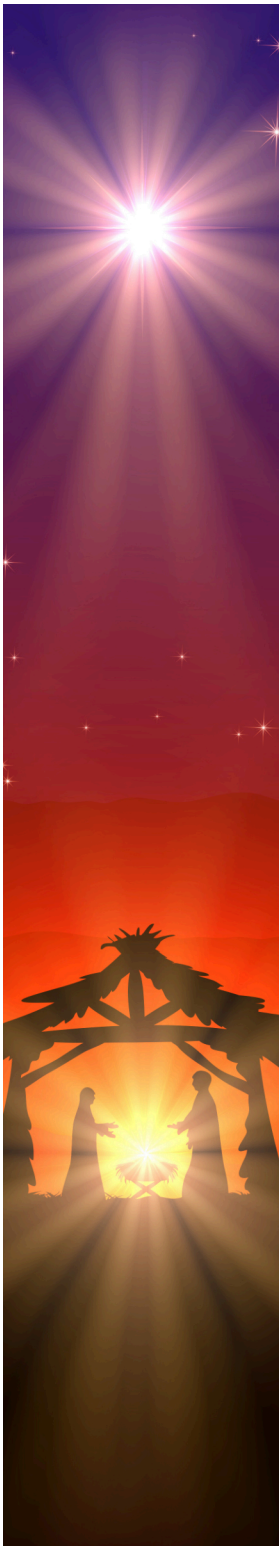


December  
2025

# THE WINE PRESS

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# THE WINE PRESS



**Pressing into Truth, Pouring out His Grace**

**December 2025**

## **Joy to the World!**

Christmas is here—and with it comes the joy of celebrating God’s greatest gift to us: Jesus! Emmanuel, God With Us. The same good news that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds still rings true for us today: He came to bring His peace to the world, and that peace is ours to receive and rejoice in.

Our prayer is that this Christmas is overflowing with joy for you—moments of laughter, closeness with loved ones, and the sweet reminder that Christ is truly with us. May you feel His presence in your home, His comfort in any weariness you carry, and His light shining into every corner of your life.

We also just want to say how grateful we are for you. Thank you for being part of the Wine Press family. We pray this season fills your heart with warmth and peace—and that the joy of Christmas stays with you long after the decorations are put away.

## **Merry Christmas!**

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The Wine Press is a thoughtfully curated collection of articles from across the web, compiled to inspire, encourage, and deepen your walk with our King and Savior, Jesus Christ. All articles remain the property of their respective authors to whom we joyfully give full credit and our appreciation for sharing their wisdom and experiences with us. May these words uplift your spirit, strengthen your faith, and draw you into ever deeper communion with the God of all grace.

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# Christmas Like a Christian

## Five Glories the World Belittles

By Marshall Segal

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**W**ords alone could never fully capture the meaning and wonder of Christmas — but we can sure do a whole lot better than the card aisles in stores today. “Many blessings and wishes to you.” “May your life be filled with warmth and good cheer this holiday season.” “Sending lots of peace and joy to you and your family this Christmas.” “It’s people like you who make this season so magical and bright.”

No, it’s not people like you (or me) that make this season merry, magical, or bright. In fact, by increasingly thinking

we’re what makes Christmas so merry, we’re slowly siphoning off its true power. The Son of the living God was born human in a small town in the Middle East, sent to bear the awful weight of sin and shame, overpower Satan’s terrifying forces of evil, place death itself in the grave, and clear the narrow path to paradise. And yet how many settle for something superficial and fleeting instead — for greeting cards, newly released electronics, and a few LED lights?

Read enough cards and watch enough movies, and you begin to wonder if the



actual “magic” of our modern Christmas is avoiding the real Christmas altogether.

## Unfeigned Magic

The world can have its makeshift magic this Christmas season, but we’re praying for a spiritual miracle in us, freshly and more deeply, and then in everyone we love:

Though you have not seen him, you love Him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. (1 Peter 1:8)

Do you still love the King lying in the manger? Does your heart still rise to see Him serve His friends, heal the sick, deliver the possessed, and then die for the world? Do you recognize yourself in the verse above, rejoicing “with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory”? If not, come and look again at the deeper, earth-shaking, heaven-filling magic of Christmas, all from just one paragraph in Colossians 1.

### 1. This Christ shows us God.

He is the image of the invisible God. (Colossians 1:15)

Those eight words really ought to be enough to drive the banality right out of our homes and pews. The man who was born to a real woman, with a real womb, in a real city, during a real time in history has made the infinite and invisible God seeable. Recognizable. Huggable. Human. This Christ was in the beginning, and all things were made through Him. And then He took on the flesh that He had made, and ate the food that He had made, and walked over hills that He had made, and loved the people that He had made — all so that we might see God.

And not only did God make himself seeable in the child born in Bethlehem, but he’s opened our eyes to see His glory — in the manger, at the cross, on the throne. Before we believed, “the god of

this world” kept us from seeing what we now see. And then, whether suddenly or slowly, we saw Him differently. We came to see “the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Corinthians 4:4). In this Jesus, we’ve seen God.

### 2. This Christ created and upholds all things.

By Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16–17)

The man at the center of Christmas changes how we see God — we actually see Him — and He changes how we see every other thing we see (and everything we don’t). Christmas isn’t only an opportunity to place Christ above all else, but to see Him in and behind all else. “All things were made through him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made” (John 1:3). The one who came to live on earth invented earth and life. This makes everything around us, everything in the universe, everything beyond our universe its own Christmas devotion about Christ.

He assembled the trees in our yards, wrapping their rings, stretching their branches, carefully placing leaves and fruit — billions and billions of trees, and yet each of them their own. And over all those trees, he painted a sky, that cosmic canopy of blue. And over that canopy, He taught the sun how to rise each morning and dance, in all its colors, each evening. And beneath that dance, He wove together the people we love, all the people we love, for all the reasons that we love them. Everything that is or will be, He made. He was and is the great Carpenter of creation.

This carpenter was in the beginning, but He wasn't only in the beginning. He made all things, but He didn't only make all things; He also holds them together — right now, as you read, and eat, and unwrap presents, and sing. “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power” (Hebrews 1:3).

### **3. This Christ came to receive the wrath of God.**

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, He has now reconciled in His body of flesh by His death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before Him (Colossians 1:21–22)

As genuinely miraculous as His coming was, we celebrate what happened that night in Bethlehem because of why He was born. This Christ came and lived to die. The Son of Man did not come merely to be born, “but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). He received the wrath of God so that we might enjoy His presence and favor.

In the end, it's the death of this human Son that sets a Christian Christmas apart from all its pagan and commercial imitations.

We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Corinthians 1:23–24)

Some may join us in celebrating the cute baby in a domesticated manger, but only Christians find peace and joy beneath the bloody cross. Their stumbling block is our cornerstone. We were once alienated from God and hostile to Him — not neutral or indifferent, but venomous — and yet Jesus laid down His life, paying

for all our hideous hissing and defanging our mutiny against Him. Christmas is about the canceling and dethroning of sin.

And He died not merely to forgive an enemy, but to have His bride — “he is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). He's not a mercenary Savior, but an adoring and devoted husband. He entered the filthiness of a stable, the indignity of human life, “that He might sanctify [the church], having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that He might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing” (Ephesians 5:26–27).

### **4. This Christ holds the keys of Death.**

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. (Colossians 1:18)

You could of course argue that we celebrate what happened on Christmas morning less because of how He died and more because of how He rose. The man who was born in Bethlehem did in fact die, but then He was “born” a second time when He shook off His grave clothes and walked out of the tomb. He didn't merely come to die, but to put death itself in a grave.

“Fear not,” this Christ says again this Christmas, “I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades” (Revelation 1:17–18). He's not the cuddly, defenseless baby the world would prefer. No, His resurrection announced His awesome power and authority over all rivals. None can withstand this Christ, and none will avoid His judgment.

And all who take refuge in Him will never die (John 11:25–26). Because of



Christmas, death will now kneel to serve you, one day lifting you into the life you've always wanted and never deserved. In fact, God has already "raised us up with [Christ] and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6–7).

## **5. This Christ will inherit and transform everything.**

In Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:19–20)

He may have been raised in the humility of a remote and obscure town, but He came to capture the world, to unite every throne on earth under His rule. And not just the cities and governments, but everything that is — mountains and oceans, grizzly bears and goldfish, evergreen trees, snow fall, and reindeer. And not just everything that's here on earth, but everything in every realm, all the spiritual realities and forces that invade human life without being seen. "All things," verse 16 says, "were created through Him and for Him."

Christmas is as good a moment as any to stop and remember that God has already made known His "plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9–10).

When this world comes to an end, we'll look back at it all and see Him. We'll see how the wildness of creation and the even greater wildness of history all ties together into one stunning tapestry of the glory of Christ. Christmas, then, is the beginning of the end of history — the inbreaking of the one who both makes sense of it all and owns it all.

So, from all the depths and riches of all this Christ is and means for us, merry Christmas! As you prepare your heart and family to remember him, resist the safe and comfortable seduction of worldliness, and press into the Christ-exalting, world-offending, heart-stirring words God himself has given us for this wonderful day.

Read the article here:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/christmas-like-a-christian>



# God With Us

By Tim Keller

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**W**e're looking at Isaiah 7:23: "A virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel," which means God with us.

John Wesley, the great founder of the Methodist Church, as he was dying, said, "The best of all is, God with us." Those were his last words. I propose to you today that if you live with it on your heart—it might have the same kind of influence on your life that it had on his.

Actually, this one word is really three words in English: God With Us. And every one of those words is heavier than the whole earth. Every one of those words will last longer than the whole earth.

So let's look at them one by one.

## 1. God: Jesus Is God

The simple meaning of Christmas is that the Creator King of the universe has become a human being. That's the message of Christmas. Everything else is secondary.

Scripture can't resist telling us this at every turn. This is the first place where Jesus is introduced—right at the beginning of Matthew. We're told He's God. And all the way through the New Testament, and in many places in the Old Testament, we're told this in every possible way: Jesus is God.

There's just no way to go by this text without talking about it again. In fact,

nothing about Christianity makes sense if you don't see this.

John chapter 1 tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." When Peter was preaching in the book of Acts, he says that "God purchased the church with His own blood." He's talking about Jesus.

There are countless other ways Scripture shows it. For example, Jesus forgives people their sins. Do you know what the ramifications of that are?

If Jim punches Joe in the nose, and I walk over to Jim and say, "Jim, I forgive you," both Jim and Joe will look at me and say, "How can you forgive Jim? You can only forgive him if you're Joe."

You can only forgive a sin if it's against you. And therefore, don't you see what Jesus means when He says to the paralytic, "Your sins are forgiven"? How can He go around forgiving sins unless every sin is ultimately against Him?

He's assuming that He's the Creator, that He owns us. That's the only possible basis on which He could forgive sins.

## The Followers Who Believed

The real issue in Christianity isn't just that He claimed to be God—it's that His followers believed it.

The very last people in the entire world who would ever believe that a human being could be God were first-century

Jews.

Eastern religions, the pantheists, believed that God was in everything, that divine beings could manifest as avatars. The Greeks and Romans were polytheists—they believed gods could take on human form.

But Jews? They believed in the uncreated Creator—infinately transcending the universe. The last people on earth who would ever believe a human being could be God were first-century Jews.

And yet—they did. And not only did they believe it, they lived with Him.

If I wanted to convince someone that I was God, I wouldn't start with my family. You can't fool the people who live with you. Yet the people who lived with Jesus—the last people in the world you could convince of this—became the people willing to die for their conviction that He was who He said He was.

What could have possibly led them to that conclusion? They must have seen a moral glory that went along with His claims—a transcendent personal greatness that matched His words. They must have seen tenderness and power combined, truth and love combined.

He trusted no one, and yet He served everyone. What a strange and wonderful, perfect person Jesus was!

They began to realize they were looking at the very being of God through the filter of a human nature.

### **The Only Possible Conclusion**

They were always saying, “Who is this? Who is this?” And the only answer that could possibly account for all the data was this: He cannot just be a great man, because He claims to be God.

So either He is who He says He is, or He's a liar—or crazy. And as insane as it must have seemed, all other alternatives were

more insane.

So they believed: This must be God with us. And they were willing to die for that belief.

Have you wrestled with it the way they did? Are you willing to put your life on the line for it the way they did?

### **The “Irritating Exclusivity” of Christianity**

This explains what many find irritating about Christianity—its exclusivity, its claim that Jesus is the only way to God.

But that exclusivity comes straight from Christmas.

Every other religion says, “Our founder was a great teacher, and morality and goodness are enough to reach God.” Christianity says, “No. Your situation is so dire that morality and goodness will never be enough. The unique Son of God had to come and die for you. You must put all your hope and trust in Him.”

That's not narrowness—it's a completely different diagnosis.

If a doctor tells you you're fine but another says, “You're terminal unless you take this medicine,” you don't accuse that doctor of being narrow-minded. He might be wrong—or he might be saving your life.

Christianity may be mistaken, or it may be true—but it's not narrow. It's saying your situation is desperate, and the cure is radical.

If Christmas is true, everything else about Christianity makes sense—the miracles, the exclusive claims, the need for complete trust in Christ. If Christmas is false, it all falls apart.

### **2. God “With” Us**

That's the hard point—Jesus is God. Now the soft point: He's God **with** us.

This great God, infinitely greater than the



universe, has entered into intimate, personal witness with us.

This week I was reading about the Transfiguration. And I realized something: there's a big difference between having a general experience of God and being with God.

Up until Jesus came, whenever the presence of God appeared, it was terrifying.

To Job—He appeared as a whirlwind.  
To Abraham—as a smoking furnace.  
To Moses and Israel—as a pillar of fire.  
In the temple—He was the Shekinah glory cloud, so powerful that no one could even enter.

Every time God showed up, He was terrifying.

### Meeting God Personally

It's one thing to experience God's presence; it's another to meet Him personally.

I once read about a singer who idolized a world-renowned performer. She attended all her concerts, studied everything about her—but she never met her. She said she was too afraid. What if the singer said,

“Oh really? Let me hear you sing.” She couldn't face that.

There's a difference between being in someone's presence and actually knowing them personally. It's the same with God.

People say, “I feel close to God at the ocean, or in nature.” That's good—but that's like attending the concert. You're in His general presence. But you haven't met Him face to face.

When Moses asked to see God's face, God said, “No. It would kill you.” Even seeing God's “hind parts,” Moses' face glowed so brightly he had to cover it with a veil.

Now imagine Moses hearing the message of Christmas:

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory.”

Moses would leap up and say, “Do you realize what this means? This is what I was denied! Through Jesus Christ, you can meet God personally—without fear!”

Where's your joy? Where's your amazement? Why isn't this the driving force of your life?



### The Barrier Removed

How can this be? How can God be with us? Because Jesus took away the barrier—the sin, the guilt, the fear.

Martin Luther experienced that. For years he was religious but not a Christian. He confessed daily, took the sacraments, taught theology—but he didn't know God. He was like someone who attended the concert but never met the performer.

Then, while studying

Romans 1:17, he realized righteousness was not something he earned—it was a gift through Christ. He said, “At that moment I was ushered through open gates into paradise.”

He moved from a general experience of God to truly knowing that Jesus is God with us.

## **Why a Baby?**

Why did God show up this time not as a pillar of fire or a tornado, but as a baby?

Because a baby is the most intimate and accessible form of human life—completely open, completely vulnerable.

This time He came not to terrify, but to draw near. Because He came to die—to remove the barrier—so that we could know God personally.

## **3. God With “Us”**

Finally, Jesus is not just God, not just God **with** us—He’s God **with us**.

The word “us” is a limited term. It doesn’t say “God with all.” So who is “us”? Some exclusive moral group who earned it? No.

Look at the Christmas texts. The “us” always includes the humble, the outcasts, the shepherds, the seekers who come without references or arguments.

The people who say, “I deserve nothing. I come with empty hands. Accept me only because of what Jesus has done.”

“All you need is nothing,” we like to say—but many people don’t have that. They come with their arms full: “I’ve tried hard; I’ve suffered; You owe me.”

No. The “us” are those who know they’re poor in spirit.

## **Three Brief Applications**

### **1. Take Off the Limitations**

If He’s God with us, stop putting limits

on what He can do in your life. Some of you have habits, problems, or situations you think will never change. Why not?

If He created the universe with a word, do you think your bad habits are any match for Him?

Get rid of your cynicism about what God can do in you and through you.

### **2. Get Near Him**

Christmas is about God drawing near to you. What are you doing to draw near to Him?

What’s keeping you from a sense of His love—habit, busyness, fear, lack of discipline?

Whatever it is, it’s nothing compared to what it cost Him to be with you. He clawed His way from heaven to earth—can’t you get up 30 minutes earlier to meet Him?

Claw your way through whatever keeps you distant. That’s the meaning of Christmas.

### **3. Give Yourself to Him Totally**

Finally, if Jesus Christ is God, then a lukewarm response to Him is not rational.

John Stott once said there are only three rational responses to Jesus:

- You’re terrified and run away.
- You hate Him and want to kill Him.
- You fall down and worship Him.

But you can’t say, “He’s an interesting person I’d like to know better.”

If He’s who He says He is, you either give yourself to Him totally—or you reject Him completely.

Watch the video here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEvGGG297yg&t=2s>

# A Rare Gift: The Peace of God

By Rick Warren

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**T**oday it's really rare to find people who are at peace. I talk to thousands of people every year—people who are active, accomplished, busy, stressed, ambitious, exhausted, overwhelmed. But I rarely meet people who are truly at peace. I mean really at peace—with themselves, with the world around them, and with God. People who just walk in peace. That's a rare gift.

And yet that's one of the greatest reasons we celebrate Christmas—Jesus came to bring us peace. Seven hundred years before the first Christmas, the prophet Isaiah predicted the Messiah would come and that he would be called “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6). And at the very first Christmas, the angels declared to shepherds:

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Isaiah announces peace. The angels announce peace. And Jesus Himself said: “I am giving you the gift of peace—the kind of peace only I can give. It isn't like the peace the world gives.”

The peace the world gives is temporary, fragile, and easily broken. Jesus says the peace He gives is totally different.

So today, as we think about the coming of the Prince of Peace, I want to look at two things:

1. What kind of peace does Jesus actually give?
2. How do you get that peace in your

life?

Before we get there, let me just say—I don't know what this past year has been like for you. Some of you have had a good year. Some of you have had an incredibly difficult year. You're tired. Fatigued. Worn out. Stressed. Maybe hanging on by a thread. If that's you, God does not intend for you to walk into the next year filled with anxiety and pressure. He wants you filled with peace—spiritual peace, emotional peace, and relational peace.

And yes—those are the three kinds of peace the Bible talks about.

## Three Kinds of Peace Jesus Gives

After studying all 790 Bible verses about peace in the Bible, they fall into three categories:

1. Spiritual Peace — Peace With God
2. Emotional Peace — Peace Within Me
3. Relational Peace — Peace With Others

Let's look at each one.

### 1. Peace With God

This is the most important peace of all because it affects everything else in your life.

You know what it's like when a relationship is strained—marriage, a friendship, a family conflict. When things

aren't right between you and someone you care about, nothing feels right. You can't relax. You can't concentrate. You have no peace. Well, the most important relationship in your life is your relationship with God. And the Bible says the very first thing Jesus came to do was restore peace between us and God.

2 Corinthians 5 says: "God sent Jesus to make peace between Himself and us."

Why? Because whenever I go my own way—whenever I say, "I know better than God," "I'll do life on my terms," "I'll be the master of my own fate"—I'm essentially putting myself at war with God. That rebellion breaks fellowship. It disconnects me from God. And that's why He feels far away. But God doesn't want you living disconnected from Him.

Romans 5 says: "Since we are made right with God by faith in Christ, we have peace with God because of what Jesus has done for us."

Peace with God doesn't come from what you do. It comes from what Christ has already done. This is the meaning of Christmas. And even the gifts of the magi pointed to it. They brought Jesus gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Myrrh was an embalming spice. Why give a baby burial spices? Because this Baby came to die—to bring us peace with God.

## 2. Peace Within Me

This is the peace the Bible calls "the peace of God." Colossians 3:15 says: "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts." This is internal peace—peace inside your heart and mind.

The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*, and it means much more than the absence of conflict. It means well-being, wholeness, harmony, serenity.

God has a peace for every one of your problems:

- If your heart is broken—He gives

comforting peace.

- If your heart is confused—He gives guiding peace.
- If your heart is ashamed—He gives forgiving peace.
- If your heart is worried—He gives confident peace.

Whatever problem you're facing, God has a corresponding peace for it.

## 3. Peace With Others

When you get disconnected from God, it messes up every relationship around you. But when you get close to God, you naturally become closer to people. It strengthens marriages, friendships, and families.

Ephesians 2 says: "Christ brought us all together through His death on the cross. He ended the hostility between different groups."

God designed us to live in unity as His children. But unity begins with peace inside our own hearts.

All three kinds of peace build on each other:

1. First, I get peace with God.
2. Then I receive the peace of God inside me.
3. Then I naturally begin to live at peace with others.

When you're filled with peace, little things don't shake you. But when you're filled with yourself, the smallest bump sends everything spilling out.

## How Do I Get This Peace?

Jesus gives us three simple steps:

1. I Must Experience a Moment of Clarity
2. I Must Express an Attitude of Humility

### 3. I Must Expect Jesus to Help Me

Let's walk through these.

#### **Step 1: I Must Experience a Moment of Clarity**

A moment of clarity is when you suddenly see reality clearly—God becomes clear, you become clear, life becomes clear. Spiritually, it's like scales falling off your eyes.

Moments of clarity happen in all kinds of ways—through worship, nature, pain, loss, Scripture, or a conversation. But clarity always begins with God shining light into your heart.

Paul prayed this in Ephesians 1: "I pray that your heart will be flooded with light so that you can see the future God has for you." You can't find your purpose on your own. You didn't create yourself—God did. Only He can reveal why He put you here.

But the opposite of clarity is denial. "I don't have a problem." "Everything's fine." But the truth is—if God feels distant, if you're constantly stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed—you need clarity.

God says: "If you had paid attention to my commands, your peace would have flowed like a river." Peace begins with seeing things the way God sees them.

#### **Step 2: I Must Express an Attitude of Humility**

Humility is the pathway to peace. Pride is the pathway to conflict. James says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." God isn't moved by whining or complaining. But He moves instantly when we humbly say, "God, I need Your help."

Isaiah 26:12 says: "Lord, grant us peace, for all we have and all we are comes from You."

That's humility—recognizing that every breath, every gift, every ability comes

from God.

#### **Step 3: I Must Expect Jesus to Help Me (The Faith Factor)**

Philippians 4 gives the practical expression of humility: "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything...If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far greater than the mind can understand." Worry and peace cannot live in the same heart. You can either pray or panic—trust God or trust yourself.

Then Jesus gives the formula for soul-peace in Matthew 11: "Come to me, all you who are tired and worn out, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you... and you will find rest for your soul." Peace comes from a person, not a pill, program, or philosophy. You don't need to do more—you need to come to Jesus.

And when you're yoked to Jesus, He carries the weight with you. His strength becomes your strength. Most of us are yoked to the expectations of others or the pressures of life. But Jesus says, "Let me share the weight. Let me help you."

Jesus says, "Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble." Why gentleness and humility? Because they are the antidotes to the two biggest sources of stress: Aggression – rushing, hurrying, over-committing. And arrogance – trying to control everything

You can resign as general manager of the universe. It will run just fine without you. Peace comes when you stop trying to control everything and let Jesus lead.

Isaiah 26:3 says: "You, Lord, give true peace to those who depend on You because they trust in You."

Watch the video: [https://youtu.be/AC\\_119XLgN0?si=oPPP1OF3PPEs-uec](https://youtu.be/AC_119XLgN0?si=oPPP1OF3PPEs-uec)

# The Case for Christmas

By Lee Strobel

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## A Christmas Eve I Couldn't Forget

Christmas season was beginning, and it reminded me of something that happened on Christmas Eve in 1974. At the time, I was a young reporter at the Chicago Tribune, sitting in the newsroom on the fourth floor of Tribune Tower on Michigan Avenue. It was a slow news day—nothing going on—so I sat at my desk letting my mind wander. And even though I was an atheist then, I couldn't stop thinking about a Christian family I'd met a month earlier.

I had been working on a series about the poor of Chicago, and that's how I met a sixty-year-old grandmother named Perfecta Delgado and the two granddaughters she was raising, Lydia and Jenny. Nothing prepared me for what I found when I walked into their tiny, two-room apartment on the west side of Chicago. I had never seen a place so devoid of possessions: no furniture, no appliances, no food, no paintings, no rugs, no coats in the closets—nothing at all except a rickety card table in the kitchen and one cup of rice.

Lydia, age eleven, and Jenny, age thirteen, walked half a mile to school in the brutal Chicago winter. Each girl owned one short-sleeved dress. Between them, they shared one thin gray sweater. Lydia wore it halfway to school while Jenny shivered beside her, and then they traded so Jenny could have warmth for the second half of the walk. I had never

met a family with so little.

What intrigued me most, though, was that despite Perfecta's crippling arthritis and their extreme poverty, they spoke confidently of their faith in Jesus Christ. Perfecta was convinced He had not abandoned them. There was no despair in their home, no self-pity—just a gentle atmosphere of hope, love, and peace.

I wrote my article about the Delgados and moved on to the next assignment. But on Christmas Eve, I couldn't get them out of my mind. I decided to drive back to their apartment on Homan Street to see how they were doing.

## An Apartment Transformed—and Given Away

When Lydia opened the door, what I saw stunned me. Readers of the Tribune had responded to my article with overwhelming generosity. The apartment looked like Nordstrom's had moved in: furniture, paintings, carpeting, a large Christmas tree bursting with wrapped gifts, a kitchen overflowing with food, new appliances, and closets full of heavy coats, scarves, and gloves. They even had thousands of dollars sent by generous readers.

But what astonished me even more was what they were doing when I walked in. Perfecta and the girls were busy boxing up many of their new possessions—to give them away. This was their newfound



abundance, and they were cheerfully packing it up for others.

I asked Perfecta, “What are you doing? Why are you giving so much away?”

In her halting English she said, “Our neighbors are still in need, and we cannot have plenty while they have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do.”

I was stunned. As an atheist, I would have hoarded everything or tried to sell it. So I asked her what she thought about the generosity of the readers who had showered them with so much.

“This is wonderful,” she said. “We did nothing to deserve this. It is a gift from God.”

Then she added, “But Lee, that is not God’s greatest gift. We celebrate that tomorrow. The greatest gift is Jesus.”

For her, the child in the manger was everything. And in that moment, something inside me—even as an atheist—longed to know this Jesus, because I saw Him reflected so clearly in Perfecta, Lydia, and Jenny.

## **Longing for What They Had**

They had peace despite their poverty; I had anxiety despite my plenty. They knew the joy of generosity; I knew only the loneliness of ambition. They looked heavenward for hope; I looked only to myself. They lived in the wonder of the spiritual; I was shackled to the material.

Something deep within me longed for what they had—or more accurately, longed for the One who had transformed them.

Still, I remained suspicious of these “feel-good” emotions. I was trained in journalism and law; I dealt in facts, evidence, and logic. At that time I believed not only that Santa Claus was a myth, but so was the Christmas story—Jesus entering the world seemed like wishful thinking built on a flimsy

foundation.

That changed years later when I took a cue from the shepherds in Luke’s Gospel. Two thousand years ago, angels announced to shepherds in the field that the Savior had been born in Bethlehem. Luke 2:15–16 says that when the angels left, the shepherds said, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened.” And they hurried off to investigate.

That struck me. The shepherds didn’t dismiss the announcement as a hoax or hallucination—they investigated it. They checked the facts. That’s exactly what journalists do.

Prompted by my agnostic wife’s conversion to Christianity and the memory of the Delgados, I decided to investigate the most important question in history: who was really in that manger? Who was that baby on the first Christmas morning?

## **Did Jesus Really Claim to Be God?**

The first issue I explored was whether Jesus grew up to claim that He was God. As I studied the Gospels—from Mark, the earliest written, to John, the latest—I saw that Jesus consistently made transcendent, messianic, and divine claims. In John 10:30 He declared, “I and the Father are one.” The word “one” there is neuter in Greek—not masculine—meaning He wasn’t saying He and the Father were the same person, but the same essence. His audience understood immediately; they picked up stones to execute Him because He, a mere man in their eyes, was claiming to be God.

British theologian John Stott summarized it well: Jesus made it clear that to know Him was to know God; to see Him was to see God; to believe in Him was to believe in God; to receive Him was to receive God; to reject Him was to reject God; and to honor Him was to honor

God.

Jesus claimed to be God. But did He demonstrate it?

## **The Credentials of Christ: Miracles, Character, and Prophecy**

I looked at His divine credentials, beginning with His miracles. Jesus said in John 10:37, “Do not believe me unless I do the works of my Father.” He knew miracles would confirm His identity. And He performed many of them—publicly, in broad daylight, often in front of skeptics: turning water into wine, healing the blind, cleansing lepers, raising Lazarus from the dead. Even His enemies conceded He performed miracles; they simply objected to Him performing them on the Sabbath.

Then I examined His character. As a journalist, I had spent weeks profiling celebrities or public figures, and the closer you got to them, the more you saw their flaws. But with Jesus, the opposite occurred. Those closest to Him were the most convinced of His moral perfection. Peter wrote, “He committed no sin.” John said, “In Him is no sin.” His character was a powerful credential.

Next, I studied ancient prophecies. The Old Testament contains dozens of predictions about the coming Messiah—forming a kind of prophetic “fingerprint.” Only one person in history could fit that fingerprint. Isaiah predicted He would be born of a virgin, called Mighty God, and named Immanuel (“God with us”). Prophecies foretold that the Messiah would come from the seed of Abraham, the tribe of Judah, the house of David; be born in Bethlehem; be heralded by a messenger; cleanse the Temple; be killed at a specific time in history; have His hands and feet pierced (hundreds of years before crucifixion existed); and rise

from the dead. Jesus fulfilled them all.

I wondered whether others throughout history might also have fulfilled these prophecies but been forgotten. Then I encountered the work of mathematician Dr. Peter Stoner in his book *Science Speaks*. He and 600 mathematics students calculated the odds of one person fulfilling just 48 of these prophecies: one chance in a trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion, trillion. Scientists call such probabilities “not going to happen.” And yet Jesus fulfilled them.

## **The Ultimate Credential: The Resurrection**

Finally, I examined the evidence for the resurrection. This ultimately brought me to faith. Ancient sources inside and outside the Bible confirmed Jesus’ death by crucifixion. Even the Journal of the American Medical Association concluded He was clearly dead before the spear wound. Scholars have traced the earliest Christian creed about the resurrection—listing eyewitnesses—back to within months of His death. The tomb was empty, something even His enemies acknowledged. And we have nine independent sources, inside and outside the New Testament, confirming the disciples’ conviction that they encountered the risen Christ.

Sir Lionel Luckhoo, the most successful defense attorney in history and a former skeptic, spent years examining the evidence and concluded: “The evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt.”

So my verdict in *The Case for Christmas* was clear: the baby in the manger is the divine, miracle-working, grace-offering, resurrected Son of God.

We look at the nativity scene and sometimes wonder whether our faith is simple and sentimental, like the image of a child. But there is a strong historical foundation beneath the Christmas story. Jesus is who He claimed to be.

## Why Christmas Points to Easter

But why did He come? What was the purpose of Christmas? Ultimately, the purpose of Christmas is Easter. Jesus entered the world to die as our substitute, to pay for our sins, and to offer forgiveness and eternal life as gifts of grace.

Yet there is another nuance. Let me illustrate it with a story.

When my son Kyle was growing up, he was allergic to cats and dogs and desperately wanted a pet. We discovered that he could have a chinchilla. We bought him one—a soft, friendly little animal named Dusty.

That Christmas, we decided to give Dusty a magnificent new cage: three stories, toys, space to run, everything a chinchilla could want. On Christmas Eve, we set the new cage beside his small, cramped one and opened both doors. We expected Dusty to rush into his new home. But he stayed frozen in the old cage. Raisins didn't coax him; a gentle nudge only frightened him.

I tried to reason with him: "Dusty, you're living in a hovel, and I'm offering you a mansion." But of course he couldn't understand. We had no common language.

Then I thought: what if I could become a chinchilla? What if I could live alongside Dusty, gaining his trust as one of his own? Then I could say, "Friend, you have no idea what's waiting for you. It's so much better—just walk through the door."

## God With Us: A Door into a New Kingdom

In a sense, that is what Jesus did on Christmas. He became one of us—fully human—so we could relate to Him. He knew hunger, thirst, exhaustion, pain, joy, friendship, and sorrow. That gives Him a unique credibility when He says to us, "Friend, you don't know what you're missing. I've opened the door to my kingdom. Walk through it."

That is Christmas. Jesus said in John 10:10, "I came that you may have life, and have it to the full."

We live in difficult economic times. Many face uncertainty. Yet most of us still live with far more than Perfecta and her granddaughters had the day I first met them. And yet they had walked through the door into God's kingdom—and found hope, peace, courage, love, joy, forgiveness, generosity of heart, and the promise of a home with God.

In Galatians, the Bible says that as we walk through that door and follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit increasingly manifests in our lives nine qualities we all long for: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Isn't that what we want most? The very things our souls thirst for?

So don't be like Dusty. Jesus is knocking, as He says in Revelation 3:20: "If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in and we will share a meal together as friends."

This Christmas season, He stands ready to open the door to His kingdom—where, in this life, He develops these qualities in us, and in the next life welcomes us into eternal joy, wonder, and fulfillment.

Watch the video: <https://youtu.be/fJp-ZERd1IA?si=envAaCocAVA2Vkhg>

# Understanding the Breakthrough Power of Worship

From [www.billygraham.org](http://www.billygraham.org)

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I can't remember how many times I have felt like God was a million miles away and then, in an instant, I recognized that He was closer than the air I breathe.

The Bible says in Psalm 22:3 that He actually lives and dwells in our praises. This is the mystery and the miracle of the breakthrough power and presence of God when we worship! When we worship, we affirm the truth of God's Word, and it is being rooted deep in our hearts.

When I was 11 years old, the Jesus Movement was taking hold in my hometown of El Paso, Texas. The church I attended began to be filled with long-haired, barefoot hippies. We sang acapella songs like "Hallelujah" over and over again. It really was an authentic, powerful move of God, but I was very young, so most of the time I was bored and distracted. However, I do remember watching the Holy Spirit move on people's lives in a special way. I remember seeing high school kids worshiping and weeping at the mention of God's love. There was such an amazing sense of grace and unity among everyone.

One Friday night as a Christian band was playing "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know," it happened—for the first time, while observing everyone worshiping God, I began to sense God's presence. I've

heard it said that worship is a picture of the Gospel in motion, and it certainly was for me that night. I saw people displaying a kind of personal, intimate relationship with God that I wanted and needed. A relationship that I knew was made possible only by the blood of Jesus.

One of my earliest memories is of my parents gathering us around my mom's baby grand piano and having us sing the old hymns of the church for what felt like hours. At 5, I would end up lying under the piano and eventually falling asleep. I didn't think much about Jesus and the Gospel then, but on that Friday night as the Christian band performed, the God we had sung about became my own personal God. I sensed Him saying to me for the first time "Tommy, I love you and I have called you to do great things for Me." I wept at the thought that the God of heaven wanted to save and use a young boy like me. I surrendered my life to Jesus that night. One of my life verses has been Psalm 40:3, "He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord" (NIV).

Every person is created to be a worshiper. God dwells and, I believe, manifests Himself in the praises of His people. It has always been my prayer when I write songs and lead worship that the breakthrough power of God would

bring the lost to Him—just like it happened for me.

After graduating from high school, I went to Bible college, and one of the areas I learned about was spiritual warfare. At first I resisted the training because I met people who spent so much time rebuking the devil. I thought they were giving the devil too much attention. To this day, I don't agree with everything I saw there, but over time I have recognized that we are in a battle and there truly is an enemy that is out to destroy us.

Several years ago when I was doing a worship event in a poor neighborhood in Zambia, I sensed a darkness all around us—poverty, violence, abuse, hopelessness, hunger. We worshiped the Lord every night for more than an hour before we felt we could even begin to present the Gospel. Only then did we sense a real breakthrough in the spirit, and we saw hundreds come to Christ.

Through that event and others like it, I came to realize that worship is how we allow God to fight our battles for us. You may be familiar with the story of Jehoshaphat. Second Chronicles 20:22 says, “As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated” (NIV). What a strange battle plan—but the result was that the Lord won the battle for them! There is something inherent in the act of worship that enables us to encounter the power of God like nothing else. It is not effective to simply tell someone to stop worrying; stop being proud; stop being self-consumed, distracted, insecure, bound and materialistic. But it is effective to tell them to start worshiping. When we make that decision to fix our eyes on Jesus, we quickly realize that God has already begun to release the grip these tendencies can have on our lives.

Worship is a declaration of our weakness and God's strength. I challenge you in your next point of need to make that hard choice to be a worshiper and let the breakthrough God fight your battle for you.

When we worship, the invisible God is at work doing invisible and powerful things. We get realigned, refreshed and refueled; we find unspeakable joy and indescribable peace. We discover the breakthrough strength of God, which enables us to walk in the truth, live in His presence and see Him fight our battles for us. It is how we can put the beauty of the Gospel on display, receive His many blessings and at the same time be a blessing to the world.

Read the article: <https://billygraham.org/articles/understanding-the-breakthrough-power-of-worship>

# What's Happening In the Middle East

## Is It Important?

By Jacki

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Most people have this question on their mind nowadays, especially those familiar with Bible prophecy. But I will get to what's currently politically happening after this little introduction...

What's happening in the Middle East will affect the rest of the world. It always has. There's an ancient proverb that says: He who rules Jerusalem will rule the world. But "why" Jerusalem? What's so significant about Jerusalem? Why not Paris, London, Moscow or New York?

There are a number of reasons. As Christians we're not supposed to put all our emphasis on a "physical" place like Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well—"The place where you worship, like a certain temple or mountain, is not the important thing. But worshiping God in Spirit & in Truth." Yes, that's true. But...nevertheless it does seem like Jesus has placed quite a bit of importance on Jerusalem, the City of Peace.

For example:

--Jesus was born in Palestine and was crucified, buried & resurrected in Jerusalem, & ascended into Heaven from Jerusalem. He chose that area to live, work & preach. It was His earthly home.

--Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives & stand there on His return.

--Jesus will come back on white horses close to Jerusalem. And eventually the Heavenly City, New Jerusalem, will descend & land there.

--We will reign & rule over the whole earth from new Jerusalem. Rev. 22:5. New Jerusalem, the heavenly City, will be the Lord's capital forever.

--Jerusalem will become the most important place on earth! Rev 21:24 "And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it (New Jerusalem): and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honor into it (New Jerusalem)."

--In Revelation it says "Jerusalem" will even be written on our foreheads. "And I will write upon him the name of the City of my God, which is new Jerusalem". Rev 3:12. Rev 21:2 "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

--In the future, the Lord will even send His Word out of Jerusalem, "And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem." Isa 2:3



--The Devil will set up his image in Jerusalem and his headquarters to control the rest of the world from there. Including the Mark of the Beast.

--The Devil is the great impostor and he hates anything about Jesus and he wants to be King and ruler of Jerusalem—not Jesus—and to defeat Jesus! He’s so jealous. The Devil wants to be the messiah, so he’s going to try to lay hold and lay claim to everything that Jesus is & represents—this includes owning Jerusalem, making Jerusalem his city & his capital, ruling out of Jerusalem & setting up his headquarters out of Jerusalem to deceive the world. That’s why Jerusalem holds so much importance—for Jesus, for the Devil and for us who will in the future go in and out of Jerusalem as Jesus’ representatives. Jerusalem is our capital in the future. So the battle for Jerusalem is both physical and spiritual—and we’re probably going to see this battle take place in our lifetime!

What is the ongoing importance of Jerusalem today?: The city of Jerusalem is sacred to many religious traditions, including the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam which consider it a holy city. Some of the most sacred places for each of these religions are found in Jerusalem, most prominently, the Temple Mount/Haram Al-Sharif.

What does the Bible say about the future of Jerusalem? Zechariah affirms Jesus’ kingdom in Jerusalem will bring blessings to the world. “Many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD.” (Zech 8:13, 22–23).

What will Jerusalem be called in the future according to Jeremiah 3? As the prophet Jeremiah wrote: “At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: (Jeremiah 3:17).

Summary of the importance of Jerusalem for the future: Important future events in Jerusalem include the rebuilding of the Temple, a period of tribulation and conflict where the city will be partially conquered, and the return of Jesus to reign from Jerusalem. Following this, the city will become the center of a new era of global peace and worship, with Jerusalem as a spiritual capital.

## **Now to Present Day Events:**

So now and in the coming months the most important thing is to keep your eyes on what’s happening in Jerusalem and the Temple Mount.

In my visit to Jerusalem in 2015, they had on display all the objects that will go in the Temple. There was a huge golden menorah under a glass case. Everything is there and ready for the Temple as far back as 2015. You can visit it and see it. On the menorah they have written: (this is the photo I took) “The menorah is overlaid with pure gold and will be sanctified for service in the Holy Temple. May it be rebuilt speedily and in our lives.”

All that to say that there will be a lot of activity, conflicts & international events involving Jerusalem from now and on into the future—which will eventually result in the 7 year peace covenant, that will be broken after 3-1/2 years. So we can expect Jerusalem to be more in the news, more international events related to Jerusalem and this region. It’s the Battle for Jerusalem!

Be Ready, Be Alert, Be Prepared (RAP!) We are going to have a front row seat to the Endtime!

John 16:33 These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

# Check It Out: Books, Apps etc.

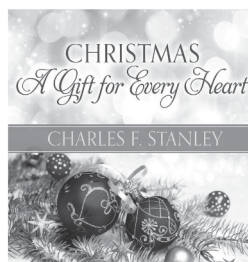
Please send in your recommendations of books, podcasts, apps or shows to:  
[contact@thewinepress.org](mailto:contact@thewinepress.org)

## Books

### **Christmas: A Gift for Everyone**

**By Charles Stanley**

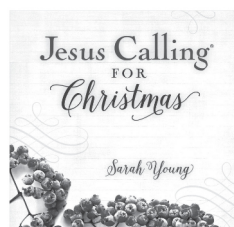
Beloved pastor Dr. Charles Stanley takes us back to our truest and best reason for celebration—the birth of Christ. By revisiting the people and events of that first Christmas, Dr. Stanley reveals the unique lessons that long-ago starry night offers to each of us today.



### **Jesus Calling for Christmas**

**By Sarah Young**

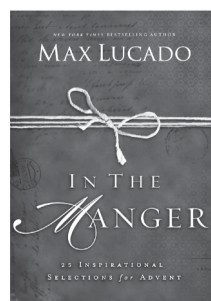
Enjoy precious moments of rest during the holidays as you savor the joys and peace of the season with this beautiful Christmas edition of Jesus Calling devotions. A heartwarming compilation of devotions from Sarah Young.



### **In the Manger**

**By Max Lucado**

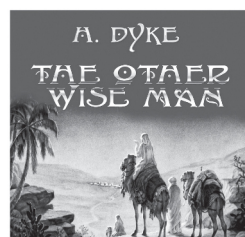
25 Inspirational Selections for Advent: A 25 Day Devotional. Experience the Advent season in a whole new way and prepare your heart to celebrate the greatest gift of all.



### **The Other Wise Man**

**By Henry Van Dyke**

What if there was another wise man, one whose journey never led him to Bethlehem? A man who saw the star but never reached the manger, whose hands were filled with treasures meant for a king but emptied by the weight of compassion. Henry van Dyke's *The Other Wise Man* is not a tale of what was, but of what could have been—and perhaps, of what should always be.





## Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free  
From our fears and sins release us  
Let us find our rest in Thee  
Israel's strength and consolation  
Hope of all the earth Thou art  
Dear desire of every nation  
Joy of every longing heart

Born Thy people to deliver  
Born a Child and yet a King  
Born to reign in us forever  
Now Thy gracious kingdom bring  
By Thine own eternal Spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone  
By Thine own sufficient merit  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne

By Thine own sufficient  
By Thine own sufficient merit  
Raise us to Thy glorious throne

Listen here: <https://youtu.be/fAGE1Es8IPs?si=HIqGQE3o8iNpG30N>



# The Greatest Man in History

**J**esus had no servants, yet they called Him Master.

Had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher.

Had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer.

He had no army, yet kings feared Him.

He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world.

He did not live in a castle, yet they called Him Lord,

He ruled no nations, yet they called Him King,

He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him.

He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.

His Kingdom is not of this world, yet it lies within the hearts of those who believe.

He spoke of love and forgiveness and His words have transformed millions.

He offers no material wealth, yet we consider him the treasure of our lives.

He promises no earthly power yet in His name the powerless have found strength.

In his weakness we find our strength, in His suffering our salvation.

Jesus, the greatest man in history continues to invite us into a story of redemption, love and eternal life.

