

Human Nature

*Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." Matthew 2:7-8*

Herod lied to the magi when he said he too wanted to worship the Christ child, when he actually wanted to kill Him! Herod probably felt his authority was threatened, so eliminating this child would protect his reign. He was evil! As much as we don't want to admit it, we have a deeply flawed nature like Herod.

Last spring I went camping in the North Georgia Mountains with some of my grandchildren along with their dads. We had a blast being together and experiencing our God through His magnificent creation! We also encountered Him through fellowship with each other. One such encounter was my discussion with a seven-year-old grandson as we hiked along a rushing stream to a waterfall. He was playing with his cousins, pretending their sticks were guns—they are boys! That led to a discussion about war, killing, and human nature. Time will tell how much he understood about human nature—and about his own selfish nature and brokenness.

Here's the harsh reality: you and I are broken too! Remember what God said in Romans 2? "There are none good, not even one." Our ego resists that truth. But if one doesn't understand his own human nature, he will never understand the need to repent and trust Jesus Christ to forgive his sins and make him a new person. People without an understanding of their sin nature will only attempt to fix themselves (if they think there is anything wrong at all). We can help them by praying for conviction of their sin, being open about our sinful nature, showing them Christ's love with deeds of kindness, and compassionately sharing the word of God.

Submitted by:  
Stephen Scott Nelson  
Atlanta House Church  
Atlanta, Georgia

One-Year Bible Reading  
Daniel 8:1-27  
1 John 2:1-17  
Psalm 120:1-7  
Proverbs 28:25-26

Sickness

*The Lord sustains them on their sickbed and restores them from their bed of illness. Psalm 41:3 NIV*

Evidently "Tis the season . . . to be sick!" I've heard of a lot of people being hit with the crud these past few months, including our pastors.

I thought I had "dodged the bullet." But I ended up going down hard, battling the bug for several weeks. It started with drainage and cold symptoms, then went on to feeling yucky with a massive runny nose. Finally, along came a sinus and ear infection, with dizziness that made me throw up! After two rounds of antibiotics, I started to feel better.

I'm reminded of a time years ago when most everyone in my family started getting sick at the same time. Our youngest son, Timothy, was a little jealous of the attention the sickies were receiving from our Florence Nightingale wife and mom, Mary. Guess what happened? Yep, Timothy threw up the next night and in the morning was wishing he **wasn't** sick!

Needless to say, sickness is not fun. But there are some things we can learn from it if we can see past the pile of Kleenex. Here are a few lessons I was learning as the remaining antibiotics coursed through my veins.

God loves me no matter what—even when I need to rest and can't "work" for Him. Also, I am not irreplaceable. Even when I'm sick, God continues to work. And it's good to be in a church family. Many people were praying and concerned. Another lesson: Having a wife who loves you is an incredible blessing! Finally, I learned that God's grace is sufficient. I was able to prepare my messages and teach while feeling weak.

Being sick is like being attacked. David said, "Praise be to the LORD, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city" (Psalms 31:21 NIV). Isn't it good to know that no matter how lousy we may feel, God's "wonderful love" is available to us?

Submitted by:  
Bill Young  
The Rock Church  
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading  
Daniel 9:1-11:1  
1 John 2:18-3:6  
Psalm 121:1-8  
Proverbs 28:27-28

Monday, December 3

Rejoice! Rejoice! Rejoice!

*For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. Galatians 5:5 ESV*

During this Advent season, we remember the time before Jesus came to earth and brought the free gift of salvation to the world. And we rejoice that He has come!

*O Come, O Come, Emmanuel  
And ransom captive Israel  
That mourns in lowly exile here  
Until the Son of God appear.  
Rejoice! Rejoice!  
Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel!*

Yet, we also find ourselves in a situation of "already, but not yet;" Christ has promised to return again (Mark 13), and so we wait. In the Scriptures, Paul tells us to "wait eagerly for our adoption as sons" (Romans 8:23), to "wait for the hope of righteousness" (Galatians 5:5), and to "wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:7). There is a tension and a sorrow, as we wait in expectation of His return.

How can we rejoice in the face of the suffering, in the midst of the waiting? This seems a counterintuitive proposition to the human mind, as if we are leaving our hand upon the hot stove burner. But the Advent song "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" reminds us: the name "Emmanuel" means "God with us." Indeed, God has given us His Holy Spirit to be with us, guide us, and comfort us while we wait for the return of Christ (Ephesians 1:13). *He is with us!*

So Christ has come and brought salvation: rejoice! Christ will return and set all things right: rejoice! And God has given us His Holy Spirit to be with us while we wait: rejoice!

Submitted by:  
Greg Miller  
The Firehouse Church  
Denver, Colorado

One-Year Bible Reading  
Daniel 11:2-35  
1 John 3:7-24  
Psalm 122:1-9  
Proverbs 29:1

Tuesday, December 4

The Crown of Righteousness

*In the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:8*

In this letter to Timothy just before Paul's death, Paul makes a startling assertion: he knew that he would receive the "crown of righteousness." What is he referring to?

I think Paul was saying in simple terms that he knew that God saw him as righteous, that he lived a life of faith till the end.

Paul makes very clear in Romans that we are righteous through faith in Christ. We have no merit of our own. Apart from Jesus Christ we are depraved sinners, deserving of judgment and hell. However, because of God's grace we receive righteousness as a gift from God.

But this righteousness is demonstrated through our faith. As we walk with God by faith and run the race that is before us, we demonstrate the righteous life that was imparted to us through the grace of Jesus Christ.

Paul could see the end of the race that he was running. God had encouraged him and strengthened him to believe in Christ, firm until the end. As such he was soon to receive the crown of righteousness, given to those who love Christ's appearing.

I liken it to a graduation ceremony. Students walk in faith, persevering through the trials and tests of a course, encouraged on by their teachers and fellow classmates. Then comes the end when that student goes forward to receive his or her diploma.

What a day it will be when all of us complete the course and step on the stage to receive the crown of righteousness from the Lord!

Submitted by:  
John Hopler  
Great Commission Churches  
Columbus, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading  
Daniel 11:36-12:13  
1 John 4:1-21  
Psalm 123:1-4  
Proverbs 29:2-4

### Make Every Effort

*Make every effort to come to me soon. 2 Timothy 4:9*

Paul’s life was soon coming to an end. In his hour of need he makes this appeal to Timothy to come to his side. What strikes me is how he makes this appeal. He does not tell Timothy to “Come or else!” Nor does he say, “If you can make it, please come.” He says, “Make every effort to come to me soon.”

This exhortation I find interesting. Paul was both gracious and strong. On the one hand, he did not demand a certain result (that Timothy be with him.) On the other hand, he was not weak in his appeal. He tells him to “make every effort to come soon.”

Have you ever tried to get people to come to a meeting? If you are in a leadership role, you certainly have experienced the challenge to get maximum participation. If so, you might take a tip from the apostle Paul. On the one hand, you want to honor the members of your group by acknowledging that they can’t always make your meeting. There are often personal reasons for not attending. Or perhaps God has other plans for certain individuals which will prevent them from attending that meeting. If so, it is vital that we respect people following the Lord’s lead. But you also do not want to fall into the trap of thinking that your meeting is unimportant—that this is just one more option on the menu of life for people. Your gathering of people for a small group or a service project or a mission effort is very important. So you might consider using the same language Paul used: “Please make every effort to come to our gathering.” Exhorting people this way preserves respect both for the potential attendees and for you and your meeting.

Paul, the great leader and teacher, was leading and teaching until the end. May we all learn from his example.

**Submitted by:**  
John Hopler  
Great Commission Churches  
Columbus, Ohio

**One-Year Bible Reading**  
Hosea 1:1-3:5  
1 John 5:1-21  
Psalm 124:1-8  
Proverbs 29:5-8

Friday, December 7

### Favored One

*Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph. . . . And coming in, he said to her, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” Luke 1:26-28*

“Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” Try to imagine being the good girl, Mary, and experiencing this greeting from an angelic being. He says that she is “favored” and the Lord is *with her!* How was she favored by God? She was chosen out of all the women on the earth that have ever lived to carry and bear the promised Messiah, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the Creator of the Universe, the “God with us” Immanuel.

So, in my western-cultured-Christianity way of thinking, what would a *favored one* look like? Well, the pregnancy would be well protected. God would provide her with top of the line Neiman Marcus maternity clothes. She should stand out as a *favored one*, don’t you think? She is carrying royalty that is far more impressive than Prince William and Duchess Kate! And what about the delivery? It would be prearranged in a prestigious hospital with the best maternity suite available where her family and friends could be with her. And, of course, it would be a sterile environment lest any type of germ affect the God-child.

But that’s not how the story goes. Mary, *the favored one*, more than likely faced the scorn of being an unmarried, pregnant, young woman. She could be stoned. Her mother and relatives probably didn’t understand or believe her. Her fiancé considers divorcing her. Where is the *favor* in that?

Does your confidence wane when the outlook is grim? Don’t let that shake your faith. The story continues tomorrow.

**Submitted by:**  
Terry Putthoff  
Open Range Fellowship  
Lone Jack, Missouri

**One-Year Bible Reading**  
Hosea 6:1-9:17  
3 John 1:1-15  
Psalm 126:1-6  
Proverbs 29:12-14

### Being Frank

*For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:10*

Recently I have been more “frank” with people about what I really believe. In fact, I have been telling people lately that I changed my name from John Hopler to Frank Hopler. In this verse, Paul was being “Frank.”

Paul tells of a man named Demas who deserted him. This Demas loved the present world and as a result was not faithful in his relationships. So Paul warns Timothy about Demas. Paul could have not named his name. He could have simply said, “Watch out for those who love this present world!” But Paul chose to be frank. He singled out Demas in his communication with Timothy.

We might ask, “Why was Paul naming this individual? Was this a kind and loving step to take? Shouldn’t Paul be more gracious in his speech?” I think Paul was being loving in his communication. He was full of grace and full of truth. We cannot be full of grace if we are not speaking the truth. This Demas could mislead many others down the wrong road. Paul wanted Timothy to know what happened so that he could warn others as well.

Certainly we are to be careful in painting a negative picture of another person. But when there are people like Demas who are resolute in going down a certain path, it is good to “be frank” in our communication with those who will be affected by that person’s unfaithfulness.

May God give us wisdom as we speak about others. May we always be gracious in honoring all men. But may we also be bold in calling out those whose lives and teaching pose a danger to us and to those we serve.

**Submitted by:**  
John Hopler  
Great Commission Churches  
Columbus, Ohio

**One-Year Bible Reading**  
Hosea 4:1-5:15  
2 John 1:1-13  
Psalm 125:1-5  
Proverbs 29:9-11

Saturday, December 8

### Favored One – 2

*And Mary said, “Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her.” Luke 1:38*

As we read the account of Mary and Joseph, we are relieved to read that the angel appears to Joseph as well. He now knows that they both have been chosen to parent the Son of God, and all looks well until Caesar Augustus demands that all people have to return to their family’s city of origin for a census to tax them.

“Really, Lord? Now? In my ninth month of pregnancy?” (That’s how I would be thinking.) The Word says that she was *great with child*. That’s a 70-80 mile trek over rough terrain, and in her condition the trip would surely take longer than usual. How inconvenient!

Mary was probably worn out by the time Joseph and she arrived at Bethlehem. Was it evening when they arrived? At dusk? The city is crowded and bustling with business. How many inns did they go to and find “no vacancy”? I’m thinking, “If God can conveniently open up a parking space for me at a Walmart during the Christmas rush, He certainly could have opened up a room for His One and Only Son to be born and for His *favored one* to enjoy the comfort of a plush environment in which to deliver His child.” But that is not how the story goes.

Ever wonder why things don’t go as smoothly as you think they should? James tells us that the testing of our faith produces “endurance.” But maybe there’s more to it than even that! Maybe God wants to keep our eyes focused on Him to meet our every need, no matter how the provision looks. And maybe, just maybe, we will see a miracle in the making!

**Submitted by:**  
Terry Putthoff  
Open Range Fellowship  
Lone Jack, Missouri

**One-Year Bible Reading**  
Hosea 10:1-14:9  
Jude 1:1-25  
Psalm 127:1-5  
Proverbs 29:15-17

Favored One – 3

*"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord." Luke 1:45*

We have been contemplating what it would look like according to the American ideal to be greeted as Mary was greeted: "favored one. The Lord is with you." We have already seen that God's standard of favor does not match ours. The *favored one* was married to a man of humble means. The birth of this royalty would have gone entirely unnoticed, had it not been for angels appearing to lowly shepherds on the outskirts of town. There were no parades. No fireworks. No announcements in the streets. Just the sound of livestock in the stalls.

So what does *favored one* mean? It means we are chosen by God to be part of His eternal plan. The way is not smooth. It is hard. Painful. Inconvenient. Scandalous at times. But if we believe in our heart, as Mary did, we will be blessed.

Lord Jesus, thank You that it will be worth it all when we see You. Thank You for inviting us to join You in the eternal mission of sharing the good news and seeing ones discover the truth of Your great love for them. Thank You for giving us this purpose in the midst of all the hardships. May we be like Mary and believe that nothing is impossible for You and surrender to Your leading. Help us to take the focus off ourselves, our inconveniences, our misunderstandings, or whatever is taking our focus off You. It is not about us, Lord. It's all about You! May we have this same attitude as Mary: "Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord, may it be done to me according to Your word." In Jesus's name I pray. Amen.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Terry Putthoff	Joel 1:1-3:21
Open Range Fellowship	Revelation 1:1-20
Lone Jack, Missouri	Psalms 128:1-6
	Proverbs 29:18

Tuesday, December 11

Misunderstanding

*They said to the others, "What is this breach of faith that you have committed against the God of Israel in turning away this day from following the Lord by building yourselves an altar this day in rebellion against the Lord? And if you too rebel against the Lord today, then tomorrow he will be angry with the whole congregation of Israel." Joshua 22:16,18 ESV*

Every once in a while, I get myself into a situation where I know I've been misunderstood. I realize also that I've misunderstood what somebody was trying to tell me. We all experience this, don't we? A story in Joshua 22 describes a misunderstanding that could have ended in disaster . . . if one group hadn't been able to explain themselves to another.

When Israel was moving into the Promised Land, one group of people was given the land on the east side of the Jordan River. They built "an altar of imposing size" that looked identical to the altar God had them build for the tabernacle. This was an "unauthorized" altar.

When the Israelites west of the river heard about the new altar, they gathered together to make war. Thankfully, they first sent the priest and ten chiefs to confront those east of the river.

The altar builders then explained their thinking. They had been fearful. They were afraid that eventually the other tribes might say to them, "You have no portion in the Lord!" Because of this, they decided to build the giant altar as a copy of the one their fathers had made for the Lord's tabernacle. They never meant to make sacrifices on it! Then the people of Israel blessed God and spoke no more of making war against them.

How terrible it would have been if a family war had broken out over a misunderstanding like this! I wonder how many of our friendships and relationships have been hurt or broken because of a misunderstanding? How many of those strained relationships can be restored by a simple conversation? All things new!

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Billy Johnson	Amos 4:1-6:14
The Rock Church	Revelation 2:18-3:6
Draper, Utah	Psalms 130:1-8
	Proverbs 29:21-22

Social Misfits

*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ . . . Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar . . . and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth . . . and David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah . . . and Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ. Matthew 1 ESV*

Have you ever done one of those DNA tests where you find out what percentage of different ethnicities you are? It's actually pretty fun to find out who your ancestors are and where they came from. I found out I am 98% German, which doesn't surprise me since both sides of my family are German. And there are some interesting people in my family tree.

Jesus had some interesting ancestors also. If you could categorize the women mentioned above, I would say they were social misfits. Tamar, Rahab, and Bathsheba could all have been seen as promiscuous women for different reasons. Ruth, a Gentile, traveled with her mother-in-law to live in a Jewish culture. And Mary, a virgin, had to reveal to her town of Nazareth that she was pregnant before she married her fiancé Joseph. These women, for all intents and purposes, could have been ostracized by those in their community for "not fitting in," not "going with the moral or PC rules of the day."

But what stands out about each of these women is that she feared God more than the ridicule of her peers. Mary's response to her bearing the Christ child sums it up: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Are you challenged by the response to God of these women? I am. Their desire to fear God more than the reproaches of other people inspires me to have that same attitude: "let it be to me according to Your Word," no matter what anyone else thinks.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Barbara Wilson	Amos 1:1-3:15
Grace Community Church	Revelation 2:1-17
Raleigh, North Carolina	Psalms 129:1-8
	Proverbs 29:19-20

Wednesday, December 12

Hurt Happens – Stay Focused

*And one of them struck at the high priest's slave, slashing off his right ear. But Jesus said, "No more of this." And He touched the man's ear and healed him. Luke 22:50-51 NLT*

Hurt happens. I know it does because I saw it on a bumper sticker. It wasn't put quite that way but all of us know, hurt happens. And Jesus tells us that "offenses must come . . . ." (Matthew 18:7 NKJV). Over the years, like you, my family and I have gone through many hurts. But the hurts that seem to hurt the most have come from people close to Jesus. It was Peter, one of Jesus's closest disciples, who drew the sword and cut off Malchus's ear. The hurt seems to go deeper when a follower of Jesus, even a leader, directly or indirectly hurts you in word or deed. "The stones thrown at your face are much easier to dodge than the ones thrown at the back of your head" (Anonymous).

How will you deal with the hurts that happen, even from those close to Jesus? We don't know for sure how Malchus dealt with it, but we do know that Jesus healed Malchus's ear immediately. Do you think Malchus focused on the pain inflicted by a close follower of Jesus, or do you think that every time he washed his face and saw his ear in the reflection he thought of Jesus, the Divine healer who personally healed him? If he thought of his healing, did he think enough about it to be a blessing to others, perhaps even to Peter?

Because hurt happens and offenses will come, what will you focus on? When hurt happens, even from those who are close to Jesus, will you focus on your pain or your divine healer, Jesus Christ?

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Berk Wilson	Amos 7:1-9:15
Grace Community Church	Revelation 3:7-22
Raleigh, North Carolina	Psalms 131:1-3
	Proverbs 29:23

Jesus Was Fully Man

*And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. Luke 1:31-32*

Christmas — what an amazing time of the year!

Not only do we celebrate the fact that the God of the Universe chose to enter His creation (Immanuel means “God with us”!), but the New Testament presents an equally mind-blowing fact. Jesus was fully man. Can you imagine that?

The God of the Universe (the One who created everything we see), the Almighty God (who holds the universe together by His power), was born to a woman. The God Man, Jesus Christ, grew in wisdom and stature. He got tired. Jesus took naps! He got hungry and thirsty. Jesus bled and died. Jesus also experienced the full range of human emotions. He marveled at people. He wept when his friend died. He was tempted like us. Jesus is as *people* as you and me.

In order to fully understand Christmas, we must grasp these two equally profound Biblical truths. The first is that Jesus was fully God. The second is that Jesus was fully man.

Jesus’ humanity means that He can relate to our sufferings. He can sympathize with our weaknesses. We have a high priest who intercedes on our behalf. One who knows what it is like to be human. He had first-hand experience!

Also, the Bible makes it clear that we are to follow the example of Jesus Christ. He demonstrated what it meant to be fully human and live a life in perfect obedience to God the Father.

But most importantly, Jesus being fully man enabled Him to shed His blood and die for our sins. Jesus was the perfect, spotless Lamb. He was the human sacrifice who could actually die for the sins of the world!

Submitted by:

Josh Whitney  
The Rock Church  
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Obadiah 1:1-21  
Revelation 4:1-11  
Psalm 132:1-18  
Proverbs 29:24-25

Saturday, December 15

It’s a Wonderful Life

*If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. Luke 16:10 NLT*

There is an episode of *Star Trek Next Generation* where Worf gets to see how his life would unfold in parallel universes if he had made different decisions in his relationships, career, social life . . . I’m telling you: you non-sci-fi geeks have no idea what you are missing! It fascinates me to think of how my life would have looked if I had made alternate choices.

It is very similar to the glimpse the angel Clarence gave George Bailey in *It’s A Wonderful Life*. He gave George the gift of seeing what his world would have been like if he had never been born. George got to see how hugely impactful his actions had been. I love this, because deep down all of us long to have a life of significance. Yet most of our days are not filled with heroic tasks but largely made up of small, seemingly mundane choices that no one sees. There are the sleep-deprived, stay-at-home moms who show patience and love to their toddlers day after day. The teenagers who refuse to gossip at the lunch table. The business person who could cheat but chooses integrity. The loose change placed in the Salvation Army kettle. The smile given to a stranger when you don’t feel like smiling. Shoveling a neighbor’s driveway. Saying “I’m sorry” for an offense. Giving up your seat on the bus. It doesn’t seem like much, but I believe that someday when we get to heaven it will be revealed how many lives we have touched.

Zechariah 4:10 (NLT) says, “*Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin.*” Keep being faithful in the little things this Christmas season.

Submitted by:

Kelly Lewis  
Grace Point Community Church  
Lewis Center, Ohio

One-Year Bible Reading

Micah 1:1-4:13  
Revelation 6:1-17  
Psalm 134:1-3  
Proverbs 30:1-4

Change Your Attitude, Harper

*I shall run the way of Your commandments, for You will enlarge my heart. Psalm 119:32*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Philippians 4:4*

Sunday School was not off to a good start. We weren’t in our normal room. We were going to have to be extra careful with any snacks. People walking by in the hallway could look in the glass doors and wave.

Nevertheless, I asked my two older pupils to begin this lesson with a demonstration. Use a balloon pump and blow up a blue balloon for each student. My plan was for everyone to wave the balloons as we read about how even the winds and waves obeyed Jesus.

Right away, four-year-old Harper was not happy. She wanted to blow up her own balloon.

“No, you may not.” I said. “Just the older kids are going to.” She pouted, and dropped her head back on her chair.

“Change your attitude, Harper,” I told her firmly.

“I can’t,” her bottom lip quivered. It was so cute.

I held firm. “Yes, you can,” I repeated. I know her mother well and knew she would approve. But Harper did not change her attitude.

“Harper, if you don’t change your attitude, I will tell your mom.” Harper knew I *would* tell her mom.

“Okay,” she said, and just like that became a very pleasant and helpful little lady.

The next morning, I found myself repeating similar words. This time to myself. My husband had asked me to help him. I had other plans.

I said to myself, “Change your attitude, Neva.” I laughed.

I am happy to report that, just like Harper, I was able to change my attitude.

Submitted by:

Neva Whitney  
Vintage Faith Church  
Stillwater, Oklahoma

One-Year Bible Reading

Jonah 1:1-4:11  
Revelation 5:1-14  
Psalm 133:1-3  
Proverbs 29:26-27

Sunday, December 16

Fighting in the Spirit

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23 ESV*

Relational conflict is normal, and God gives lots of helpful instruction on how to develop deeper and closer relationships as we work through conflicts. Before marriage and for the first couple of years of our life together, my wife and I argued regularly. We didn’t hit, cuss, or throw things, but we did engage in a lot of long and frustrating conversations. Sometimes we raised our voices and had to fight back anger, but somehow it seems that the majority of our conflict was productive and, although painful, was producing a deeper understanding of and love for one another.

One thing we strived to do was to fight in the Spirit. We knew that there was a standard of behavior that God has for His children. Numerous scriptures describe what this looks like, but perhaps the most famous is the fruit of the Spirit as described in Galatians 5. As Christians, we all try to live like God would want us to, but somehow it is easy to think that acting Christlike is impossible or unrealistic during an argument. Of course, my wife and I never perfectly demonstrated the fruit of the Spirit, but I think great strides were made just by not granting full reign to our fleshly desires. We tried to show patience, pursued peace, and treated one another gently. Eventually we learned that the goal was not to win the fight, but to understand each other and to learn how to work together in supportive and loving ways. As a result, our arguments became less frequent. After a few years we realized that our marriage was no longer marked by fighting, but by harmony. God’s ways work!

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson  
The Rio Church  
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

Micah 5:1-7:20  
Revelation 7:1-17  
Psalm 135:1-21  
Proverbs 30:5-6

“I Heard the Bells On Christmas Day”

*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.  
Luke 2:14*

“Christmas Bells” is a poem written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in 1863. It was put to music by John Baptiste Calkin in 1872. The chorus runs: “I heard the bells on Christmas Day/ Their old familiar carols play,/ And wild and sweet/ The words repeat/ Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

Two years after the tragic death of his beloved wife, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow learned that his son, Charley, had run away to join the Union army. Nine months later, on December 1, 1863, he heard that Charley had been wounded. Bringing Charley home to heal, Longfellow wrote this poem. Thus the setting for this verse: “Then from each black, accursed mouth [cannons] / The cannon thundered in the South,/ And with the sound/ The carols drowned/ Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

Despair reigned. It was the midst of the Civil War. The nation had been torn apart. Antietam, Chancellorsville, Gettysburg, and other horrific battles had been fought. Hundreds had died. How many more? Would it end? So much hate. Where was God? Longfellow continues: “It was as if an earthquake rent/ The hearth-stones of a continent/ And made forlorn/ The household born/ Of peace on earth, good-will to men!”

At the end of each stanza are the words, “Peace on earth, good-will to men!” Even in the despair of losing his wife, in the uncertainty of his son’s healing, and in the horrors of the Civil War, Longfellow was still longing for God’s peace. He, like us, finds peace in Jesus. That holy baby born on Christmas Day. He is our peace. Jesus is God’s good-will to men. Hold onto that truth in the chaos of life.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Shirley Ferguson	Nahum 1:1-3:19
Oakridge Community Church	Revelation 8:1-13
Clarksville, Maryland	Psalms 136:1-26
	Proverbs 30:7-9

Peaceful Presence

*Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Your heart must not be troubled or fearful. John 14:27 CSB*

Jesus combats the fears and troubles of this world by giving peace to His followers. But the reason He gives us His peace is profound: He gives us peace as a result of His covenant obedience and love toward the Father. Both of those reasons—love and obedience—are why He was going away, back to the Father, as He was revealing to His disciples. His constant peace is anchored in His obedience and love toward the Father.

If you were to list a few things causing you fear and trouble right now, what would they be? What will happen if in each of those areas you begin to pray and ask God for peace? But don’t ask for peace in a vacuum. Jesus never doled out promises without meaningful context. The context for the peace of Christ was the absence of His physical presence, but also the presence of the coming Holy Spirit. This spiritual transaction occurs in the context of prayer, obedience, and love.

I would like to challenge you to sink into more of a peaceful presence with God—but such does not merely come through contemplation. Rather, pray to God for peace. Prayerfully consider each of the troubling scenarios in your life, and ask how the truth of Scripture can be obediently applied. Finally, endeavor to love the people in those scenarios as you have been loved by the Father.

Once you have prayed, searched Scripture, and committed to love people, then do as Christ suggests, “Get up; let’s leave this place” (John 14: 31 CSB). Consider a time where you did not have peace in your life—was getting up and changing locations helpful? God longs for you to have His peace. However, such peace depends on our obedience and love to Him, just as Jesus’s peace depended on His love and obedience to the Father.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Andrew Roberts	Zephaniah 1:1-3:20
Awaken Church	Revelation 10:1-11
Jacksonville, Florida	Psalms 138:1-8
	Proverbs 30:11-14

Ring, Bells, Ring ! – 2

*“Behold, the virgin shall be with child and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel,” which translated means, “God with us.” Matthew 1:23*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned “Christmas Bells” in 1863 during the Civil War. It was a bleak, dark time in our nation’s history. Times are black again. It is the year 2018. War reigns in our nation once more. It is not a physical war, but a spiritual war. Random shootings, riots, and protests against police occur; we hear bitter words slung at people through all forms of media. So much hate. Where is God?

*And in despair I bowed my head;  
“There is no peace on earth,” I said,  
“For hate is strong,  
And mocks the song  
Of peace on earth, good-will to men.”*

I look around and despair. Hate is so strong. It can be overwhelming. Is there peace or good-will to men? In despair, I do bow my head. My heart cries out to God, “Where are You?”

God lifts my head, stares into my eyes, and says, “I am right here, My child. Trust Me!”

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep;  
God is not dead; nor doth He sleep!  
The Wrong shall fail,  
The Right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good-will to men!*

God is not dead. He isn’t asleep. He knows what is going on around us. He isn’t surprised. Trust in Him. Hope in Him. He is Victor. The Wrong indeed will fail. The Right will prevail. The victory is already God’s! Let the bells ring out! Ring, bells, ring loudly, ring deep. Ring, bells, ring!

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Shirley Ferguson	Habakkuk 1:1-3:19
Oakridge Community Church	Revelation 9:1-21
Clarksville, Maryland	Psalms 137:1-9
	Proverbs 30:10

Jesus Is Born

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. John 14:27 NIV*

Christmas is just days away. It’s supposed to be a time of celebration and joy—a time of peace. In the world we live in, however, the joy of Christmas can be hard to imagine. We live in the midst of church shootings, mass murders, suicide bombers, social unrest, and threats of nuclear war.

How do we deal with a world like this? How do we reconcile our faith in God with such unbelievable displays of evil and unrest going on around us? How can the amazing promise of Christmas exist in the midst of such overwhelming depravity?

These are tough questions. And the answer is not more gun control or police officers manning metal detectors in our schools. Why? Because the real problem lies deep within the human heart. As it says in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (NIV). Also in Romans 3:10-12 (NIV) we read, “There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one.” Clearly, we have a sin problem, not a social problem. And this is exactly why we *need* Christmas!

Jesus was born and came to this earth. He is not surprised by the depths of wickedness we see today. It was precisely *because* of the wickedness found in the hearts of men that He came. You see, we *need* Christmas! We *need* to be rescued, to be transformed. Only God can do that for us. And He did, by sending His one and only Son to pay for our sins and transform our human hearts.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Bill Young	Haggai 1:1-2:23
The Rock Church	Revelation 11:1-19
Draper, Utah	Psalms 139:1-24
	Proverbs 30:15-16

Jesus Is Savior

*I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. 1 John 5:13 NIV*

With Christmas less than a week away, I’ve been contemplating eternal matters. I’d like to share two different stories with you, both true. They are similar stories but with different endings. Both involve funerals. One is about someone I’ve never met, the other one about a dear friend.

The first account was related to me through a friend who had recently attended a funeral. He reported what was shared at the memorial service. It turns out that the deceased man was told by his spiritual leaders as he lay on his deathbed, “You have done enough good works to go to heaven. You are ready to die.”

The second story involved a member of our church, a close friend of mine. As I visited with him in the hospital, we talked of eternity, healing, and being with Jesus. After I prayed for him, we both rejoiced in the fact that he would be in heaven someday—but not because of any good works he had done (he had been sick and practically bedridden for 22 years)! No, we talked about the mercy of Jesus Christ, our Savior; we talked about the blood He shed for our sins. My friend and I rejoiced that he had placed his faith in Jesus many years ago. Because of Christ’s sacrificial payment, my friend would be with God for all eternity, apart from any good works he had done here.

Yes, two stories. Two conclusions. Two different eternities. How can we know which is true? I am convinced that God wants us to have a hope, but hope must be based on truth. The Bible says, “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (Titus 3:4-5 NIV). Have you accepted this great salvation as an undeserved gift?

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Bill Young	Zechariah 1:1-21
The Rock Church	Revelation 12:1-17
Draper, Utah	Psalms 140:1-13
	Proverbs 30:17

Sunday, December 23

Jesus is God With Us

*Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call His name "Immanuel" (which means, "God with us"). Matthew 1:23 ESV*

Christmas — the most wonderful time of the year!  
When I think of Christmas, there are so many wonderful and exciting things that come to my mind. A few of my favorite things are picking out the perfect tree, hanging up the Christmas lights, and sipping hot chocolate (with extra marshmallows) while Nat King Cole and Bing Crosby sing in the background.

You know, as much as I love these moments and cherish the sentiment that comes along with them, they truthfully have little or nothing to do with the wonder that is Christmas. The true meaning of Christmas came down from heaven and was found wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. A baby named Jesus, born in Bethlehem.

The truth of the incarnation of God Himself is so profound and astounding, it’s hard to know how to even begin to make sense of it. How do we wrap our minds around the wonder of the Ancient of Days becoming an infant? How do we understand the depths of the Eternal God who breathed life into man, now living as man, depending on the nurture of His mother? Honestly, there are not enough words in the world, or breaths in a lifetime of living, to explain how astonishing this event was. Yet the Bible states it as simply as, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name ‘Immanuel’ (which means ‘God with us’).”

So simple and yet so profound. Jesus Christ is the eternal promise of God that He Himself would come into our world to save us. Jesus Christ is the one we celebrate and worship. He is the Immanuel! That is what makes Christmas so wonderful. Come, let us adore Him!

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Bryan D. Edwards	Zechariah 4:1-5:11
The Rock Church	Revelation 14:1-20
Draper, Utah	Psalms 142:1-7
	Proverbs 30:21-23

Shepherds and Kings

*In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields. Luke 2:8  
Behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem . . . Matthew 2:1 ESV*

In my Bible reading plan I get to read the gospel of Luke twice each year, once in January and again in August. So when I got my fresh start in January, I again noticed the shepherds and the kings coming to visit the “little Lord Jesus,” as He is called in “Away in the Manger.” And I found myself thinking Advent thoughts, which, of course, should be All-Year thoughts.

Think about the shepherds. They were the lowest social class of Jewish society, I have been told. They were the rednecks, the hillbillies, the locals, the blue-collar workers, the manual laborers, the poor—out in the hills on what was probably a cold winter’s night. Our oldest son Arie gave us a poem for Christmas long ago written from the viewpoint of one of the shepherds; this was a man who considered himself an absolute loser: “My mother . . . she used to see things in me./ She’d hug me and tell me tenderly,/ ‘Yahweh will craft your life if you will trust . . .’/ But let me spare you the suspense—I’m a bust!”

Think about the kings, or wise men. They were from the upper echelons of society, the elite. They were wealthy scholars, intellectual internationals, the kind of people CNN always goes to for expert opinions on issues, the class of rich people or achievers whom everyone respects. They got an audience with King Herod in Jerusalem when they asked for it. They prepared expensive gifts for the Christ Child, unlike the shepherds who just dashed over after the angels’ announcement.

What does this tell us about our God? That He wants us *all*—from the lowest and the losers to the highest and the achievers. The Baby-become-King welcomes us all.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Dotty Vanderhorst	Zechariah 2:1-3:10
Cornerstone Community Church	Revelation 13:1-13:18
Lenexa, Kansas	Psalms 141:1-10
	Proverbs 30:18-20

Monday, December 24

The Best Gift Ever!

*The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 6:23 NIV*

Each year as the Christmas season rolls around, the common question on everyone’s lips is, “What do you want for Christmas?” I remember as a six-year-old standing on the school gym stage demurely singing my debut solo: “All I want for Christmas is a kitchen set, a kitchen set, a kitchen set...”

My parents must have been listening and maybe wanted to reward me for my musical courage, because a pink metal kitchen set appeared under the Christmas tree that year!

Part of the joy of Christmas is showing love by sharing gifts. We want to delight our recipients with gifts that we *know* they will like. That can sometimes lead to a quandary, however! Another childhood memory of mine is wandering the toy store aisles on Christmas Eve, frantically scanning the near empty shelves for a gift—any gift by this point—for my cousin Alan. I don’t know that the dog statue with the bobbly head that I landed upon was quite what Alan had in mind!

Some gifts aren’t a surprise but are warmly welcomed, like the blue Danish collector plates that my dad always presented my mom each Christmas. Other gifts are very much a surprise, like the shiny new bicycle for my husband that was parked in the kitchen when he woke up Christmas morning as a young boy years ago.

The Christmas gift of all gifts, however, the most surprising and most delightful, is the gift that God presented us all when He sent His Son Jesus into the world. For you see, God knew what we really needed and gave His very best. Those of us who have received that gift, we know He is the perfect gift, the BEST GIFT EVER!

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Dawn Bovenmyer	Zechariah 6:1-7:14
Stonebrook Community Church	Revelation 15:1-8
Ames, Iowa	Psalms 143:1-12
	Proverbs 30:24-28



God’s Gift

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul. I will praise the Lord while I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being. Psalm 146:1-2*

Thank You, Lord, for sending Jesus. Sending Him, for all people—every race, every station, every type. You came not to be that cute, cuddly, helpless baby in the manger. You came to be that Savior on the cross. You came to die, Your gift to all mankind.

You came to be He “who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross . . . so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2: 6-8, 10,11).

We praise You, Lord. You are worthy of so much more than our praise, yet we bring it to You and lay it at Your feet. May our gift to You this year be our lives. May You use our lives for Your glory. Happy Birthday, Jesus.

Timothy Keller, in *The Songs of Jesus*, said, “Lord, I thank You that You cared so much for us that You became a vulnerable mortal and died to satisfy the demands of justice against sin. I praise You for Your unspeakable gift this Christmas day.” Amen!

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson  
Oakridge Community Church  
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Zechariah 8:1-23  
Revelation 16:1-21  
Psalm 144:1-15  
Proverbs 30:29-31

Love Is... Sticking with It

*[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. 1 Corinthians 13:7 NIV*

Is that the kind of love you desire? Sometimes instead of being “protected,” we get hurt by those we love. “Trust” is something that we value, but once that trust gets violated, it is hard to get it back. As long as there is “hope,” it makes it bearable to work through rough spots in a relationship, but sometimes it feels hopeless. “Perseverance” may be the toughest of all. It is especially hard to persevere when we feel hurt, cautious, and hopeless. One wonders if the type of love described in the verse is even possible in human relationships.

We desire deep relationships that can stand strong through the thick and thin. However, we don’t like to get hurt, and it’s just a matter of time before we feel hurt by those we love. To protect our hearts, we may distance ourselves from those who hurt us. We may even put shields up and keep people from getting close to us, in hopes that if we don’t let others close, it won’t hurt as much when they cause us emotional pain. Of course, not only does this not work, but it also keeps us from experiencing the meaningful relationships we desire. A better way to protect ourselves is to mitigate the hurt by finding ways to work through conflict.

Commitment is key. We struggle to be committed because we are fearful of being stuck in difficult relationships. While this is understandable, we must grasp that without commitment, it is extremely hard to have the type of deep and meaningful relationships we desire. Without commitment it is hard to stick in there while we work through conflict and find ways of reducing hurt through discussion, understanding, forgiveness, and healing.

Submitted by:

Steven L. Nelson  
The Rio Church  
El Paso, Texas

One-Year Bible Reading

Zechariah 9:1-17  
Revelation 17:1-18  
Psalm 145:1-21  
Proverbs 30:32

Shaking the Blues

*They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. Luke 2:16 NLT*

The week after Christmas can sometimes be difficult. Post-Christmas blues are real. All the planning and pre-Christmas hype has come and gone. The tree is totally dried out; the decorations are not as charming as when we first put them up. Most of us have eaten more than we should have, spent too much money, and used up our vacation time. Are we really expected to just pick up where we left off and live real life again?

We need the *real* meaning of Christmas to change our lives (and thoughts) long past Christmas day. Let’s think for a minute. What did life look like for the baby Jesus a couple days after His birth? He was certainly completely dependent on others. He couldn’t eat, talk, or change His messy self. Read our opening verse from Luke 2:16. The image of this scene shakes me to the core. A helpless babe lying in a manger.

I’ve been blessed to witness quite a few births and hold a number of newborns. The birthing process itself is nothing short of miraculous. The truth of God Himself surrendering His position of strength and control to humbly and helplessly lie in a manger is profound. This expression of love is beyond me. It humbles me even to try and think about it.

God wants us to know Him as He is: merciful, grace-filled, and approachable. It’s mind boggling (to say the least) to think that our miraculous Creator loved us so much that He came to us as a helpless baby.

My friends, shake off those post-Christmas blues! You can’t forget that what we just celebrated, the birth of Jesus, *really did happen*. Jesus is the Savior of the world. God is with us, and He is just as approachable right now as He was when He lay helplessly in a manger. Fall into His arms and get ready for an amazing 2019. Why? Because God will be there!

Submitted by:

Steve McInroy  
The Rock Church  
Draper, Utah

One-Year Bible Reading

Zechariah 10:1-11:17  
Revelation 18:1-24  
Psalm 146:1-10  
Proverbs 30:33

Away in a Manger

*And she gave birth to her firstborn Son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7*

“Away in a Manger” is one of the most popular Christmas carols. Also called “Luther’s Cradle Song,” it was thought to have been written by Martin Luther. Evidence now shows that it was not written by Luther, but by an American in the late 1800s.

Because we learn this song as a child and because of the simplicity of the words, this carol is often overlooked. We can thoughtlessly sing and discount it. But let’s give it another look.

*Away in a manger, no crib for a bed  
The little Lord Jesus lay down His sweet head  
The stars in the sky look down where He lay  
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.*

Think about the implications of those simple words. The God of the universe chose to become a mere human, a baby. But not a prince nor a king, not even a rich man. Our Lord Jesus chose to be born a poor, common man. So common was he that there was no crib for Him, no home, only a manger.

“No home for Jesus” becomes a common theme throughout His life. From sleeping in a manger to fleeing to Egypt and later starting His ministry, Jesus had no home: “The foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head” (Matthew 8:20). Even when Jesus died, He was placed in a borrowed tomb. Jesus had no home here on the earth. He always knew His home was in heaven.

Thank You, Jesus, for giving up Your home for us.

Submitted by:

Shirley Ferguson  
Oakridge Community Church  
Clarksville, Maryland

One-Year Bible Reading

Zechariah 12:1-13:9  
Revelation 19:1-21  
Psalm 147:1-20  
Proverbs 31:1-7

Away in the Manger – 2

For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. Luke 2: 11

“Away in the Manger” was written in the 1800s. Viewed as a child’s song, it is often overlooked. But let’s continue looking at this beloved carol and see some truths of God.

The cattle are lowing, the Baby awakes  
But little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes  
I love Thee, Lord Jesus, look down from the sky  
And stay by my cradle ‘til morning is nigh.

The second verse takes us from the manger to the present day. We know that Jesus didn’t stay “little Lord Jesus.” He becomes the Lord Jesus, both then and now. So the carol takes us out of the stable and into our hearts. Jesus goes from being the baby to looking after all His children.

Be near me, Lord Jesus, I ask Thee to stay  
Close by me forever and love me I pray.  
Bless all the dear children in Thy tender care,  
And take us to Heaven to live with You there.

If you are God’s child, then Jesus is near, and He *will* stay by you forever. We can turn to Him right now. Can you feel His loving presence? It is all around you, cradling you. He *will* take you to heaven, His home. Heaven is the only place Jesus ever called home. Because of His love and sacrifice, it is our home too. And we *will* live with Him forever and ever and ever, alleluia!

The words may be simple, but thanks be to God they are not only profound but also true. “I love Thee, Lord Jesus . . . .” Oh, my Lord, I do love Thee.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Shirley Ferguson	Zechariah 14:1-21
Oakridge Community Church	Revelation 20:1-15
Clarksville, Maryland	Psalms 148:1-14
	Proverbs 31:8-9

Light and Truth

Now I am deeply discouraged, but I will remember you—even from distant Mount Hermon, the source of the Jordan, from the land of Mount Mizar. Psalm 42:6 NLT

It’s amazing how personal our God is! There are points in our lives when we have discouragement, times of doubt, times we question if God is *really* listening to us. Or has He just tossed us aside? These thoughts are real, and we can wonder if we are the only ones who think them.

In Psalms 42-43 (NLT), the psalmist writes about how he is feeling doubt and discouragement. His enemy is all around him, taunting him; he is alone. He has the real sense that God has tossed him aside and isn’t answering his prayers.

Three times during those two chapters, the psalmist writes these same lines: “*Why am I discouraged? Why is my heart so sad? I will put my hope in God! I will praise him again—my Savior and my God!*”

It’s so easy for me to get *in my head* when I am discouraged, tired, or burned out. Thoughts and anxieties start to creep into my mind, and they turn into a whirlwind. It’s not easy to escape it. The darkness starts to form; my thoughts and doubts spiral inward. It’s not a good thing.

But there is good news! Just as the psalmist writes, no matter how bad life may seem, he is going to call on the name of the God. Verse 43:3 is a beautifully crafted prayer: “Send out your light and your truth; let them guide me. Let them lead me to your holy mountain, to the place where you live” (NLT).

God’s light will guide us. God’s truth will wash over us. His dwelling place is where we can experience peace. One of my favorite songs, called *Dwelling* is by The Rock Music. It’s based on these verses. Read through Psalms 42-43, and give the song a listen today.

Let the Lord lead you with His truth and light!

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Tony D’Amico	Malachi 1:1-2:17
The Rock Church	Revelation 21:1-27
Draper, Utah	Psalms 149:1-9
	Proverbs 31:10-24

Monday, December 31

Here’s My Heart, It’s Yours to Keep

I will guide you along the best pathway for your life . . . . Psalm 32:8 NLT

Recently, The Rock Music released a music video for one of our songs, *Here’s My Heart*. Within the song there is the prayer that God would take our hearts in their entirety. It may seem simple enough, but we all know how hard it can be to both offer our hearts to God *and allow* God to completely take our hearts. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, the world around us fights for our affections. Perhaps it’s our job, our money, or glory? Maybe even “good” things, like our family or church can wrestle for our attention and worship.

May I suggest (like the song says) that the “safest” place for our hearts is within the hands of Jesus? Psalm 32:8 says, “The Lord says, ‘I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you’” (NLT). For me, a simple illustration of this verse is my guitar.

If I were to place my guitar in the hands of a child, or even an adult who didn’t know its proper function, it could be catastrophic for the instrument. At the very least, it would become an instrument that sounded awful or chaotic. However, when played by one who knows how it should be handled, it has the potential to make beautiful, thoughtful melodies.

How much more meaningful and powerful is the potential of your very life being driven by the overflow of your heart? In the wrong hands, how chaotic and dangerous could this be? The world, our flesh, and the devil, all fight for ownership. Now imagine your life (and your heart) within the Master’s hands. What a “song” your life could be! Isaiah 64:8 says this very thing: “And yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We all are formed by your hand.” This day surrender your heart to Him. Who knows more than He does how beautiful your life could be? After all, He’s the One who made it. In prayer, yield it to Him.

<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>One-Year Bible Reading</b>
Steele Croswhite	Malachi 3:1-4:6
The Rock Church	Revelation 22:1-21
Draper, Utah	Psalms 150:1-6
	Proverbs 31:25-31