

# King of Kings Advent Devotional



*Christmas* ~~MESS~~

God's Gift for a Messy World

Daily Advent Devotionals Guiding Us to  
Find the Peace, Hope, Joy, and Love  
of Christ in a Messy World

2024

# December Events at King of Kings

## Community Dinner

Thursday, December 5th, 4:30-6:30pm

[pam.hoeffel@kingofkingswoodbury.org](mailto:pam.hoeffel@kingofkingswoodbury.org)

Enjoy a warm meal with our larger Woodbury community.

## Holiday Boutique

Saturday, December 7th, 9:00am-3:00pm

[laurel.bornholtz@kingofkingswoodbury.org](mailto:laurel.bornholtz@kingofkingswoodbury.org)

Shop handmade goods from over 75 vendors.

## Kids of the Kingdom Christmas Program

Sunday, December 8th, 9:30am & 10:45am

[paula.arland@kingofkingswoodbury.org](mailto:paula.arland@kingofkingswoodbury.org)

Watch our students share the story of the birth of Jesus during worship.

## Spirit Song Holiday Concert

Sunday, December 15th, 3:00pm

[jim.lindstrom@kingofkingswoodbury.org](mailto:jim.lindstrom@kingofkingswoodbury.org)

Listen to Spirit Song choir sing beautiful holiday tunes.

## Candle Light Christmas Eve Services

Sunday, December 24th, 1:00, 3:00, 5:00, 7:00, & 9:00pm

[amelia.houdek@kingofkingswoodbury.org](mailto:amelia.houdek@kingofkingswoodbury.org)

Celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ at our Christmas Eve Services, including singing Silent Night together by candlelight.

## Family Blessing Service

Sunday, December 29th, 9:30am & 10:45am

[amelia.houdek@kingofkingswoodbury.org](mailto:amelia.houdek@kingofkingswoodbury.org)

Start the new year off right with a special blessing during worship.



## Feeling ChristMessy

I don't know about you, but I'm feeling ChristMessy. Don't you mean Christmassy? No, ChristMessy, as if things aren't quite right— maybe there's a spiritual disconnect, a sense of longing or an unfulfilled need.

Much like life, Christmas isn't always wrapped up in a nice, neat little box with a bow on top. Christmas can be chaotic, stressful and at times downright messy because let's face it, relationships are messy, people are messy, the world is messy and no matter how much we try to plan and anticipate the season, it seems that something inevitably doesn't go as planned and we're left clearing up a mess. Even Hallmark movies get it right by adding a bit of chaos along with that wonder.

Yet Jesus intentionally comes into the messes of our lives in order to bring us life. As you read and reflect on these daily devotionals this month, consider where and how you can welcome Jesus to walk with you amidst the messiness of this season.

Blessings,  
Pastor Jon Larson

## Thank You

As we take time to reflect on how Jesus speaks a word Peace, Hope, Joy and Love into our lives this season, we are grateful to all those who contributed to the Advent Devotional including our Women's Ministry Team, Men's Ministry Team, Prayer Ministry Team, and congregation members.

November 28 - Thursday

# Anticipating The Mess

Goal Setting | Preparation

*A voice cries out: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all people shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'*

*-Isaiah 40:3-5*

**I**t seems to start earlier and earlier every year as Christmas decorations adorn the shelves and aisles of every store and with it comes the anticipation of all that needs to get done between now and Christmas. Yet even as we anticipate the mess of the season, how can we keep our hearts centered and prepare the way for the Lord?

As you prepare your heart, mind, and physical space for the Christmas Season, what are your goals?

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Heavenly Father, we look forward to this season and the celebration of Your amazing gift to us, the birth of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Yet, it can be easy to get caught up in the anticipation of decorations and the seemingly endless planning. Help us to clear the way of these obstacles, seeing past the whirlwind of lists and activities. May we stay focused on what is truly important, the joy of knowing Your love. We pray this through Your Precious Son. Amen. - Michelle Campbell

# The Season of BusyMess

## Busy Schedule

*Better is a handful with quiet than two handfuls with toil, and a chasing after wind.*

*-Ecclesiastes 4:6*

**D**uring this season in particular, it seems like the answer to “How are you doing?” is “Busy.” While we feel like we are being productive by going from one thing to the next, scripture reminds us that our busyness can actually wither us away. Maybe you’re feeling like that even now as you look at all the tasks on your to-do list.

What would it mean to refocus and recenter your heart on God? When has the busyness drained you and how could you find meaning and purpose in God?

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Blessed Savior, forgive me for living my life more by frenzy and less by faith. My busyness has kept me from rest and relationship with You. Help me not to be so much in a hurry that I miss listening to Your still small voice. In Your name I pray, Amen. -Connie Dageford

November 30 - Saturday

# TimeliMess

Putting Off The Mess | Paralyzed By The Mess

*Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.' As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin. -James 4:13-17*

**W**e don't like to label ourselves as procrastinators, but during this time of year it seems that things simply get pushed down the line. We look at our to-do lists, get a bit overwhelmed, and think, "I'll get to it tomorrow" or find ourselves feeling paralyzed and unable to move.

What's one thing can you do today? How can you try to keep a healthy balance during this hectic season?

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Hello Lord-here we go! So much to do to prepare for this wonderful season. Help me to always keep You front and center in this time of hurry up. I give thanks each day that You are present in my life and have given me family and friends to get ready for. I know that You are beside me always and will guide me through. Amen. - Sandy Bruckner

# PeacefulMess

The Peace Of Christ For A Messy World

*The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*-Isaiah 9:2, 6*

**T**he list of things that need to take place and get done between now and Christmas is daunting. Sure, we might have a general game-plan but the longer we think about it, the more overwhelming it becomes. Anyone feel like screaming?

Let's face it, Christmas can be a time filled with anxious spirits, unrealistic expectations and timelines, yet Jesus offers a word of peace.

What word of peace do you need spoken into and over your life?

How can we replace anxiety and fear with trust in God, prayer, and faith? Instead of letting worry dominate our lives, what if we focused on God's promises, sought His peace, and relied on His strength?

Which name of Jesus do you find comfort in?

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Gracious Lord, Thank you for the blessing we received in the birth of your son, Jesus Christ. Help us stay focused on Your promises of comfort and peace as we make our way through the messy season of Christmas. Let us take time to slow down and be still to reflect on the peace that comes from knowing our Savior was born to bring light into the darkness and forgiveness for our sins. Amen. - Lynda Paulson

December 2 - Monday

# Reflection on Peace

By Pastor Dan Clites

*"Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you." -2 Corinthians 13:11*

**J**oanne and I just took in the newest movie release of "The Greatest Christmas Pageant Ever."

It's the silly but extremely meaningful tale of the first Christmas story, lived within a church pageant in a town called "Emmanuel." Despite the ironic namesake (meaning: God with us), the people of Emmanuel have become faithful at being complacently rote in reenacting the manger scene every Christmas Eve. That is, until something really messy hits the church when the completely unruly Herdman kids break into rehearsal and take over the pageant. The congregation and community go into an absolute uproar— declaring messy people can't be a part of such an important, holy moment! The congregation is bitter and the Herdmans are bad— both naive to the power of the manger birth...until; that is, the peace of Mary, Joseph and baby Jesus grabs everyone's hearts in full restoration. In the end, the manger mess becomes a masterpiece of God's Christmas peace-- to be of one mind. To live in peace and to know God is Emmanuel. His peace is with us.

Friends, this pageant story is our story too— for the bitter and the bad. That's because Christmas comes not just for the so-called beautiful and well-behaved, but for the ugly and unruly. Aren't you glad the peace of Jesus came to save us from our un-peace?

Witness what I mean for yourselves. Take your family to the movie. Then, chat about "The Greatest Christmas Pageant Ever."

Father God, we repent of our sin to judge others from our own brokenness. Arrogantly, we either think we're already too beautiful for your manger mess, or we think we're way too messy for you to care and clean us. Please Lord, renew the manger hope in all of us, so we can come into to your peace— declaring that YOU are with us by the greatest gift ever! Amen.



# ExcessiveMess

Clutter | Discontentment | Pushing Out What Should Be In

*Of course, there is great gain in godliness combined with contentment; for we brought nothing into the world, so that we can take nothing out of it.*

-1 Timothy 6:6-7

**C**ontentment is a wonderful word that often escapes us as we spend our time writing Christmas lists, circling items that catch our eye in advertisements, hunting down the new product everyone seems to have on social media, and putting items in our carts for future purchase. While we may find ourselves thinking, "I don't need or want anything" there always seems to be something that catches our attention. We may even find ourselves wanting something else even right after we've opened our presents.

When is a time when you truly felt satisfied in the Lord?

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Dear God, thank you for all that you have blessed me with. Teach me to find contentment with what I have, to be willing to share with those in need, and to focus my attention on your will for my day. Show me where and how you would have me spend my time, resources, and energy today. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. - Laura Lee

December 4 - Wednesday

# EagerMess

People Pleasing | Unrealistic Expectations

*Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ. -Galatians 1:10*

**W**hether they're the expectations that we've placed on ourselves, or the expectations that others have placed on us, it seems that we're constantly in "people pleasing mode." 'Tis the season for bending over backwards. While we can find joy in making sure that everyone's needs are taken into consideration and everyone is happy, sometimes that joy and happiness comes at the expense of our own.

How can you give grace to yourself and stop feeling like you have to do it all?

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# MessyMess

The Mess Upstairs | Vulnerability

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.*

-2 Corinthians 3:17-18

**A**s long as the main level appears clean, we can have all sorts of stuff packed away in the closets and **NO ONE** – under any circumstances – is allowed upstairs. Yet with company coming over, it's not just the messes on the main level that we have to deal with, but the messes upstairs.

Similarly, we may be doing fine on the outside and look all put together but sometimes those smiles are simply a cover for what's really going on in our hearts and lives.

What would it mean to be real with all the emotions that often accompany this season?

Describe a time when you shared your true emotions. What was that like for you?

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Dear Lord, we try to appear like we have it all together and that we are without any mess or sin, but as we try to deceive others, we deceive ourselves. Forgive us. Help us to arm ourselves with the belt of truth, to unveil our faces, to be vulnerable and to share our hearts knowing that "love rejoices in truth". Be with us as we step out of our comfort zones and take a chance to be truthful with others. Give us Your love, Your comfort, and Your peace in our vulnerability. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

- Laura Griffith

December 6 - Friday

# AwareMess

Distractions | Preoccupied

*Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me.' But the Lord answered her, 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her.' -Luke 10:38-42*

**W**e might have as many distractions as there are lights on a Christmas tree. Most often, we're preoccupied by "what's next?" or "what's left to do?"

What would it mean to be more present in the moment?

What can you learn from Mary?

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Dear Lord, the holidays are so full of details about gift buying, parties to attend, meals to prepare and the mental gymnastics required to make it all happen. Help us to use Mary's example of being aware and present in the moment of Jesus's teachings and allow us to remember why he was born and what he did for all of us. Amen. - Dawn Swenson

# MournfulMess

## Christmas Mourning

*So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you. -John 16:22*

**L**oss comes in a variety of forms and can play into how we respond to the season; We may not exude the type of holiday cheer that everyone else expects from us because of what's going on inside. We may even try to convince ourselves that everyone feels happy at Christmas.

What would it mean to honor the emotions we are truly feeling rather than meeting everyone else's expectations of us? What would it look like to create healthy boundaries?

In your life, how have you seen God working even in the midst of your grief and sorrow? Was it through a friend's call at just the right time, or a special gift, or something else?

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Gracious and loving Heavenly Father, we are so grateful that you are with us in our struggle of loss and grief, whether it is loss of a loved one, a job, our independence or something else. Jesus, you too experienced loss so you understand and feel our pain. So we pray that during this Advent and Christmas season may we have the strength to be honest with ourselves and others with our feelings of loss and look to the manger where Jesus gives us the hope of new beginnings and peace and love. Amen. - Marilyn Wendt

December 8 - Sunday

# HopefulMess

The Hope Of Christ For A Messy World

*"...an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, 'Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.' All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 'Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel', which means, 'God is with us.' -Matthew 1:20b-23*

**C**hristmas can be a season of yearning, longing, and hopeful anticipation. God spoke to Joseph through the angel saying, "You shall name him Emmanuel which means God is with us." Because of Jesus' presence in our lives, we have hope, and can take comfort in God being with us, even throughout the mess.

What are you hoping for right now? Where are you waiting for Jesus to show up and move in your life?

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Dear Lord, I am sitting here amid my Christmas mess wondering if my gifts will be good enough, will I love my gifts, will the food be outstanding and on and on. Help me to always remember that You are the best gift we have ever received. I know that You are always by my side to help. Thank you for your presence in my messy life. Amen. - Sandy Bruckner

# Reflection on Hope

By Greg Hammond

*My soul waits in silence for God alone, for my hope is from Him. He alone is my rock and salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken. -Psalm 65:5-6*

**A**dvent is about reflection, preparation, and hope. As we prepare for our worldly Christmas traditions, all of the shopping, decorating, party and travel planning will undoubtedly overwhelm us. Emotions will naturally run high as it is part of our human nature. It is not a sin to feel frustration, impatience or anger, however, it is our response to these inherently human emotions that matters to God. We must remain alert and remember that when we become stressed or upset this holiday season, the enemy and his helpers will gladly exploit our vulnerabilities with the goal of keeping us from experiencing the abundant life found through the unwavering promises of God.

Satan loves this time of year as he targets individuals, families and the church itself to sow seeds of division and unleash a torrent of relational messiness. To protect us against Satan's attacks, we must remember that Advent, in addition to preparing for Jesus' first coming, we must also take a step back and make sure we are preparing for His second coming. We must revel in the hope of the Gospel message that Jesus came to earth as God in human form and sacrificed Himself at the cross for our sake, so that we can be justified (held blameless) through His free gift of grace and thus, restored in relationship with Him for eternity!

Satan can't touch that.

Dear God, guard us from the distractions and frustrations of the season, and protect our relationships from the enemy's schemes. May we live in the hope of the Gospel, remembering that in Christ, we are secure and unshaken, now and forever, due to Your unwavering promises. Amen.

December 10 - Tuesday

# HeavyMess

Overwhelm

*From the end of the earth I call to you, when my heart is faint. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I; for you are my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy. Let me abide in your tent for ever, find refuge under the shelter of your wings. -Psalm 61:2-4*

**F**eeling overwhelmed can often feel like standing in sinking sand. As the problems and troubles keep mounting, we feel like we're sinking further and further into despair. It can often feel as if we're carrying the weight of the world on our shoulders.

Breathe in. Breathe out. Write down an affirmation that you can carry with you through today.

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Almighty God, our schedules become busier and busier. The ever-increasing demands on our time can be overwhelming! Yet, when our hope and courage are failing, **YOU ARE OUR ROCK!** Father, we call on You, trusting not in our abilities, but Yours. Please fill us with Your peace. Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. - Michelle Campbell



# RegretfulMess

Guilt | Shame

*Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. -Isaiah 43: 18-19*

**W**oulda, Shoulda, Coulda. Anyone resonate with that today? Maybe there's even a side of guilt and shame that's being served with that regret over something that was said or done. Shame, guilt and regret aren't emotions that God wants us to hold onto, so why do we dwell there so often? Whatever the regret, guilt or shame you're carrying, allow God to speak a word of forgiveness over your life.

How would it feel to let God speak a word of forgiveness over your life? What's stopping you from accepting that you deserve that forgiveness?

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December 12 - Thursday

# LoneliMess

## Feelings Of Being Alone

*It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. -Deuteronomy 31:8*

**T**he feeling of loneliness and isolation can not only come when we are alone, but even as we are surrounded by others. We can have feelings of isolation even while we're in a relationship, with our families, or among those who live under the same roof.

Let's face it, loneliness is hard and can come with all sorts of emotions like fear, worry or rejection, especially at this time of year.

Describe a moment you felt the presence of God in a time of isolation, or a moment when someone walked alongside you and served as a physical presence of God. Is there an action you can take today to do that for someone else who may be feeling alone?

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Gracious God, this is supposed to be a time of laughter and togetherness—at least that's what the Hallmark movies show! And yet, I feel so alone. Help me to use this time of solitude to draw closer to You and guide me to others feeling the same. May I find and be a comfort and a friend. In Jesus' name, Amen. -Connie Dageford

# BitterMess

## Letting Go Of Resentment

*Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. -Hebrews 12:12-14*

**I**t's amazing what we carry in terms of a bitter or angry spirit. Maybe there's something that seems to pop up every year that we just can't shake as we anticipate gathering with friends and family. No matter how joy-filled or festive we try to be, something looms over, consumes, and impacts our spirit and attitude. We may have even started to avoid certain events or family functions altogether because "that person" may be there.

What bitterness or burden do you need to lay down not only for the sake of another but for your own heart, spirit, and mind?

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Dear Gracious and Loving Father, your son Jesus told us to love our neighbors as ourselves. In this Christmas season, help us to remember to throw off any bitter resentment against anyone as Satan tries to divide us from each other and your true joy on earth. Help us to see the good in everyone and not just focus on the bad. Let us reach out to others in our family and community in love and reconciliation. Help us to remember to love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen. - Deb & Bob Bowman

December 14 - Saturday

# AwkwardMess

Caring For Others

*When the cares of my heart are many, your consolations cheer my soul.*

*-Psalm 94:19*

**C**hristmas (ChristMess) isn't simply about the stuff that we are carrying, but sometimes we are invited into someone else's mess. Maybe God is inviting us to walk with someone for whom this season is difficult to offer a word of hope and to provide some much needed support and prayer.

When have you been blessed by caring for someone else that took you outside your comfort zone? What did that do for their spirit and yours?

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Gracious and loving God, your never ending care for us shows us how we are to care for others. You are our Lord, Savior and Shepherd so guide us, Lord, on how best to provide loving care to those in need. Help us to be good listeners and to have a compassionate heart with those we are caring for. May we walk with them as long as our care is needed during their difficult times. In Jesus's name, Amen. - Bonnie Harna

# JoyfulMess

The Joy Of Christ For A Messy World

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. -Luke 2:8-11*

**E**ven during this festive time of year, there are many things that seek to steal our joy. We are often more focused and preoccupied with what's going wrong rather than with what is going right. We see interruptions as an inconvenience rather than an opportunity for blessing.

What can you learn from what steals your joy?

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Heavenly Father, thank you for being a loving and patient God. This Christmas season, remind us that the reason for the season is not in the lights or decorations, presents or the parties, but that the joy comes from Jesus, our Messiah. Amen. - Lynda Paulson

December 16 - Monday

# Reflection on Joy

By Lynda Paulson

*Let all of the people of Jerusalem shout his praise with joy! For great is the Holy One of Israel who lives among you. -Isaiah 12:6*

**T**he three and a half to four weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas seem to be the busiest and most hectic weeks of the year. We're so busy getting "ready for" Christmas that we often don't see the joy of Christmas. As a child I always looked forward to Christmas. The joy of getting to eat my favorite goodies that only seemed to get made at Christmas. The joy of decorating the house and tree. The joy of getting that one special gift that I really wanted. But the one thing that I always looked forward to was going to church on Christmas Eve. There was something special about that service. I felt joy in my heart as I walked in the doors of my little childhood church. The lights were dimmed down low, candles were lit on the ends of the pews which were adorned with pine boughs. I don't know if it was the music we sang or the scriptures that were read that filled me with joy or if it was God himself. I still feel that same joy every year on Christmas Eve when attending church services.

What brought joy to your heart during Christmas? What could you do to bring back that joy if you no longer feel it?

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Lord, thank you for the joy you bring to our lives through your promises of never-ending love and forgiveness. Be with us through these hectic, busy and chaotic weeks of the Christmas season. Guide us to finding ways to slow down and reset our priorities so that we can receive the joy of your son's birth. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

# RestlessMess

Waiting | Worrying | Longing | Yearning

*O Lord, all my longing is known to you; my sighing is not hidden from you.*

*-Psalm 38:9*

**W**aiting can be so hard especially when we're looking forward to something, like a package to arrive or a change in our circumstances. We see a similar impatience when it comes to those little ones who just can't wait for Christmas to open their presents or to get through the torture of posing for family photos with matching sweaters. Waiting is hard no matter how we cut it.

Share a story about a Christmas when you were worried about something but it worked out for the good. How did you see God work before, during, and after what you were worried about?

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Dear Lord Jesus, our minds are in a whirlwind this time of year and worrying about things like-will I get everything done? Will the person like my gift? Did I spend too much money? The list goes on...Forgive me, Jesus for letting worry and waiting take my focus away from you. Your Word tells me to seek first your Kingdom Jesus, with the assurance that you will provide. Help me, Lord Jesus, to trust you and seek you during these busy days. I thank you for your presence and guidance and peace. Amen.

- Marilyn Wendt

December 18 - Wednesday

# ReadiMess

Focus | Purpose

*Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour. -Matthew 24:42, 44*

**F**rom decorating the tree and wrapping the gifts to spending time with family and friends, Christmas is a very special time of year. Though the planning and anticipation may last months, each year we're surprised by how quickly the season not only arrives, but also how fast it passes. No matter how much we plan, it seems that the big day sneaks up on us and there are still things left to do. Yet it's not so much about the tasks themselves but how we can lose sight of our sense of self and our sense of purpose.

Reflect on the goal you wrote about on November 28th. Are you on the right track? Consider if you need to recommit to your goal or adjust your approach.

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# StressfulMess

Pressure | Distraction

*Teach me your way, O Lord, that I may walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart to revere your name. -Psalm 86:11*

**L**et's face it, we can often be distracted and consumed by end of year projects, expectations at work, gift buying, meal planning, preparing for travel and other social commitments. As a result, Christmas can feel extremely hectic and we can often feel overwhelmed by stress.

In fact, stress can become such a natural part of our lives that we can no longer relax as there's this constant source of pressure and anxiety. Sometimes we find ourselves feeling preoccupied, distracted and distant (even when surrounded by laughter and joy) to the point that someone close to us asks, "Are you with us?" in order to wake us up and get our attention.

What's one expectation you could let go of that would allow you to feel more present?

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Gracious God, this world is a noisy place. Especially this time of year where we are pulled in so many different directions of expectations. Quiet our heart, heavenly Father. Draw us in and let us rest in your presence. Gently remind us of the beautiful simplicity of that first Christmas and encourage us to strip away all the should do's and just follow you. You remind us that your yoke is easy and your burden is light. Thank you for wrapping us in your love. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. - Rebecca Allyn

December 20 - Friday

# EmptyMess

Exhaustion | Running on Empty

*Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint. -Isaiah 40:28-31*

**M**any of us are running on empty, holding on by a thread with little hope for restoration in sight. We're exhausted, no doubt due to the massive amount of Christmas prep and shopping, but we manage to keep plugging along, due to the "justifiable" overindulgence of our favorite coffee or treats that often accompany this time of year. It seems that whenever we get one or two things done, there are three more ready to take their place.

Where are you finding strength this season? Describe a time when you felt strengthened by God.

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Heavenly Father, we try so hard to power through this season to make it all happen, leaving us overwhelmed, exhausted and empty. Yet you wait with arms wide open to embrace us and renew our strength. You designed us to do just enough and not everything. Help us to remember to stay in your presence and lean into your wisdom and strength when we start to feel overextended. You have called us by name and invite us into communion with you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen. - Rebecca Allyn

# Divisive Mess

Tension | Disagreements

*I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. -Ephesians 4:1-3*

**E**ven if we love our family and those we gather with, it never fails that someone says something that upsets someone else. When that happens, it's easy to get caught up in a mess where expectations, viewpoints, and differing social or political ideologies divide us, cause our patience to wear thin, tensions to rise, and filters to turn off. Rather than getting caught up in the dysfunction, what would it mean to handle the situation with grace?

Share a story of when you took time to think about how to respond rather than quickly responding in anger. How did God strengthen you to do that?

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Heavenly Father, thank you for the people you put in my path today. Give me words of peace and encouragement for them. Help me to seek to understand with humility. Enable me to meet them where they are. If I start to feel impatient or upset, gently remind me to pause and seek your guidance and comfort before I speak. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.  
- Laura Lee

December 22 - Sunday

# LovingMess

The Love Of Christ For A Messy World

*Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. -Romans 12:9-11, 17-18*

**L**et's face it, we try to fill this season with all the things we love: our favorite Christmas decorations, songs, movies and treats. Yet when everything is stripped away, what is this season really about? It's about the love that God has for us and the love He intends for our lives and the world. Sadly that love can often get covered up because of all the distractions around us. What would it mean to live that love of God in Christ Jesus?

How can you refocus your attention to see God's love and live in that love?

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Dear Lord, as we focus on Christmas and showing love to our family and friends, let us remember the supreme love you have for us. You gave us your son in this season as the ultimate gift of love. Help us to focus on the love you shower on each and every day so it never gets lost or forgotten about. Amen. - Dawn Swenson

# Reflection on Love

By Jenny Johnson

*We love because he first loved us. -1 John 4:19*

**I**n our everyday busy lives, it is often hard to find love for ourselves. As a mom I often find myself ensuring that I am meeting everyone's needs before my own. When I reflect on myself, I often focus on my weaknesses rather than love myself for who I am and what I am doing for others. 1 John 4:19 states that "we love because he loved us first." This is a great reminder that God our Lord and Savior loved us first allowing us to demonstrate love for others. A key learning from 1 John 4:19 is that in order to love others, we first need to demonstrate love for ourselves. Throughout our messy days, we need to pause and show love for ourselves and celebrate all the great things we are doing.

Over the years I have seen that when I am able to follow in God's footsteps and demonstrate love for myself, I am better able to share my love for others. During the Christmas season, my family often finds our schedules filling up more quickly with several commitments to fulfill. It is easy to get caught up in distractions of the season and lose focus on what Christmas is about. In my family we find that we need to schedule time to give back and show love for those in need during the Christmas season. We will purposefully schedule time to go shopping for families in need and pack meals with Feed My Starving Children. By doing small simple things to give back to those in need, our hearts are once again filled with love allowing us to continue to share our love with others.

Lord, please help me be able to love myself and others during both the good and messy times of life. The holiday season can be overwhelming so please grant me peace in my life and allow me to demonstrate my love for others. Amen.

December 24 - Tuesday

# ChristMess Eve

Finding Peace, Hope, Joy, And Love In The Mess

*Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.*  
-Matthew 7:7-8

**W**hether we choose to celebrate Christmas on Christmas Eve or wait for Christmas morning, it can feel like a big waiting game.

While we try to distract ourselves with pre-Christmas activities, like a game or watching a holiday classic, we can't help but think about what the next few days will bring and how happy we'll be that this special day has finally arrived.

It's the "Calm before the Storm" so to speak as our houses will soon be covered in ribbons, wrapping paper and emptied boxes that serve as a reminder of all the work that went into this season.

Yet much like the excitement of opening presents, where the tag is often cast aside and thrown in the pile with the rest of the wrapping paper and we find ourselves digging through the discarded paper to find out who the gift is from, if we're not careful, we'll miss out on some of the most blessed gifts of the season.

Dear Lord, in anticipation, we wait for You. While Jesus dwelled with us, we often heard Him say, "It is not yet My time." Just as He waited, we wait. We wait for You to answer our prayers, we wait for You to show us Your way, we wait for You to come again, and we wait for so much more. But, Lord, You already gave us the most blessed gift: the Holy Spirit. Break through our distractions and help us to not miss out on that most blessed gift. Help us to encounter Your Spirit right here...right now. Help us to see Your Kingdom in our days. We live in time of now and not yet. Help us to seek you during this time while we wait. Show us Your Peace, Your Hope, Your Joy, and Your Love today and every day of our lives. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.  
- Laura Griffith

# WeariMess

I'm Done | Spent

*Jesus said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'*

*-John 4:13*

**A** favorite hymn during the Christmas season is "O Holy Night," which describes the night of Jesus' birth: "A thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices ? For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."

Our world still feels "weary." What makes today any different? How does this gift of a savior impact our actions and attitudes? How does the relationship with Jesus transform us?

How does the birth of Jesus impact your heart and spirit?

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December 26 - Thursday

# Regretful Mess

What Really Matters?

*Do not say, 'Why were the former days better than these?' For it is not from wisdom that you ask this. -Ecclesiastes 7:10*

**T**he shopping is done, the presents are unwrapped, and it's now time to sit back, relax and take it all in. Yet, instead of finding peace and a sense of satisfaction, disappointment appears.

Why is that?! Why do we focus on the missed opportunities, disappointments, and regrets over words that were spoken rather than on all of the blessings that we've experienced? Why do we insist on focusing on the nostalgia of what has been rather than making the most of the present?

What's robbing you from cherishing the moment?

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Dear Heavenly Father, creator of heaven and earth, thank you for all of the blessings that you have poured out upon us. Help us not to live with regrets for missed opportunities or the way things used to be. Help us to focus on the bountiful, good blessings that come from you. Set our minds on the future of eternal life with you. We give you thanks for the real reason for this Christmas season. Help us celebrate the birth of your Son, Jesus, who redeems us from our sins. For you loved us so much that you sent your son for us. Help us to see and accept your gift of grace through your son Jesus. Blessed be your son, Jesus. Amen. - Deb & Bob Bowman



# TruthfulMess

## Difficult Conversations

*But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love. -Ephesians 4:15-16*

**W**hether it doesn't fit, the style is wrong, or we'll never use it, there are always those gifts that are slotted for the return pile. We might even find ourselves thinking, "What were they thinking when they bought this?!" Someone may have been getting us the same gift for years because we mentioned it once, but it turns out we really don't like it. We may have things with the tags still on from Christmases past, but we just didn't have the heart to tell the person that the gift missed the mark.

Sometimes it's hard to speak the truth when someone's heart is on the line, especially when there may be embarrassment, hurt feelings or other emotions involved. Yet what if by speaking the truth in love, there is an opportunity for healing and restoration?

Is there a truth you need to admit to someone, to yourself, or to God?

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We pray, Jesus, that you'd help us to draw in close to you this beautiful season. Give us a discerning spirit so we can clearly know right from wrong. And guide us as your people to be brave enough to want to change, to walk in your truth and become more like you. And when we slip, thank you, Father, for reaching out to us with your incredible forgiveness, love and grace! You pick us up, dust us off, and place our feet back on solid ground! Your truthfulness always makes a way for something better and brighter in our lives, because it specializes in making all things new again! We love you so much and praise your holy name! Amen. - Annette Sherrill

December 28 - Saturday

# CleanliMess

Reset | Reflection

*'Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.'* -Joshua 24: 14-15

**E**ventually we'll have to clean up all things Christmas; Maybe we've already started in hopes to get the house back in order before the New Year hits. Yet in the process of cleaning, what about our spiritual house? Are there additional things to put away, to clean up? Are there new patterns to keep or old ones to leave behind? What commitments can we make to ourselves, to our family, and to God?

Review your goal from November 28th again. Is this an ongoing goal that you will continue to pursue as we move to the next season? Do you sense your goal will shift?

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Heavenly Father, we thank you for this wondrous, hopeful, and messy Christmas season we just experienced. Remind us, as we pack away the nativity scenes and lights for another year, to continually turn our hearts and minds to you. Help us to see what parts of our spiritual lives we also need to pack away, and give us the commitment to keep on display the beautiful habits that have flourished over the last month. We love you, Lord, and continue to serve you with our whole hearts. Amen. - Leigh Rekow

# NewMess

Looking Forward | Anticipation | Waiting

*Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus*

*-Philippians 3:12-14*

**I**n a messy world, finding Christ means inviting Him into every aspect of our lives, including the clutter and chaos. As we conclude this devotional, let's commit to continuing to let Jesus step into our mess and walk with us. Let's walk together into the New Year with a heart ready to grow and arms outstretched to embrace His transformative presence.

What are you looking forward to? What are you leaving behind? What are you stepping into?

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Sovereign God, you are the one who makes all things new. We walk into this New Year with hope in our hearts, confident in the love you have for us as your children. We may not know what this coming year will bring, but we know that your faithfulness has already prepared the way for us. We are so grateful that you walk beside us in our joys, and carry us through our messes. Broaden our hearts to embrace the transformations you want to make in us. Lord, bless our families, friends, and neighbors. May your presence be felt in the hearts of all. Amen. - Leigh Rekow



1583 Radio Drive, Woodbury, MN 55125

-  651-738-3110
-  [office@kingofkingswoodbury.org](mailto:office@kingofkingswoodbury.org)
-  [www.kingofkingswoodbury.org](http://www.kingofkingswoodbury.org)

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