected visitor, you never quite knew who would be there—and that was part of the fun.

Many great memories and lifelong friendships began with a simple invitation.

An invitation doesn't always have to be into your home. It could be asking a friend to join you for a movie you think they'd enjoy or inviting a new co-worker into a conversation to help them feel welcome.

At its heart, an invitation is a simple way of saying, "I see you, and there is room for you."

Living an invitational life begins when we notice the people already around us. It means being willing to make room in our plans, our conversations, and sometimes our homes. The invitation itself may seem small, but we rarely know what it might mean to the person receiving it.

That first Christmas, there was no place available for Mary and Joseph in the guest room. Yet Jesus was welcomed into the world in humble circumstances, laid in a manger. We aren't told who made room for them, but we are reminded that even the humblest space can become part of something far greater than we can see.

A simple invitation can become an opportunity for someone to encounter the love of Jesus through us.

PRAYER

Lord, give me Your eyes to see who needs an invitation and a welcoming spirit this Christmas. Help me make room for others as You have made room for me. Amen.

JORDAN BERTA, Prayer Representative Team Lead, Crossroads, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Who around you might be longing to feel included?

Pray: Ask God to help you notice someone you can welcome into your life.

Action: Extend one simple invitation today—a coffee, a meal, a conversation, or time together.



Light in the Darkness

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

– Isaiah 9:2

Recently, both low beams in our car stopped functioning simultaneously. After determining that it wasn't a deeper electrical issue, I replaced them, yet for the next while, it was difficult to see for an adequate distance ahead as I drove at night. Thinking that the new low beams I had purchased were defective, I was just about to buy yet another set. But first it seemed worthwhile to ask my mechanic to take a look while he was doing some other work on the car.

As it turned out, my seemingly underperforming low beams were improperly aimed, resulting in the light not shining far enough ahead of the car to adequately light up the road. When I drove at night for the first time with those headlights properly aimed, the difference was like night and day! You see, when we have been stumbling around in the darkness for a long time, we almost forget how wonderful it is to be able to be guided by a sure light!

Isaiah's promise of a great light reminds us that Jesus, the Babe of Bethlehem, came to guide us out of darkness and into the light of God's salvation.

For the rest of my life, I will read that verse differently because I have experienced for myself the difference in confidence that comes from being able to see where you are going as you are driving in the dark. This passage reminds me that the Babe of Bethlehem, Jesus Christ our Messiah, was born to be the Light of the world. His coming points the way to a reconciled relationship with our holy God through His miraculous birth, sinless life, sacrificial death, victorious resurrection, and ascension, and the sure and certain promise of His return.

Christ's desire for those who have chosen to trust Him is that we would become "little lights" for Him, reflecting the saving love of God to a world that is clearly stumbling in the dark. Let's keep our lights pointed in the right direction so we can help another weary traveller find their way home to faith in Jesus!

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for shining Your light on my path. Keep me close to You and help me reflect Your truth, grace, and love to those around me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REV. BRUCE JONES, Lead Pastor, Chalmers Community Church, Kincardine, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Where is God calling you to shine His light?

Pray: Ask God to help you reflect Christ's light each day.

Action: Help light the way for someone today through practical help or prayer.



Make a Way

"Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. 'Make level paths for your feet,' so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed."

– Hebrews 12:12–13

I can still recall the cry of pain that day. Our youngest son was climbing on the parsonage stair railing when he reached an unstable section. The railing broke beneath him, and he dropped to the floor. His arm bent awkwardly as we held his pint-sized body, trembling in pain and fear.

A broken arm could not be treated in our remote rural town. The nearest children's hospital was eight hours away, where his arm could be properly set to heal. Of course, as his parents, we made a way! We drove eight hours so he could receive the care he needed and begin to heal.

In the Old Testament, God called His people to "prepare the way" for the Lord (Isaiah 40:3). At Christmas, we remember that Jesus came. He is the Way (John 14:6). Now, because of His great love, God invites us to do the same. We get to make level paths for others so they can encounter Jesus and experience His healing. What an honour.

Do we notice those who are walking through life or pain alone? A conversation, a kind word, or an invitation can become a level path that helps them encounter Jesus.

Several months later, we heard a similar cry. While roughhousing with his cousins, our son had broken his arm again! But this time, we were near a major city as we prepared to move there, and the children's hospital was close by. Healing came quickly, and his arm is now stronger than ever.

That day, we knew healing was near—and where to find it. Let's help others discover that hope and healing are near in Jesus.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for sending Jesus, the Way, so we are never alone. Help me make level paths today so someone else can encounter You. Amen.

MEREDITH BROUGHTON, Lead Pastor, Level Church, Stoney Creek, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder: Who around you may be walking through life or pain alone?

Pray: Ask God to help you prepare the way for someone to encounter Jesus.

Action: Take one intentional step—a conversation, an invitation, or a simple act of kindness—to help someone experience the hope of Christ.

Draw Near, Go Near

"I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

– John 17:23

My friend Kevin and I met at church when we were two-and-a-half years old. Growing up, everyone in our circles knew us simply as "Kevin and Kevin." We were nearly always together, and occasionally found a little trouble together, too.

For 50 years, we have never missed calling each other on our birthdays. We connect at other times throughout the year, but there is something special about that birthday phone call. We usually laugh about how old we are getting and share a little of what is happening in our lives. The call itself may be simple, but it tells me that I have been remembered. Kevin thought of me and took the time to reach out. That makes me feel known and valued.

Today as we celebrate the birth of Christ, we remember a birth that assures us we have never been forgotten. God did far more than remember us from a distance. In Jesus, He came near. He entered our world, shared our humanity, and showed us the depth of His love. The child in the manger is God's declaration that we are known, valued, and loved.

In John 17, Jesus prays that His followers will live in such loving unity that the world will recognize Him through us. The love we have received is meant to become visible in the way we draw near to others.

Who might need to know today that they have not been forgotten? Perhaps it is a neighbour, coworker, friend, or family member who seems far from God. We do not need a perfect speech or an elaborate plan. Taking one step toward that person may be as simple as making a phone call, asking a sincere question, and taking the time to listen.

Jesus drew near to us. This Christmas, let's allow His love to move us toward someone else, and trust Him with what may grow from one simple conversation.

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for coming near and showing me that I am known, valued, and loved. Let Your love fill my heart and shape the way I love others. Amen.

KEVIN SHEPHERD, Chief Executive Officer, Crossroads and YES TV, Burlington, ON

TAKEAWAY

Ponder:
Who in your life might need to feel remembered today?

Pray:
Thank Jesus that you are known, valued and loved by Him.

Action:
Make one meaningful call today. Listen well and remind someone they matter.

