Merry Christmas

FROM
BIC CANADA



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BE IN CHRIST

BELOVED
BELONG
BECOME

Fully Human

A 2026 ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS
DEVOTIONAL BY BIC CANADA

Fully Human

The decision behind the theme for this year comes from a common thread I've noticed in my conversations and reflections over the years, and most recently highlighted in my own life as a new(ish) parent.

I am the mom of a 3-year old toddler. This age is known for emotional explosions, endless energy, stubborn independence, and asking 'why' approximately a million times a day. I'll admit that my 'patience tank' for my daughter and for myself is often close to empty by bedtime, and I catch myself in moments wishing I was a bit more like a robot with endless battery life and pre-programmed responses from the best parenting books.

I don't think these feelings or frustrations are unique to parents. Whether it's in response to someone else or feeling the internal struggle of wishing to be built a bit differently, the annoyance of human-ness is a universal human experience. We've all had moments where emotions have surprised us, where we just wish there was more time or energy, where someone stubbornly decides to do something 'all by myself', or where we've longed for the world to make sense. We all seem to experience moments where the human design gets in the way of what we want or how we think things 'should' be.

But God didn't make a mistake when He designed us. And being a human isn't something to apologize for. Jesus' life in our messy world gives us a glimpse into the beauty and strength of our human-ness.



AN ADVENT GIFT TO

Make a Difference

BIC CANADA GLOBAL

Our faith calls us to recognize that everything we have is a gift from God, and giving back is a major part of our following of Jesus. Our faith also calls us to be people of action.

Will you prayerfully consider partnering with BIC Canada Global, and our sisters and brothers around the world, as we seek to extend Jesus' message to others? Visit **BICCanadaGlobal.com** for project info.

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Preparing FOR Christmas

As we begin our journey through this devotional together, we aim to prepare our hearts for soaking in the wonder of the Advent season. We've written a few suggestions to make this season an even more intentional time of reflection and connection.

MAKE AN ADVENT WREATH

The Advent Wreath is a centuries-old tradition born from adapting ancient winter customs as a way for Christians to meaningfully prepare for Christmas. God's eternal love is represented by the circular shape of the wreath, and the green leaves are meant to symbolize the eternal life that is made possible through Jesus' coming. One of the four candles is lit each Sunday of Advent as a visual reminder of Jesus as the Light of the World, and highlighting the hope, peace, joy, and love of the Christmas story.

You can make your own Advent Wreath by following the instructions at sincerelysarad.com/how-to-make-an-advent-wreath



DECEMBER 26

The First Archive of the Gospel

VERSE Luke 2:19

The shepherds and visitors were gone now, leaving behind an unforgettable chain of events. Mary could have simply moved on to the next demand of new motherhood. Instead, she turned to reflection and treasured the experience in her heart. Here, with Mary, is the first archive of the gospel.

As the 2026 Christmas season draws to a close, it's worth remembering that Mary didn't have the whole story. She didn't know Simeon's prophecy, the trials and travels that lay ahead, the thirty hidden years, a cross, an empty tomb. She only had a heart full of things too large to fully comprehend. So she leaned in, treasured what she'd been told, and reflected on all she'd experienced.

Perhaps that's an invitation for us too. What moments from this Christmas season are worth reflecting on, lest we simply slip back into our normal routines? A quiet conversation, a moment of worship, an answered prayer, a reminder of grace? And what are you still pondering? What questions or wonderings are you carrying into the new year without full resolution?

Someone once said, "Reflection is an intimate date with yourself." As you step into the new year, don't rush past what God has done for you and in you. Take time to treasure it and ponder it — worship requires both. Let it keep working on you, the way it worked on Mary, long after the shepherds and visitors had gone home.

PRAYER *God, in the year ahead, renew our hearts to be filled with faith and trust in you. Replace our fears, insecurity and anxiety with confident hope based on your love, character, and trustworthiness. Amen.*

Todd Lester

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, BIC CANADA

ALTERNATIVE ADVENT CALENDAR

The theme of this year's Advent Guide is Fully Human, reminding us that Jesus is our perfect example of what it means to celebrate our humanity and deepen relationships with those around us. Consider using some of the suggestions below and/or writing your own to create a 24-day 'Humans In Community' Advent Calendar.

- Write a letter or Christmas card to let someone know you're thinking of them.
- Go through your closets for any warm winter clothes you can donate. Homeless shelters are often looking for coats, hats and gloves at this time of year.
- Try your best today to give everyone the benefit of the doubt if they seem stressed or grumpy in the lead-up to Christmas.
- Use one of your skills or hobbies to specifically serve someone.
- Shovel a neighbour's driveway.
- When you're running errands, keep an eye out for anyone struggling with heavy bags.
- Try to use your Christmas shopping as a way to support local businesses or charities.
- Encourage someone with a compliment or gratitude for who they are.
- Ask for help with something you've been putting off.
- Check what items your local food bank needs most this month and plan to drop off a donation.
- Share honestly with someone you trust about how your Advent season is going.
- Thank any customer service and retail staff that you see today.
- Learn about someone else's Christmas/Holiday traditions.
- Try slowing down a bit more in your interactions today to make more space for connection and being present in each moment.
- Pick one hour of the day to put your phone on silent.
- Surprise someone with a favourite treat.



CHRISTMAS DAY

Vulnerable Saviour

VERSE Hebrews 2:14-18, Luke 2:1-21

When I was a little girl, three of my siblings and I went swimming in a lake. Unaware, the current carried us too deep, and we were in trouble. I could see the glistening sun above the water's surface, but I couldn't reach it.

In my thrashing, I felt my older brother and grabbed the drawstring at the back of his bathing suit. I held on for dear life—literally. He swam us sideways to the rocks, my sister following, and each of us crawled onto those rocks, gasping for breath, traumatized by what had occurred. In those moments of struggle, so close to drowning, nothing mattered except kicking and flailing our arms.

A newborn kicks and flails their arms, crying in hunger, fear, or discomfort. Their only instinct is survival. While we often picture our Saviour all calm and peacefully sleeping, He, too, had moments of struggle and disorientation.

It never ceases to amaze me that the High Priest, the Saviour, the Messiah, came as a vulnerable, tiny human. He needed His diaper changed and had to wait while His frontal lobe slowly developed. How many times did He feel like He was drowning and struggling to reach the light?

As the carol, "O Holy Night," reminds us, "He *knows* our need."

Because of this, I can panic and kick—and rejoice and breathe—knowing He understands it all.

PRAYER *Jesus, thank you for meeting us in every moment. Keep us anchored in Your grace. Amen.*

Charmaine Stulp

ADMINISTRATIVE COORDINATOR, BIC CANADA



THE Beauty OF BIG EMOTIONS

We often hide our grief, anger, or overwhelming feelings because we think they make us look weak or unspiritual. But Jesus didn't suppress his emotions; he leaned into them. We worship a God who cries open tears and feels righteous anger. Jesus shows us that our capacity for deep feeling isn't a design flaw; it's a reflection of the Divine image.

Our most overwhelming emotions often show up when we see or experience something that goes against the deepest desires and values of our heart; our emotions point us to how we wish things were and how we hope they will become. Advent begins by making room for our honest longing and grief.

THE FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today we light the candle of Hope.

Advent begins with a brokenhearted God yearning to bring hope to the world.

READER 1:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

John 3:16-17

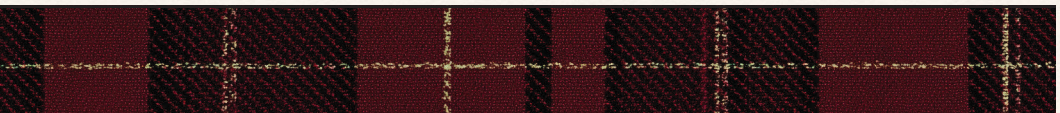
The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

READER 2:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil— and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 2:14-18



CHRISTMAS EVE

Joy Through Trust

VERSE Luke 1:26-55

The journey of motherhood is often filled with mixed emotions. When Mary received news from an angel that she would become the mother of Israel's Saviour, she was initially troubled and perplexed to say the least, yet by the end of her encounter with the angel, she was open, surrendered, and even joyful. Mary still had no idea what to expect or what the future would hold, but she knew God could be trusted.

Growing up, I found Christmas a little depressing - not only because I was an only child with no one to play with, but also because my grandmother was often very solemn during the Christmas season. As I got older, I learned that she had lost her first child on Christmas Eve, right after bringing him into the world. Though she went on to raise two more children, she never forgot her first, and the holidays were an acute reminder of her loss.

Somehow, through the pain and unanswered questions, my grandmother's faith never wavered; she learned to hold both joy and sorrow side by side. Her favourite verse, which she repeated often, was Psalm 46:10: *"Be still, and know that I am God."* I didn't understand why she liked that verse so much when I was younger, but I do now. It comes from Psalm 46, a psalm about God's presence and help in the midst of the earth falling apart around us. Like Mary, my grandmother had learned to surrender herself to a God who could be trusted and who didn't ask her to be anyone other than herself.

Over time and through every season - in the questions, in the pain, in the joy, on the mountain top and in the valley, *"The Lord is with **you**"*, just as he was with Mary. *"For the word of God will never fail."* No matter how we are approaching this Christmas season, may we, too, be able to find peace in a gentle and almighty God, and respond just as Mary did: *"I am the servant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word."* For we have a God who is loving and faithful to us exactly as we are, and he promises to never leave us or forsake us.

Letitia Jeffkins

GLOBAL SPECIALIST, BIC CANADA



DECEMBER 23

A Different Kind of Celebrity

VERSE Luke 19:1-6

Today, many people have an insatiable curiosity about celebrities. You don't have to spend a long time in line at the grocery store check-out to learn more than you'd like to know about their relationships, lifestyles, and foibles. But for the celebrities, the scrutiny must get old fast. Many, I'm sure, would prefer their fans to admire them from a distance.

Jesus' parables and miracles had caused such a stir that He was welcomed into Jericho like a celebrity. The streets were clogged with people hoping to catch a glimpse. One would-be observer was Zacchaeus, the chief tax collector, a man of great wealth, but with small stature and an even smaller reputation. Driven by curiosity, he did the undignified thing and climbed a tree to catch sight of Jesus.

What Zacchaeus didn't expect was Jesus' response to his curiosity. Because he was willing to give up whatever dignity he had to see Jesus, Jesus welcomed him, brazenly inviting himself over for dinner and giving Zacchaeus so much more than the mere glimpse he had hoped for.

Jesus isn't like a celebrity who wants to be admired from afar. Instead, our curiosity is rewarded with intimate friendship. As James tells us, "Draw near to God, and he'll draw near to you." Jesus wants a relationship with you. All you need to do is ask.

PRAYER *Lord, sometimes I worry that you'd like to keep your distance from someone like me. Help me to believe that you love me and that you'll respond to my curiosity by drawing near to me. Amen.*

Peter Law

LEAD PASTOR,
CROSSINGS COMMUNITY CHURCH, KIRKLAND LAKE ON

READER 1:

God looked at the world with sadness and knew it wasn't as it should be. It needed salvation in the hopes of a better future; we needed intervention not from a distance but with an intimate act of solidarity - sending His own Son to enter the world, fully human.

Prayer:

Thank you God for sending your Son into our messy and broken world, fully human so that He could become both our comfort and our example. May we seek to align our hearts with yours, leaning into deep grief for this world and therefore a whole-hearted hope to bring more of your beautiful and perfect Kingdom here.

Amen.



NOVEMBER 30

Jesus Knows How You Feel

VERSE Luke 22:42

Have you ever felt alone at Christmas? I have. It's hard.

It sure helps to talk with someone who truly understands because they have felt the same way. That's empathy, and it's powerful. Empathy literally means to enter into the suffering of another. There is nothing like having someone say to you when you're in a moment or even a season of loneliness, "I know how you feel."

Suddenly we don't feel so alone.

It's possible to feel lonely in our relationship with God too. In Psalm 22:1 David, in agony, writes, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Was David in fact forsaken by God? No. Later in the psalm, David pushes past how he feels in the moment to claim by faith what he knows to be true, namely that God has not forsaken him and has heard his cry.

But did David *feel* forsaken? Absolutely.

A thousand years later Jesus would cry out David's agonizing question from the cross. Was Jesus in fact forsaken by God? No. The last word from the cross was not "why", but "Father." "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

But did Jesus *feel* forsaken? Most definitely.

This Advent, talk to Jesus. He knows what it feels like to feel alone.

PRAYER *Lord Jesus, even if our cup of loneliness doesn't pass, we take great solace knowing that you know how we feel. We're not alone. We love that You are Emmanuel. Amen.*

Chris Higginson

LEAD PASTOR,
NEW LIFE CHURCH, COLLINGWOOD ON

DECEMBER 22

The Wisdom of Children

VERSE Luke 10:21-24

As a father of three young children (Age 4, 3, and 1), I find great joy in those moments when my children come to me and ask for help. "Dad, can you fix my toy?" I am equally amused when my children, desiring to do something beyond their ability, declare, "No! I do it myself." A picture of my son with his shoes on backwards and coat inside-out when he declared that he would dress himself comes to mind. From a young age we desire to be seen as having it all figured out. We want to be seen as "wise and learned". While desiring wisdom is good, this desire can lead us down a path where we forget the source of wisdom, we forget that we are children, and we forget that we are naive of the Father's higher ways.

That is what makes the humanity of Jesus so wonderful. He did not remain distant from our experience. No matter our age, education, or status, we are children before God—and Jesus knows what it is like to be a child because He was one.

In Luke 10: 21-24, Jesus, with great joy, thanks God that His truth was revealed to little children and hidden from the wise and learned. He, as one who reveals the Father to us, also chose not the religious elite nor the most powerful to be His disciples. Rather, he chose the over-looked, open-minded, and curious.

PRAYER *Thank you Father for revealing your truth to me. Thank you for sending me your Son, that I may know Him, and may know you more through Him. May I never take for granted the privilege I have in knowing Jesus. Amen.*

Aaron Hooper

PASTOR TO YOUNG FAMILIES,
THE MISSION, LANGTON ON

DECEMBER 21

The Gift of Wonder

VERSE Luke 2:41-47

Every day, our 3 year old son asks us time after time the big question of "what" or "why". He has an innate desire to fully understand the world and how it works.

For some of us, we become conditioned to stop asking the big "why's." We begin to accept the way things are, and we push our wonder and curiosity aside.

In Luke 2:46, we see one of the only stories of Jesus' childhood - a story where Jesus teaches us that it's not only okay but important to ask big, thought-provoking questions. This becomes especially true as we get older because we tend to get set in our ways of thinking, which makes it difficult to remember to listen and learn with the young minds who ask those good questions.

We, as adults, can learn from the younger people in our lives and churches. Jesus teaches us that it's not a bad thing to ask hard, big questions OR small, little ones. Questioning what we believe doesn't mean that our faith is weak. Staying curious can actually help to strengthen our faith and keep it more authentic. Learning and wondering alongside others can also strengthen the body of Christ. So, let's stay curious, ask questions, keep pondering, and continuously pray.

PRAYER *Lord, help us to not just sit passively, but to continue to be curious about You. Open our hearts to become more like children learning about the world. May we look at each other and Your Word with great excitement and wonder. Amen.*

Kerrie & Wesley Hillis

KIDS CORNER COORDINATOR AND YOUTH PASTOR,
WAINFLEET BIC CHURCH, WAINFLEET ON

DECEMBER 1

On Our Way to Christmas...

VERSE Luke 19:41

In Luke 19:41, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem; to His suffering, crucifixion and ultimately, the redemption of humankind. Luke tells us that when Jesus saw the city, He "began to weep". Why?

Yes, He saw the physical destruction of the city. He wept for that. Yet, even more, He wept for the state of the peoples' hearts as they had rejected God's plan. The world that Jesus entered into for us was messy and heartbreaking, and He responds with grief and deep compassion.

Our world today is not so different. In most communities, alcoholism and drug abuse is widespread. Domestic, physical, emotional and sexual abuse is much too common. There is so much destruction in communities and individual lives, and Jesus continues to be rejected by many.

I wonder what Jesus' response would be if He were to walk towards each of our communities this Christmas. Would there be tears of joy in finding communities of people following Him, living their lives in obedient love to Him? Or would there be tears of sorrow in discovering rejection of Him, His sacrifice on their behalf, and God's plan? Perhaps there would be both.

PRAYER *Father in heaven, our hearts are burdened for our communities just as we know yours is. Help us to keep our hearts open like yours, full of love, and sensitive to the reality in our peoples' lives. On our way to Christmas, use us to share your love and peace to further transform our communities as their hearts turn towards You. In Jesus' name and for His sake. Amen.*

Dolly Dikens

LEAD PASTOR,
THE SPIRITUAL WAY, KIRKLAND LAKE ON

DECEMBER 2

When Jesus Stands at the Tomb

VERSE John 11:32-36

Young, vibrant, a husband and father — gone after a brief but brutal fight with leukemia. At his funeral, his mother cried, "It's not fair. God took the good son." Her anguish was raw and honest. Mary and Martha surely felt the same ache when Lazarus died.

When Jesus arrived at Lazarus' tomb, He stepped fully into that same human sorrow. Scripture says He was deeply moved, agitated in His spirit, troubled in His heart. And then — Jesus wept. Not dramatic, not distant, but personal tears. His grief reveals His solidarity with our pain, His hatred of death, and His compassion for every wounded heart. He does not stand above suffering; He enters it.

Yet His tears were not the tears of defeat. They were the tears of a warrior who knows death's days are numbered. In His first advent, Jesus enters suffering; feels what we feel and participates in our pain. But in His second advent, He will end suffering altogether. The grief of Lazarus' tomb points forward to the joy of a world with no tombs at all.

Like this mother, we may feel hard pressed, perplexed, struck down — but in Christ we are never crushed, never abandoned, never destroyed. The King who once wept will one day wipe every tear from our eyes.

"Christ in you, the hope of glory."

PRAYER *Father, we thank You for Jesus—fully divine, fully human—who entered our pain and carried our sorrow. Remind us that the One who wept with His friends now lifts us with His resurrection hope. Amen.*

Mike & Terri Hutchinson

LEAD PASTOR AND WORSHIP MINISTRY DIRECTOR,
FORDWICH BIC COMMUNITY CHURCH, FORDWICH ON

READER 2:

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

Luke 2:19

Sometimes our response to Christmas is skepticism, doubt, questions, curiosity, or a frustration with missing pieces of the story. God's unconditional love means that we can bring Him our true unmasked selves, including all of our doubts, questions, and yearnings to know more.

Prayer:

God, we thank you for the invitation to have a personal and intimate relationship with you, where you know our hearts' desires and struggles. May we rest assured in the love you have for us not in spite of our questions, but because of them. May we strive to live a life full of curiosity and hunger to learn more about You through the world and the people you created. And may we stay open to what you want to reveal to us.

Amen.



THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today we light the candle of Love.

Advent tells the story of the deep and unconditional love that God has for us, just as a parent longing to unite with their children.

READER 1:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

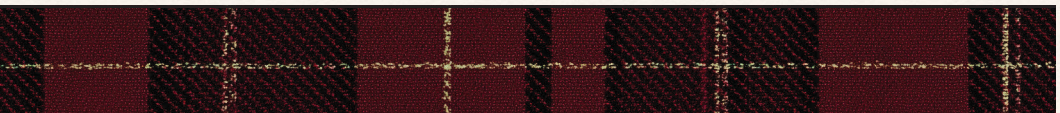
Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in the highest heaven,

and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

Luke 2:8-15



DECEMBER 3

Making Room

VERSE Mark 3:1-5, John 2:13-17

As you settle in to take a breath with Jesus, are you feeling the **hope** of the season, or are you already **overwhelmed** by all that it brings?

Either way, take a moment to notice. This week is all about the big emotions that Jesus held. He knows firsthand what it feels like to carry those emotions, and He understands what we are holding today.

Take a few deep breaths. Invite Jesus to be present with you. Lay down whatever you are carrying and be open to what He has for you.

During this season of preparation, God invites us to examine our hearts. Are we open to His work, or are we resisting Him like those who opposed Jesus in Mark 3:1–5? Jesus was deeply grieved because people cared more about keeping the rules than caring for the person in front of them. He calls us to let go of hardened hearts, embrace His mercy, and let our hearts grieve alongside His when we see a world getting it backwards.

We see that same passion in John 2:13–17 when Jesus cleanses the temple because He desires more than religious activity—He desires hearts that are fully devoted to God.

Advent invites us to slow down, take a deep breath, and make room for Jesus. He invites all of our emotions, worries, and distractions without judgment. In the midst of it all, He is yearning to soften our hearts and continually mold them to respond honestly and lovingly to the world around us.

PRAYER *Jesus, thank You that You know exactly what we are feeling. Soften our hearts, remove what keeps us from You, and fill us with the hope that comes through Your healing and new life. Amen.*

Tammy Lembo

ADMINISTRATOR AND SUNDAY CONNECT COORDINATOR,
WAYPOINT CHURCH, OAKVILLE ON

DECEMBER 4

The Gift of Grace

VERSE John 8:1–11

We all know what it feels like to fall short. Choices we wish we could undo, words we wish we could take back, and parts of our story we would prefer to hide. In John 8:1-11, a woman caught in adultery is brought to stand accused before Jesus - her failure exposed, surrounded by people ready to judge and condemn her.

But Jesus responds in a way that causes the crowd to rethink their judgment. His words invite self-honesty and examination. They require accountability and humility. In this moment, the only person present who has the authority to condemn - the only one without sin - is Jesus himself. And he chooses mercy and compassion.

This is the heart of God revealed through Jesus: the one with the greatest authority to judge is the one who extends the greatest compassion and grace.

At Advent, we remember that "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son...For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17).

As the crowd slowly walks away, Jesus says, "neither do I condemn you...Go now and leave your life of sin."

While Jesus acknowledges the woman's sin and the need for change, he does not use shame as a tool for transformation. Instead, he draws near, offers forgiveness, and invites her into a new way of life. Jesus shows us that God's response to human brokenness is not condemnation from a distance, but loving restoration that calls us toward healing and hope.

PRAYER *Jesus, as we celebrate your birth, we thank you for the gift of grace. In this season, let us receive the forgiveness, healing, and restoration you came to offer, and may we become the kind of people who extend that same grace to others. Amen.*

Jessie Knight

YOUTH AND SERVICE COORDINATOR, WEST TORONTO BIC CHURCH, TORONTO ON

THE Courage OF CURIOSITY

To avoid looking foolish, we often hide our questions, our wonder, and our doubts behind a mask of certainty. But God is not surprised by our questions or inquisitiveness, He designed us with the craving to learn and understand the world around us. On the brink of Christmas, we look at how Jesus approached the world with open, inquisitive, and humble engagement, constantly asking questions to provoke more pondering and discussion. Jesus gives a masterclass on curiosity by asking over 300 questions recorded in the Bible, while also celebrating and patiently responding to those with questions for him. True humanity is marked by wonder and curiosity, not static perfection. We are invited to drop the facade of having it all figured out, and instead approach the world, God, and each other with unashamed curiosity.



DECEMBER 5

Messiah in the Mess

There's a Promise God incarnate
The One and Only Son, who chose to walk with us
Mother Mary held her baby
A manger for a throne, no room to call His own

The dirt and the darkness won't keep Him away
For this is the reason He came

Glory glory
Glory to God for mercy in the flesh
Glory glory
Emmanuel hope here with us
Messiah in the mess

Scan this to find the song on YouTube

Lowly shepherds, worn and weathered
Tending flocks by night, were taken by surprise
When the heavens, full of angels
Announced the newborn King, the first to hear them sing

Glory glory
Glory to God for mercy in the flesh
Glory glory
Emmanuel hope here with us
Messiah in the mess

He enters into the mess we create
Christmas reminds us the reason He came

Glory glory
Glory glory
Glory to God for mercy in the flesh
Glory glory
Emmanuel hope here with us
Messiah in the mess

PERFORMED BY TEMITOPE AND SARAH KROGER

Written by Sarah Kroger, Temitope Peters, Colton Price



STAYING CONNECTED

Although Christmas can sometimes mean more people and more gatherings than any other time of year, it can also be one of the loneliest seasons. Perhaps it's difficult to pause long enough amidst all the hustle and bustle to meaningfully connect, or maybe Christmas emphasizes the empty seats at the table for those who live too far away. This Christmas season, you are invited to try intentionally connecting in a new way. We've compiled a few ideas below.

For those hoping your schedules will finally sync up enough for a call...

Take a small step to make your communication feel more personal in the meantime – try sending voice messages instead of texts, or using an app like Marco Polo to send video messages back and forth on your own schedules.

For those finding it hard to make time for everything...

Consider sharing your hobbies and projects – sign up for an exercise class together, take turns helping each other with home projects, read through the same book at the same time, offer to teach your craft.

For those unable to connect in person...

Build an ongoing connection based on a shared interest – set up a shared music playlist, take turns surprising each other with food deliveries throughout the year, set aside a regular online game night.

DECEMBER 19

Strengthening Community

As we recognize and celebrate the strength of community this week, you are invited to learn more about yourself and the unique giftings you bring, and to intentionally connect with others whether near or far.

Consider using quiet reflection, feedback from loved ones, and/or personality tests to help jot down a few of your strengths below. If you can already think of ways that your gifts could be used by God to serve others, write them down as well!

Notes



THE Gift OF OUR LIMITS

Our culture worships non-stop productivity, leading us to hide our exhaustion and physical needs. Jesus, however, respected his biological boundaries—he slept, he ate, and he got tired. Having a body that gets tired, hungry, or overwhelmed isn't a sin; it's just part of being human. If Jesus is our example and even He needed to rest and step away, then we are invited to also honour our exhaustion and celebrate rest as a holy, God-given boundary.

Jesus understood the physical and spiritual needs that come with being human. His ministry included providing for people both physically and spiritually. Jesus demonstrated countless examples both of recognizing his own human limits and of providing for the needs of others. We can follow Jesus' example by respecting ours and others' limitations, and seeing them as opportunities to connect deeper with each other and with God.

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today we light the candle of Peace.

The Christmas Story is far from peaceful - it's a story of exhaustion after a long journey, chaotically navigating a busy town in search of accommodations, and unexpectedly giving birth in unsuitable conditions alone and far from home. When Mary first hears about how God plans to use her, she is understandably afraid and confused.

READER 1:

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you."

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end."

"How will this be," Mary asked the angel, "since I am a virgin?"

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. For no word from God will ever fail."

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

Luke 1:26-38



DECEMBER 18

BEE-long

VERSE 1 Corinthians 12 & Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

The summer after I finished Bible College, I worked for a beekeeper. To this day, it remains one of the best jobs I've ever had. Honeybees are among the most socially complex creatures in the animal kingdom. Though each bee is an individual, together they function as one thriving colony. Every bee has a role, and without each one doing its part, the hive cannot flourish.

God's vision for His church is similar. No one is called to live or carry out God's mission alone, even Jesus. As Ecclesiastes reminds us, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour." The Mission of the Church was never meant to be a solo effort; it takes a community of people serving, encouraging, praying, and growing together.

The difference between one bee and the whole colony is remarkable. A single honeybee produces only about 1/12 of a teaspoon of honey in its lifetime; not even close to enough to sustain a hive. Together, however, thousands of bees can produce an incredible harvest. I still remember lifting honey supers from one hive that weighed more than 80 pounds each. What no single bee could accomplish alone became possible because the colony worked together.

The same is true of the church. Alone, our impact is limited. Together, God multiplies our gifts, strengthens our witness, and advances His kingdom.

PRAYER *Lord, make us one. Teach us to belong to one another as we belong to You, so together we may help bring heaven to earth. Amen.*

Austin Gagné

LEAD PASTOR,
DELISLE COMMUNITY CHURCH, DELISLE SK

READER 2:

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

You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Isaiah 26:3

READER 1:

Jesus' conception is far beyond human ability and understanding, leading Mary to a place of necessary trust in God. Her trust and surrendering to God's plan allows her to experience moments of peace throughout her wild journey.

Prayer:

God we praise you for the miracle of Jesus' conception, and for your evident presence with Mary and Joseph through the pregnancy and birth story. May we remember that you are the same God who is also waiting expectantly and lovingly to trade our burdens for the kind of deep rest and peace that only you can provide.

Amen.



DECEMBER 7

Growing Faint

VERSE Matthew 4:11

Matthew 4:11 says that after forty days of fasting and resisting temptation, "the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus." I love that Jesus, who had all authority, still allowed himself to be cared for. He didn't push beyond his humanity. He received what his weary body needed.

I learned this lesson the hard way. During my fourth-year undergraduate seminar class, I was so determined to prepare the perfect final presentation that I neglected myself. As the deadline approached, I spent nearly three days barely eating, drinking, or sleeping. Standing before my class, battling nerves combined with my exhaustion, I fainted mid-presentation. It was humbling, but unforgettable. As I regained consciousness, I was surrounded by peers and McMaster's Emergency First Response Team. All along, my body had been telling me its limits, and I ignored them.

Similarly, our culture often celebrates pushing through at any cost, yet Jesus shows us another way. He embraced the limits of being fully human. He knew hunger, thirst, and exhaustion. And when the wilderness was over, he accepted the ministry of angels. His willingness to receive care reminds us that our limitations are not failures, they are invitations to trust God and one another.

Advent reminds us that God came to us not as someone immune to weakness, but as one who fully entered it. When we honour our need for rest, nourishment, and help, we are not falling short of faith. We are following the example of Jesus, who shows us that receiving care is sometimes one of the holiest acts of all.

PRAYER *Lord, teach me to honour the limits You lovingly built into me. Help me receive Your care with humility and extend that same compassion to others. Amen.*

Zac Boot

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS DIRECTOR, WESTSIDE HAMILTON, HAMILTON ON

DECEMBER 17

Soaring Together

VERSE John 2:1-11

Some autumn evenings, I will look out over the fields surrounding our farm and watch long lines of Canada geese crossing the sky in their familiar "V" formation. Flying together allows them to travel farther as a flock than they ever could alone. They take turns leading, and if one goose falls behind, others stay with it. Watching them fly and listening to them call out to each other as they go reminds me that God has designed all of creation, including us, to depend on one another. Strength is often found in community.

Jesus' first miracle didn't happen in solitude or in a place of great importance. It happened at a wedding celebration surrounded by family and friends. Jesus accepted an invitation into community long before crowds followed Him. When the wine ran out, He preserved the joy of the celebration. Even the Son of God chose to share life with others, through laughing, grieving, serving, and relying on those around Him.

In a world that prizes independence, we often hide our need for others. Jesus and nature both point us towards the truth that joy and strength grow best when life is shared. Like the geese flying together across the autumn sky, we were created to celebrate together and support one another. During this Advent season, may we notice the many ways we are connected to others and how those relationships sustain and shape us.

PRAYER *Lord, thank You for creating us for community. Help us to receive support, offer encouragement, and experience the joy that comes from walking together. Amen.*

Heather Fretz

BIC BOARD CHAIR,
MEMBER OF THE TRINITYLIFE CHURCH COMMUNITY, SHERKSTON ON

DECEMBER 16

The Greatest Miracle

VERSE Luke 8:1-3, Matthew 4:18-22, Matthew 9:9-13

I saw a meme recently that said Jesus' greatest miracle was having twelve close friends as a man over the age of thirty. In a world where one in four Canadians report having no close friends, the meme has a point.

So many people are experiencing isolation and disconnection that we've named it the "loneliness epidemic." Like most epidemics, the impact on our mental and emotional health is severe.

Dr. Jacques Lee puts it bluntly: "Loneliness is as bad for you as smoking."

Or, as the first pages of the Bible tell us, "It's not good for man to be alone."

The good news is that today's scriptures show us that Jesus didn't accidentally end up with 12 friends. He was proactive in pursuing relationships that would form a trusted group around Him for sharing life and ministry. He didn't wait for others to make the first move, but was courageous enough to take the initiative, reach out and invite others into his life.

Jesus was also not exclusive about who could be his friend. His social circle was extremely diverse, spanning such a wide range of political views, personalities and social statuses that he became known as a friend of sinners, even though he was a rabbi.

For those of us living through a loneliness epidemic, we can be grateful that Jesus didn't need a miracle to make friends and, if we follow his example, neither do we.

PRAYER *Jesus, in our loneliness, help us have the courage to make the first move towards others and the heart to embrace all kinds of people. Amen.*

Eric Versluis

FOUNDER OF WE HELP PASTORS, OTTAWA ON

DECEMBER 8

Utter Dependence on Jesus

VERSE Mark 6:31-32

We're likely familiar with the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000, but it's easy to overlook these two verses that come just before this incredible act of compassion and provision. In the busyness of their ministry, and having just heard that John the Baptist had been killed, Jesus invited his disciples into a boat to retreat to a quiet place before continuing to serve. It reminds me of Elijah in 1 Kings 19, where in the chaos, the Lord met Elijah not in the wind or earthquake, but in a gentle whisper.

We, too, can become overwhelmed by the busyness of life and the pain and need we encounter around us. It doesn't take long before we come face to face with our human limits. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly invites us into quiet places of rest, reminding us that our dependence belongs to him alone. We are not the Saviour - Jesus is. A few verses later, when the disciples suggest sending the crowd away to find food, Jesus responds, "You give them something to eat" (Mark 6:37). As they served from a place of rest and dependence on Jesus, he provided all that was needed.

This Advent, may we embrace the gift of our limits, allowing them to draw us into deeper dependence on Jesus and into the hope of Emmanuel - God with us.

PRAYER *Thank you, Jesus, for creating us with limits that remind us to depend on you and the community you place around us. Draw us away to quiet places where we can hear your gentle voice. Help us to find our true rest in you. Amen.*

Melissa Vytsma

REGIONAL MANAGER WITH PRISON FELLOWSHIP CANADA
MEMBER OF THE OAK RIDGES CHURCH COMMUNITY, RICHMOND HILL ON

DECEMBER 9

Caring for Our Spirit at Christmas

VERSE Luke 5:15-16

Rest is always an act of resistance—maybe never more than at Christmastime. The season itself has its own set of expectations. Then, there are the expectations of our family and the expectations we place on ourselves. Have we done enough? Have we spent enough? Are WE enough?

Jesus, empowered and led by the Holy Spirit, shows us what it means to be fully human. As the demands on his time and energy increase due to his popularity, Jesus often withdraws to lonely places to pray. He recognizes and prioritizes his own need to rest, recharge, and reconnect with God.

Jesus invites us to embrace our human limitations. We are not machines. We are God's beloved children in need of rest. It's time to hop off the holiday hamster wheel and resist the urge to do more, spend more, be more.

Maybe this year, we could **care less about Christmas spirit and more about caring for our spirit at Christmas**. We could do what Henri Nouwen called the real "work" of prayer, which is to become silent and listen to the One who calls us Beloved.

PRAYER *Begin to breathe slowly and deeply. Become aware of God's presence with you. Merge the rhythm of the phrase with the rhythm of your breathing as you repeat the phrase silently or quietly aloud. End your time of prayer in silence, listening to the voice that says good things about you.*

Inhale: *Jesus.* **Exhale:** *I am the Beloved. Amen.*

Casey Heintzman

WORSHIP DIRECTOR,
SANDBANKS COMMUNITY CHURCH, PRINCE EDWARD COUNTY ON

DECEMBER 15

Wonderful Unity

VERSE John 17:21

"It's the most wonderful time of the year." We hear this refrain repeated throughout the season of Advent, a suggestion that our annual rhythms mutually culminate in the anticipation and enjoyment of the Christmas season. I think implicit in this sentiment is that Advent represents a period filled with *wonderful* quality time spent among the family, friends, and neighbours we care for deeply. While many look forward to these gatherings with great anticipation and joy, others dread the reminders of how fraught relationships can be with our families of origin, or the reminders of those whose absences will be acutely felt.

The anxieties that may resurface during the *wonderful* season of Advent - the ones tied to old conflicts and broken relationships - are mirrored in Jesus' prayer in John 17:21 *"...that they will all be one, just as you and I are one..."* We are made for unity with God and with each other, and Jesus' heart aches alongside ours when relationships are painful or broken. Jesus' vision of unity acknowledges and celebrates differences, even though they are often at the root of our conflict. We can take comfort that Jesus too experienced conflict firsthand and knows the feeling of deep longing for relationships to be made right. May you deeply experience the *wonderful* unity of the Father and Son this Advent season.

PRAYER *Jesus, we pray that you sit with us in our pain, and that you pour grace, mercy, and forgiveness on us as we continually seek unity with our family, friends, and neighbours this Advent, restoring relationships in a manner emblematic of your grace and peace, such that it bears witness to your deep love toward us! Amen.*

Matt Binnington

HOME CHURCH LEADER,
EAST TORONTO BIC, TORONTO ON

DECEMBER 14

Share One Another's Burdens...

VERSE Galatians 6:2

As local church communities, perhaps you have been on this journey of faith for some time, or maybe you're just beginning the start of your walk with Christ.

Truly, no matter where you are, we are all called to be family... A family that can feel complex, messy, and perhaps stressful. Our church family can be like that at times.

However, as followers of Christ, being part of His family, and by His example, we are called to embrace the messiness of supporting and sharing each others' burdens. And that includes being willing to receive support.

Years ago, when my husband died, very suddenly and totally unexpected, it was an extremely bleak time. I was angry with God, and I had a lot of 'why' questions. Several individuals stepped up, sharing my burden, even during the darkest of days. They supported me, loved me, and shared this burden that I couldn't carry on my own.

I learned that receiving support means letting people in. Instead of suffering alone, we have the choice to allow others to share the load. That is how we grow stronger, develop wisdom, gain new perspective, and deepen our connection to God and to one another.

Striving every day to do our best and share our painful seasons together in community as Christ demonstrated, is not just a sermon to be preached, but a life to be lived.

PRAYER *Lord, show us how to keep our eyes and ears open, not only through this Christmas season, but throughout the year. Teach us to connect with those around us, easing others' loneliness and hardships and allowing them to do the same for us. In Jesus' name... Amen.*

Cheryl Scott

BROCKVILLE ON

DECEMBER 10

Rest

VERSE Matthew 11:28-30

The world often glorifies a nonstop lifestyle of constant busyness. In contrast, Jesus withdrew to lonely places to pray, quiet places to rest, and slept through literal storms. If Jesus took time to rest, both physically and spiritually, then so should we.

Jesus' invitation to follow him includes a promise of rest. However, like the Israelites who hardened their hearts at Meribah and Massah, we are often in a state of unrest, anxious and troubled about many things, but, as Jesus instructs Martha, "only one thing is necessary."

Jesus calls us first and foremost to himself, not to works, ministry, or service. These things are important but secondary. As we come, we learn gentleness, humility, and rest for our souls like Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

This promised rest should not be understood as freedom from life's storms or as an invitation to a fruitless life. There is still a yoke to bear, there is work to be done, which God prepared in advance for us. But, in Jesus, the yoke is easy, and the burden is light because we are surrendered to his lordship, free from anxiety, stress, confusion, and futile exertion. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest.

PRAYER *God of hope, fill us with all joy and peace as we rest and trust in you, so that we may overflow with hope, becoming gentle and humble in heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Matthew Quinn

MEMBER OF THE COMMON GROUND CHURCH COMMUNITY,
ALLISTON ON

DECEMBER 11

Sacrificial Love

VERSE Matthew 25:35-40

There was a time when I believed the lie that I was unwanted, that I was unworthy of being loved, and unworthy of being chosen, and I questioned God. I questioned why He cared, and why He would die for me. It didn't make sense - the grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Why would God send His Son to die for me, so that I might live?

The answer, although not easy to accept, is simple. In John 15:12-13, Jesus says it plainly, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends." Christ died for me, because He loves me! He showed us the ultimate example of sacrificial love during His time on Earth, and He calls us to extend that same kind of love to others.

Matthew 25:35-40 shows just how greatly the Lord values our love for others. Just as He provides for our needs, He wants us to care for the hungry and thirsty, the sick and naked, and even the stranger and prisoner. He says, '"truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'" (Matthew 25:40). As we care for the needs of others, we are loving and serving the Lord.

PRAYER *Lord, thank you for your beautiful example of love. I pray today that you help me to accept your love and to love others with that same kind of love. Continue to shape me to be more like you each day. Amen.*

Nathalie Barabas

2026 SUMMER INTERN,
MASSEY PLACE, SASKATOON SK

When it was time for Elizabeth to have her baby, she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown her great mercy, and they shared her joy.

Luke 1:57-58

Prayer:

God we give you praise and thanks for the joy you made available to us through your Son. May we look to you as the source of deepest joy despite our circumstances, and may we continually seek to have a transparent and willing heart in order to share our life with those around us.

Amen.



THE THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Today we light the candle of Joy.

READER 1:

Today we celebrate the joy that is available for us because of Jesus' decision to come live in our world. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

Luke 2:10

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

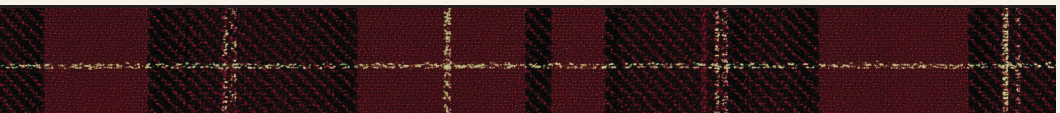
John 15:9-11

READER 2:

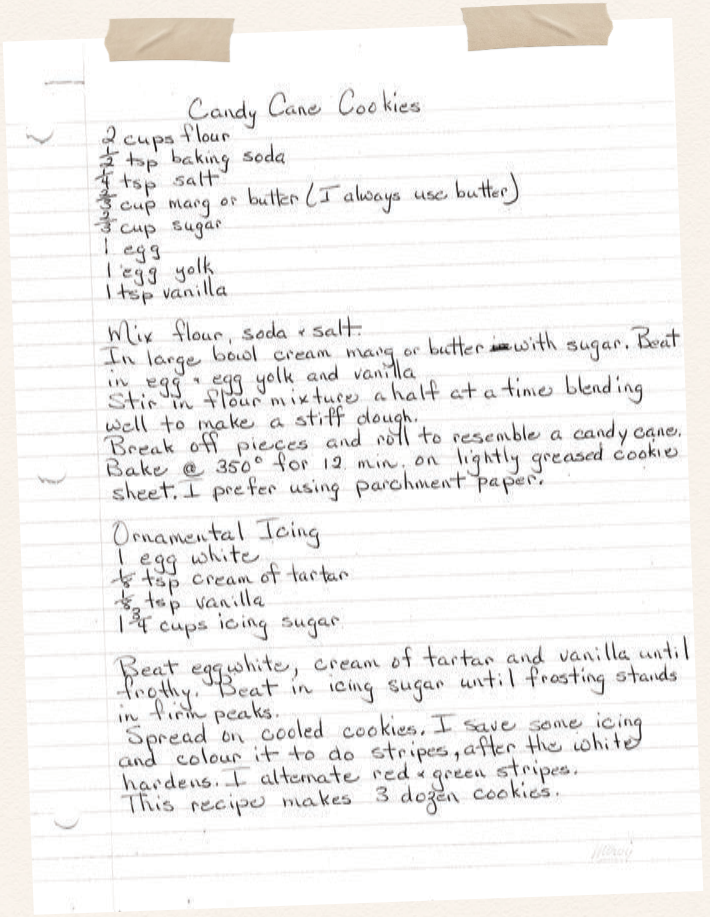
Today we are also invited to share joy in community with those around us.

At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!"

Luke 1:39-45



DECEMBER 12



Candy Cane Cookies

2 cups flour
2 tsp baking soda
½ tsp salt
1 cup marg or butter (I always use butter)
1 cup sugar
1 egg
1 egg yolk
1 tsp vanilla

Mix flour, soda + salt.
In large bowl cream marg or butter with sugar. Beat in egg + egg yolk and vanilla
Stir in flour mixture a half at a time blending well to make a stiff dough.
Break off pieces and roll to resemble a candy cane.
Bake @ 350° for 12 min. on lightly greased cookie sheet. I prefer using parchment paper.

Ornamental Icing
1 egg white
⅛ tsp cream of tartar
½ tsp vanilla
1¾ cups icing sugar

Beat eggwhite, cream of tartar and vanilla until frothy. Beat in icing sugar until frosting stands in firm peaks.
Spread on cooled cookies. I save some icing and colour it to do stripes, after the white hardens. I alternate red + green stripes.
This recipe makes 3 dozen cookies.

"I have been making these cookies for 40 years. They have become a family, friends, and neighbourhood favourite. My children always loved helping with rolling and striping. Back then, we did all the striping with toothpicks. Now, my children and grandchildren make them every year.

"The soft cookie and hard icing give it a lovely crunch. The orders are getting higher every year! Last year we made 20 dozen and every cookie was enjoyed. I love making these for others. They're a bit time consuming to make, but so worth it."

Chris Costa

BAKER EXTRAORDINAIRE,
MEMBER OF THE WELLAND BIC CHURCH COMMUNITY,
WELLAND ON



THE Strength OF INTERDEPENDENCY

In today's world, independence is highly praised, sometimes causing us to hide our loneliness or our need for support. Yet Jesus deliberately chose a life of deep community - He relied on others for friendship, built a team to do ministry together, shared his gifts with individuals and large crowds, and asked for companionship in his darkest hours. Jesus was rarely alone. Instead, He intentionally formed a messy, close-knit chosen family to share in His time on Earth. Our life is also meant to be shared in community with those around us - our emotions, our experiences, our talents, and our ways of thinking. Jesus models for us that a life lived in community means multiplying efforts, resilience, and joy.

WEEK THREE