



A 25-Day Series of Reflections on Christmas from
EquippingSaints.com

By Don Pucik

Contents

Preface: Why?	2
Day One	3
Day Two	4
Day Three	5
Day Four	7
Day Five	8
Day Six	10
Day Seven	12
Day Eight	14
Day Nine	16
Day Ten	17
Day Eleven	18
Day Twelve	20
Day Thirteen	22
Day Fourteen	24
Day Fifteen	27
Day Sixteen	29
Day Seventeen	31
Day Eighteen	33
Day Nineteen	35
Day Twenty	37
Day Twenty-One	39
Day Twenty-Two	41
Day Twenty-Three	43
Day Twenty-Four	44
Day Twenty-Five	46
Conclusion: How Jesus Changed My Life	48

Preface: Why?

For me personally, this has been an exceptionally grueling year, filled with busyness, changes, and losses. I have experienced stress, anxiety, confusion, and grief. I can say honestly that at each point in the journey, I found Jesus there... tender, strong, truthful, and very present. Through the Scriptures and my moment-by-moment reliance on Him, I found refreshment from Him, drinking deeply from the water only He can give.

However, as Christmas approached, I found dryness in my soul and a deep thirst in my heart. I needed to catch my breath and lose myself afresh in the wonder of His incarnation and His journey... on my behalf. So these reflections are a bit selfish in their intent, but I share them with you in a desire that you, too, might be refreshed.

Christmas changed for me when I abandoned my life into God's hands in 1978. At the end of this document, I share what happened... I thank God for rescuing me!

I am also thankful for the blessing of my family, especially for the hot blonde (*my wife Gail, who contributed the reflection on Day Eighteen*)! They are all so gracious to give me the time I need (without complaint, and with great encouragement) to be alone with Him.



As always, the typos and grammatical errors you find here are mine. But if you discover any truth, well, that's only from Him.

Welcome to the Christmas Revolution!

Day One

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth. - **John 1:1, 14***

In the popular reality TV show "[Undercover Boss](#)," CEOs go to work as ordinary people within their own companies. Subject to the same income, policies, and managers as the other workers, the CEOs are often motivated to make leadership changes and provide special assistance to the employees they befriended during their undercover experience. When an overbearing supervisor unknowingly mistreats or speaks harshly to the CEO-in-disguise, viewers begin to look forward to the moment when the true identity of the CEO is revealed.



What is Christmas really about when you peel away the myths and legends, gift-buying and giving, and holiday customs and social gatherings? It's the story of the time when the CEO of the universe went "undercover" among us. The timeless and eternal God stepped down quietly out of eternity and slipped into our neighborhood. Entering our time and space as the baby Jesus, he emerged as the Lord of Lords, and the astounding story of His visit continues to be told and re-told through the ages. Carrying out a divine rescue mission with a human heart pounding with love, He chose to come. And for those of us who know Him, He walks with us still. His birth was the beginning of a revolution.

A revolution represents a radical change in something. Over the next 25 days leading up to Christmas, I want to point out the revolutionary nature of our sacred celebration.

Day Two

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." - Genesis 3:15



The earliest reference to the Christmas Revolution is found... in Genesis?

Created in the image of God, Adam and Eve were given an entire world to rule, shape, and nurture (Genesis 1:26). Later identified as Satan (Revelation 20:2), the serpent deceived the couple into abandoning God's rule in their lives, embracing self-rule as a superior lifestyle (Genesis 3:1-6). The consequences were awful and immediate for our first parents--and for you and me.

God cursed the serpent and the earth, withdrawing His presence (Genesis 3:14, 17; Romans 8:20-21). The creation that was ours to rule became the legal property of Satan. That's why we have to contend with disease, disasters, despots, and death: we are living in a kingdom of darkness at this very moment (Colossians 1:13), corrupted by our sin and Satan's rule (Luke 4:6; 1 John 5:19). The devolution of nature is mirrored in every human soul. "Free" from God's Presence and Life, the human soul stumbles around in a moral twilight, gasping for a few breaths of happiness, and reducing deity to the miniature confines of the human imagination.

In Genesis 3:15, we find the first word of hope to the hopeless, the earliest expression of the good news, and a stunning prophecy of Satan's final defeat delivered by a human descendant of Adam and Eve. The ancient serpent will strike this Man, but the Man will fatally crush the great Deceiver (1 John 3:8). Adam couldn't do this, but Jesus did (1 Corinthians 15:22). He was no ordinary descendant of Adam.

On a recent road trip, my wife and I drove across vast stretches of West Texas flatlands... just incredibly, unbelievably flat. Coming over a small rise, we could see for miles to another ridge in the distance. The Genesis 3:15 passage is like a prophetic overlook, elevating the reader so he or she can gaze across the entire expanse of Old Testament history and directly into the stable in Bethlehem:

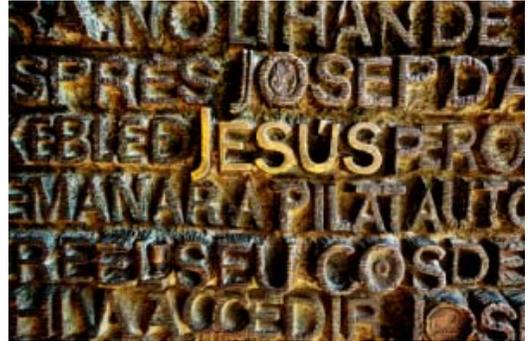
- beyond the Patriarchs and God's promises that fueled hope throughout their lives...
- beyond the Exodus account of God's cosmic victory over the demon-gods of Egypt (Exodus 12:12), setting His people free to follow Him...
- beyond the supernatural periods of communal well-being, homeland security, and personal wholeness (*shalom*) under King David and Solomon, when God's rule was expressed through an anointed, adopted king, prefiguring the coming King...
- and beyond the great prophets who penned their visions and songs of the coming anointed One (Messiah/Christ) who would usher in the kingdom of God.

The message of revolution in the Garden is this: **from the first moment you realize that your life is ruined and broken, God has a word of hope for you!** The Savior has come to destroy the enemies of your soul. Rescuing the ones who will accept His invitation, Jesus transforms darkened hearts and depopulates Satan's kingdom.

Day Three

"He is the image of the invisible God..." - Colossians 1:15

What is your "image" of God? Children think about this...



Dear GOD, I bet it is very hard for You to love all of everybody in the whole world. There are only four people in our family and I can never do it. - Nan

Dear GOD, In school they told us what You do. Who does it when You are on vacation? - Jane

Dear GOD, Are you really invisible or is that just a trick? - Lucy

Good questions, aren't they? However, as we get older, the questions change...

God, why is the world filled up with so much pain and suffering?

My own life is a mess. I have ruined everything. Is there hope for me? What do You think about me?

God, I'm hurting. I'm in trouble... do You care?

Do You like me? Love me? Or are You out to "get" me for what I've done?

God, are You there? Are You listening?

God, where are You? Who are You ?

You have answers to these questions framed in your mind. They might be tentative or firm, but taken together, your responses draw a mental image of God. Who you think God is--even if you deny His existence--radically affects you. Our inner portraits of God shape our lives, guide our choices, and determine our destiny. We need to get it right.

In the Old Testament, God prohibited the use of carved, "graven" images in worship (Exodus 20:2-6). Even when we are armed with the very best intentions and conceptions of who God is, our human attempts to "picture" God will always fall short. Commingled with our own ideas and opinions of what God should be, our projections of God become manageable deities... little gods who are less than real and far more amenable to our choices and desires (Romans 1:20-23). To make matters worse, God is a Spirit, invisible, and unseen. Who He IS cannot be captured with a graphic or a sculpture.

More is needed. Much more. Here comes the Christmas Revolution...

In Colossians 1:15, the apostle Paul declares that the baby born in Bethlehem is "the image of the invisible God." God does not leave us to our imagination. He wants you to know Him and who He is. Who is God? What is He like? What does He think? What does He want me to know about Him? What does He want me to know about me? Jesus is the answer.

Coming into our realm of time and space, infinite existence and consciousness was captured in human form. Theologians will never adequately explain the incarnation, having argued about it for centuries. But the truth is simple: when God wanted you to know Him, He didn't send a snapshot (how do you take a picture of an invisible subject?). He sent a perfect and complete representation of Himself. Jesus, as the image of God, does not live in your mind, but He exists apart from your thoughts, and He lives... and He speaks... and He acts.

Jesus is not a picture on a canvas, but a perfect reflection of the Person of God. Babies can entertain themselves for hours in front of a mirror, marveling at the movements of the image which perfectly match their own. When you look at Jesus, you are not seeing a static, lifeless caricature of God, but every movement and expression of God Himself--as if you were watching Him in a mirror.

So it behooves you and me to let God reveal Himself to us His way and on His terms, doesn't it?

What a revolutionary notion! It's part of the Christmas Revolution.

Day Four

*"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!" - **Philippians 2:5-8***



The baby in the manger reflects a revolutionary way of thinking that inverts this world's system of values. Releasing His infinite majesty and absolute rule, and limiting Himself to the insignificance and lowly place of a house servant, Jesus lived a life that was absolutely yielded to the will of His Father. Why did He do this?

*"For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." - **2 Corinthians 8:9***

Jesus became a servant so that your life could be transformed. With one life to spend, He spent it all... on you. His obedience changes you. And if His attitude seeps into your thinking, you're going to become a revolutionary presence in your world too.

Obedience is an offensive concept in our culture: it seems demeaning to obey someone. Yet, for Jesus, it was essential to doing life the way God intended. The obedient life is simply a dependent life, an active exhibition of faith in God. You cannot fulfill His assignment for your life by drawing on your ingenuity and resources alone. The God-sized work He gives you is always more than you can do in your own strength. Although Jesus was fully God, He did life within the limitations and frailties of His humanity -- just like you and me. Jesus had a divine mission, but He could only accomplish it through the enabling presence and power of God.

- When Jesus needed to know what to say, God guided Him (John 12:49).
- When Jesus needed to know what to do, God showed Him (John 5:19).
- When Jesus needed supernatural help, God helped Him (Luke 11:20).

Jesus is not only our Savior. He's our model for how to live in a dependent relationship with God. "Obedience" is about trading in your meager "powers" and tapping into His power. It's not about losing your worth and value, but finding your significance through His purpose for your life. This is the attitude of Jesus... and it started with His arrival in Bethlehem.

According to Paul, this is the mindset of Jesus that must infect your own thinking. Welcome to the Christmas Revolution!

Day Five

*When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." . . . Now when the tempter came to Him, he said, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." . . . Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down..." - **Matthew 3:16-17; 4:3-6***



The essence of lostness is to do life apart from God. Whether the lifestyle is evil or benevolent, a life lived independently of God is broken and subhuman, falling short of the filial joy that is our creaturely birthright. Yesterday, we saw how Jesus chose to live with human ordinariness, completely dependent on the Father for direction in His choices, words, and actions.

Today, we explore why.

At His baptism, Jesus heard His Father's heart and experienced His pleasure. Like Adam and Eve in the Garden, Jesus enjoyed an intimate, childlike relationship with a Father whose love was like a blanket that enveloped Him. His response was simple: love Him back! Asked to pick the single greatest commandment of all, Jesus would later teach, *'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'* (Matthew 22:37). Is that "obedience"? Yes. Is it an expression of "dependence"? Yes. But if it is anything, love is seeking the pleasure of the One who is loved.

Immediately following His baptism, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into an encounter with Satan. The Garden scenario was being replayed. Armed with the favor of God, the Son had a single task... love the Father. Like Adam and Eve, everything Jesus was tempted to do involved acting independently of the Father. "You're the Son of God," the devil said. "You can do whatever you like. Turn stones to bread. Show off a little. Take over the world." But what was the price of this "freedom"? It was too much.

Near the end of His earthly journey, one of the disciples asked how Jesus would "manifest" or appear to His followers after His physical departure. Jesus replied,

*"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him." - **John 14:23***

The people who will know Him are the ones who love Him. The obedient, dependent Christ-follower is not a mentally weak individual who has been deluded into a slavish relationship with an imaginary deity... but rather, he or she is a lover caught up in an intoxicating affair with a God who lives within.

The baby in Bethlehem not only inverted this world's value system, He also turned the world of religion on its head. Religion is about what we do to obtain what we want or need from a god, or it's a mechanism for becoming a god of our own. But through the baby-in-the-manger event, we

discover that God is pursuing an all-consuming relationship with us -- and in that relationship we find a delirious, unspeakable joy (1 Peter 1:8).

In the end of this story, temptation is not overcome through the will, but through a heart overwhelmed by the favor of God.

It's another delightful facet of the Christmas Revolution!

Day Six

*"But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said, "The Christ of God." And He strictly warned and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. . . . But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God." Now it came to pass, about eight days after these sayings, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray. As He prayed, the appearance of His face was altered, and His robe became white and glistening. And behold, two men talked with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. . . . a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were fearful as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!" When the voice had ceased, Jesus was found alone. - **Luke 9:20-35***



When bad news arrives, it can rock your world.

Peter was absolutely right when he declared that Jesus was "the Christ of God" (Luke 9:20), but he had only a limited understanding of what that meant. In the collective Jewish mindset of the first century, the idea of a Messiah ("anointed one") ushering in the kingdom of God had been percolating for centuries. Like everyone else, when Jesus came preaching "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17), Peter envisioned a victorious king arriving to subdue all of his enemies. Watching Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons, Peter had become convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ.

What Jesus said next was unexpected and frightening: "The Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day." What? Jesus is not going to take over Jerusalem and drive out the Romans? The Messiah is going to die? And... I may die too?

Then Jesus added a cryptic word of hope: "there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the kingdom of God."

A week later Peter is standing on a mountain gazing at the brilliant, supernatural radiance emanating from every atom of Jesus' body and clothing. A cloud descends, enveloping Peter... and he hears a voice... oh, that voice... God speaking, "This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!"

There were others present at "The Transfiguration." The significance of that experience continues to provoke much reflection and discussion. But for Peter, mentioning the incident years later in a letter, it was the voice that made him an eyewitness "of His majesty" (2 Peter 1:16-18). Jesus said some of them would "see" the kingdom of God, and Peter did (Luke 9:27). He had encountered the presence of God in the cloud. He had seen the glory of God shining from within Jesus. He had heard the voice say, "Hear Him!"

For Peter, following Jesus meant abandoning his preconceived notions of what God should do or would do. Jesus, Elijah, and Moses knew the imminent events coming up in Jerusalem. Peter heard them discussing the details. The divine plan was different from what he had expected, but it wasn't bad news... it was gloriously good news.

God is a King... the only true King. He has a purpose that is being executed in the midst of our broken, rebellious corner of the universe. He is in control. There are no divine "fails." No mistakes. Everything is playing out on time and on course. Comprehending every responsible and irresponsible action of every human being in all times and places, He enters into the chaos of our willfulness and extracts... good... for those who have said "yes" to Him, throwing themselves onto His leadership and care (Romans 8:28).

So, if Jesus says that the kingly rule of God is here, it is. If Jesus says He is going to die and then rise from the dead, then He does. If Jesus says following Him will cost me everything, then it will. The Father said I must listen to His Son, the One born in Bethlehem. No need to be afraid of the rough times, because "rough" is not synonymous with "out-of-control." The Lord's got this!

As a child in His kingdom, I am absolutely safe and secure. Let the bad news come... it's never, ever the whole truth, nor is it the final scene of my story.

But it is part of the Christmas Revolution.

Day Seven

*Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father--God." Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. . . . Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him - **John 8:41-42, 57-59***



At the heart of the conflict described in John 8 was Jesus' relationship to His Father. "*I am not of this world,*" He told them (verse 23). Jesus explains that He "*came from God*" and that God "*sent Me*" (verse 42). What did He teach? "*I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him*" (verse 26). Then and now, Jesus' clear statements about Himself are reinvented, restated, reinterpreted, or rejected, but rarely are they taken at face value. They are revolutionary, and for most people, they are unacceptable.

Individuals will go to great lengths to reject the truth about God and avoid a relationship to Him. As these religious leaders challenged Jesus, they stumbled down the pathway of rejection:

- they challenged His truthfulness - "*You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true*" (verse 13);
- they challenged His origins - "*Where is Your Father?*" (verse 19);
- they challenged His identity - "*Who are You?*" (verse 25);
- they challenged His message - "*We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free?'*" (verse 33);
- they challenged His spirituality - "*Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?*" (verse 48); and
- they challenged His authority - "*Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom do You make Yourself out to be?*" (verses 52-53).

But religious debate turned into attempted murder when Jesus said, "*before Abraham was, I AM*" (John 8:58). This was a bold declaration of deity. "*I AM*" was a reference to the sacred and holy name of God, "Yahweh" (Exodus 3:13-15). Hearing what they believed to be blasphemy, the deeply offended crowd picked up stones... the conversation was over, and Jesus walked away unharmed.

How's your conversation with Jesus going?

In the midst of an all-out attack on Jesus, His opponents brought up the well-known question about Jesus' paternity. "*We were not born of fornication,*" they said (verse 41). It was a cheap shot. Mean. Hurtful. Almost no one had believed Mary's story how she had become pregnant through the Holy Spirit, but Jesus knew the truth about Himself (Luke 1:21-38). The problem was that these men didn't know the truth about themselves. Claiming to know God as "Father," they missed God. Completely.

Drop the stones. Stop challenging Him and dissecting Him... just listen to Him: "*If God were your Father, you would love Me,*" He said (verse 42).

When you are dealing with the one, true God of the universe... you will fall in love with the baby born in Bethlehem. It's that simple. And it's an inescapable reality within the Christmas Revolution.

Day Eight

Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death. . . . So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" - Mark 14:61-64; 15:39



There's no such thing as benign blasphemy.

The high priest and the other religious leaders could have handled His claim to be the Christ or Messiah. Similar claims from other "messiahs" were fairly routine... and ended badly as the Roman authorities easily defeated the well-intentioned rebels, crushing all hope of liberation. But this man was different. He claimed to be the Son of God.

In his reply to the question, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?," Jesus used the divine name "I AM." Although the religious leaders were looking at a very ordinary looking "Son of Man," Jesus declared that when the kingdom of God is finally ushered in, He would be seen by them again, sitting next to the One who is all Powerful.

This was blasphemy in the minds of the horrified priests. To insult, devalue, or malign God was unspeakably offensive and punishable by death. They had no doubts. They did not hesitate. Jesus was a blasphemer of the one and only true God!

In North America, it's hard for us to understand how offensive blasphemy can be to a group of committed religionists. In our culture, we blaspheme deities and people with ease, then laugh about it, never giving it another thought. Whether we hear it in the news, on a late night talk show, in a political speech, or on the radio, it's just not a big deal... it's all just good fun.

However, the Incarnation--God becoming flesh-- is a major hindrance to Christianity on the stage of world religions. Researchers report that more Christians have died for their faith in the last 100 years than in the past 2000 years -- most died because of the ancient conviction that Jesus was God's Son. The baby in the manger is sweet, but a grown man who claims to be God must be stopped!

You cannot affirm Jesus' "message" and also abandon His claim to be God's Son. His entire proclamation hinges on that fact. If it is untrue, everything He taught should be tossed. Popularizing an argument from the 19th century, C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* explains:

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man

and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

Lord, Liar, or Lunatic? It's a "trilemma"! Among the religious leaders who heard Jesus, and in the courtroom of human hearts through the ages, there are no harmless liars or lunatics. The opponents were just being intellectually honest: Jesus was either telling the truth, or He was guilty of insulting and offending God. Rather than let God handle it (and believe me, He can), these men determined Jesus should die for His blasphemy. They got what they wanted.

But another man, a battle-hardened soldier who had seen hundreds of men die, watched the dying of Jesus against the backdrop of what he had been told about Jesus. The centurion was more thoughtful than the religious priests. He connected the dots. He saw what the priests and religious scholars couldn't or wouldn't see. Arising from the uncluttered observation of a centurion standing near the cross, he couldn't help speaking his thoughts aloud, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"

Blasphemy? Or truth?

It's the greatest barrier to belief for millions of people. But for others, like the centurion and me, it is the blessing that redefines all of life... and it's the central, explosive truth of the Christmas Revolution.

Day Nine

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. . . . And he was three days without sight, and neither ate nor drank. . . . Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. - Acts 1-5, 9, 20-21



Saul hated anyone who was a follower of Jesus. He tracked and hunted them down. He tied them up. He dragged them back to Jerusalem. He was doing everything within his power to destroy the church (Galatians 1:13). That is, until He encountered the brilliant light and the penetrating voice on the road to Damascus.

Saul heard the *Lord*... *Adonai*, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And this *Lord* identified Himself as Jesus! In the aftermath of the conversation, Saul was blind. He was in total darkness for three days, but he was able to "see" the truth. What did He "see" while he was in the dark? He concluded that:

- "Jesus knows me." He called Saul by name.
- "Jesus comes after me." He was pursuing Saul.
- "Jesus is really Lord." Saul had to revise his entire understanding of the man known as Jesus of Nazareth.
- "Jesus is intimately connected to His followers." Saul was persecuting the followers of Jesus; Jesus said Saul was persecuting Jesus. What you do to a Christian, you are doing to Christ.

As soon as he regained his physical eyesight, **Saul began preaching that Jesus was the Son of God**. Have you ever "seen" the truth about Jesus?

Jesus knows you. He is pursuing you.

Saul... he represents every life changed because of the baby born in Bethlehem: every soul transformed by the Christmas Revolution!

Day Ten

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. - Hebrews 1:1-3



In the movie *Antz* (1998), the entire story occurs in and around an ant hill in New York City's Central Park. Quite oblivious to the larger world around them, a mosquito and a ladybug have a conversation:

Mosquito: What if, like, we're just these tiny things... and we're just, like, part of this whole other huge universe... that's, like, so big we don't even know it exists?

Ladybug: Man, that is so deep.

I'm like that mosquito and ladybug. So are you. If God is ALL-INFINITE in size, in power, and in knowledge (and I believe He is), how could I hope to know Him? If He spoke to me, how could I understand anything He said to me?

The core message of Hebrews 1:1-3 is this: God has spoken to us through His Son. The passage strikes me in several ways:

- **God takes the initiative to speak to me.** When dealing with tiny creatures like you and me, God must make the first move to communicate -- and He has! In his classic work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer writes, "All my knowledge of Him depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him, because He first knew me, and continues to know me."
- **God speaks clearly to me.** The writer asserts that Jesus is the "express image" of God... an exact copy of His essence or being. By coming as a baby in Bethlehem, God chose to communicate with us in a form and a language we could understand.
- **God does everything necessary to be intimate with me.** The writer says that Jesus "purged our sins." For the first readers who were Christians, He had cleansed their lives to such a degree, that the result was as if they had never sinned. Although God originally intended that we would live with Him and for Him (dependent on Him for direction and life), each of us was also infected by a hereditary predisposition of the heart to live for ourselves. Through His death on the cross, Jesus is able to wipe away every offense and obstacle to intimacy for those who yield their lives to Him. He also invites us on a journey of transformed desires and dreams flowing from a new heart.

He knows who I am. My name. My past. My heart. And He still wants me to know Him. It is equally true that He wants you to know Him through His Son, the One born in Bethlehem.

It's a very clear message underlying the Christmas Revolution.

Day Eleven

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. - **John 3:16-18***



One year after Gail and I moved from California (1988), the *Los Angeles Times* reported that a young woman had been trapped in her car after falling asleep at the wheel just after midnight on a Saturday morning. The car had plunged through a guard rail and was dangling by its left rear wheel. Several motorists stopped, grabbed some ropes from one of their vehicles, tied the ropes to the back of the woman's car, and hung on until the fire units arrived. A ladder was extended from below to help stabilize the car while firefighters tied the vehicle to tow trucks with cables and chains.

"Every time we would move the car," said one of the rescuers, "she'd yell and scream. She was in pain." It took almost three hours for the passers-by, California Highway Patrol officers, tow truck drivers, and firefighters – about 25 people in all -- to secure the car and pull the woman to safety.

"It was kinda funny," fire captain Ross Marshall later recalled. "She kept saying, 'I'LL DO IT MYSELF!'"

Absurd, isn't it? And yet, we're all trapped in a world that is very much like that car. Doing life in a natural and social environment that is broken, damaged, corrupt, and condemned, we keep assuring ourselves that we "got this!" But we don't. And we never did. If we could only see what God sees...

Created to live in relationship with Him, we have all run away. Designed to live with others by reflecting His love and mercy, we formulate our own ideas about how to live with people, leaving broken hearts and emotional debris in the wake of our selfishness. Endowed with a heart where God can come and commune with us, we have chosen to blockade the doors, denying God access to our hearts, darkening the windows of our souls, and becoming empty caricatures of humanity. Hanging from a very brief thread of physical existence, we disparage and disregard the only God out there who is listening. The result? There's no hope in that scenario... we are condemned already.

But, in spite of everything we have become... everything we have said... and everything we have done... He loves you and me. What was the Jesus doing entering this world as a baby in Bethlehem? It was a rescue mission. He was coming after us. The goal? To keep you from perishing... to give you everlasting life.

We can keep reassuring ourselves and one another that we can do it ourselves. Or we can believe in Him, surrender control, and rely completely on Him and not ourselves for getting through this life.

Saved from certain disaster. Saved to be enveloped by His love and inhabited by His life. Not so bad... considering where you're hanging from right now.

I thank God for rescuing me. He is my Christmas Revolution. Is He yours?

Day Twelve



*For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. - **Romans 8:3-4***

The real story at Mount Sinai was that God wanted to dwell among His people. Listen to how He describes His actions to the Exodus generation:

*"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine." - **Exodus 19:4-5***

He wants to be with us, but intimacy is costly: He requires that we obey (depend on) everything He says. Sounds simple enough. Receiving the Law at Sinai, God's people believed for generations that they had everything they needed to please God. Although numerous prophets and psalmists knew better, generation after generation concluded wrongly that God was preoccupied with a solid, external effort to keep the Law. Like many people today, they believed that God was primarily interested in changing their behavior.

They couldn't have been more mistaken. He wants to do far more than reform our behavior, He wants to recreate and capture our hearts.

As much as God loves us, His holiness requires us to reflect inner purity and moral perfection before we can draw near. So, the demands of the Law were not optional, but essential to intimacy. The Law was also designed to show us what life looks like as God intended it to be lived. The Law is a reflection of what we should do and want... naturally. The Law is good. The problem is that we are not.

Paul said the Law was "*weak through the flesh.*" Although someone might conform outwardly to the Law, on the inside, in the heart, he remains a wide-eyed, self-centered rebel. You might avoid murder, but hate reigns in the heart. You might remain faithful to your spouse, but adulterous fantasies continue to cloud your mind. You might appear righteous, but you know on the inside that nothing is right.

Enter, once again, the Christmas Revolution!

Jesus was born "*in the likeness of sinful flesh*" but nothing inside Him was dark or wrong. He depended on the Father for everything. He was a walking demonstration of the Law, reflecting the Life that His Father had for each of us to live, but none of us could... or would.

The Gospel or good news is this: everything required for intimacy with the Father has been accomplished by Jesus, then credited to the ones who have placed their trust in the Son. I can approach God as freely as the Son He sent, when I lose myself into the life of the Son.

And there's more! The "*walk*" of the believer is like the Son's "*walk*": an overflow of the activity of the Spirit within the heart. The Spirit enables a new way of life, prompting and empowering cooperating believers to become and to do everything God had envisioned for us in the Law.

In the seventeenth century, John Bunyan, Baptist pastor and author *Pilgrim's Progress* penned these lines to describe this entirely new way of living:

*"Run, John, run"
The law commands
But gives me neither feet nor hands
Tis better news the Gospel brings
It bids me fly
It gives me wings.*

Have you found your wings? The Christmas Revolution... God sending His Son so our hearts could be transformed!

Day Thirteen



But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. -

Romans 5:8-10

Peter Miller pastored a Baptist church during the American Revolution at Ephrata, Pennsylvania. Coming to the area in the 1730's, Peter originally pastored Bethany Church, a German Reformed congregation. At the request of his friend Thomas Jefferson, he translated the *Declaration of Independence* into seven languages to help the world understand what was happening in the colonies. He was well-known and deeply respected.

Michael Witman, a deacon at Bethany church, was deeply troubled and angered at Miller's exit to become a Baptist preacher. Witman routinely harassed Miller and his congregation. He ridiculed them. He spread lies about them. One time Witman hit Miller in the face; on another occasion, Witman spit on him.

Miller did not retaliate or respond. In fact, he never said anything bad about Witman's abuse... he just took it.

Witman owned the local hotel and tavern. One evening during the winter of 1777-1778, two men came in to stay the night. Outspoken as always, Witman began expressing his loyalty to the British crown to his guests, without realizing they were American spies. Although he tried to escape by jumping out a window, Witman was captured and tried for treason before Gen. George Washington. He was sentenced to death on the gallows.

When Miller learned of Witman's sentence, he grabbed his cane and walked sixty miles through the snow to Valley Forge, seeking a pardon for Witman from Washington. Washington told him that his friend would have to die.

"My friend!" said Miller. "I have not a worse enemy living than that man."

Washington was stunned, changed his mind, and wrote out a pardon. Witman's property would be confiscated, but his life would be spared. Miller hurried to West Chester, fifteen miles away, the site of Witman's imminent execution.

Miller arrived as Witman was being led to the scaffold.

When Witman saw him, he said, "There is old Peter Miller. He has walked all the way from Ephrata to have his revenge gratified today seeing me hung."

He was wrong. Miller shouted out to stop the execution, waving the pardon document. Observers later reported that the two men embraced each other. The former enemies walked home to Ephrata as friends for the rest of their lives.

Miller understood the love of God.

God sent His Son into the world to die... while we were enemies. Unbelievable love... demonstrated forever as part of the Christmas Revolution!

Source for this story: Steinmetz, Hiram E. "Peter Miller - Michael Witman." *Historical Papers and Addresses of the Lancaster Historical Society* VI.1 (1901): 46-49.

Day Fourteen

"A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, refusing to be comforted, because they are no more." - Matthew 2:18

[12/14/2012] At Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut, twenty children arrived at school this morning who would never leave alive. Eager for Christmas to come, their hopes and dreams were snuffed out by a shooter in a few minutes of indescribable tragedy. Adults died too. And hundreds of lives were shattered along with the bodies of the victims. Tears flowed freely across the land... including my own.

O dear Lord, You arrived here two millennia ago in the midst of this same kind of evil. In You alone, we find comfort in the present and hope for the future. Please capture the hearts that are broken. Don't permit evil to beget evil. Please draw Your people into these scorched fields of human pain and agony to serve and heal through Your Presence.

Jesus was born for this battle... for days like today. From infancy, He encountered enemies that sought to eradicate His mission by destroying Him! The fight rages on and He calls His followers to join Him. How?

Now when they had departed, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, flee to Egypt, and stay there until I bring you word; for Herod will seek the young Child to destroy Him." When he awoke, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." - Matthew 2:13-15

In the middle of the night, Joseph received a message from God: Herod is coming to “*destroy the child.*” Narrowly escaping to Egypt, the baby Jesus escaped the mass murder of all male infants and toddlers in Bethlehem.

Are you shocked? Or is this story a horrific reminder that the world we live in is at war? Evil is not simply an idea or an act. Evil is fueled by an individual consciousness nearly as old as creation itself. Millennia ago, the Bible explains that some of God's creatures rebelled. The angels sinned. Man sinned. The world as God intended devolved into moral and spiritual chaos. Trapped in a very real spiritual war, we have enemies, and we need a Savior!

Then Herod, when he saw that he was deceived by the wise men, was exceedingly angry; and he sent forth and put to death all the male children who were in Bethlehem and in all its districts, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the wise men. - Matthew 2:16

After a lifetime of hatred and power-mongering, Herod is now determined to stamp out a divinely prophesied rival for his throne! Angered when the wise men failed to lead him to the



child, he sent his troops to massacre the little ones of Bethlehem. Like so many senseless acts of violence and cruelty in the modern world, Herod raises the question: why would God allow such pain?

Preoccupation with this question can derail individual faith. A better question might be "who is responsible for the pain?" Jesus calls the devil the "*ruler of this world*" (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), a liar, and a murderer (John 8:44), who steals truth from the hearts of people who do not know God (Matthew 13:19), and is keeping them blind to the reality of a living God (2 Corinthians 4:4). He animates evil in the world, influencing and empowering those who do not know God to reject God and do everything that is offensive to God (1 John 5:19). According to the Scriptures, human suffering is a consequence of a very deadly warfare raging around every human soul.

The issue is not a question for the *head*. We need to check our *heart*.

How does God react to widespread suffering and pain? In Matthew 9:35-36, the Bible says Jesus was "*moved with compassion*." He cares and so should we. We should not waste time on philosophical queries in the face of human suffering, but we should care deeply enough to be motivated to action.

But when Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise, take the young Child and His mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the young Child's life are dead." - Matthew 2:19-20

In this story we observe evil in motion, making repeated attempts to snuff out the life of the young Jesus. We also see almighty God anticipating and thwarting the enemy. Through the wise men, He provided financial support for a move to and from Egypt. In his sleep, Joseph received clear direction about when to move, when to stay, when to return, and where to settle—each decision countering the destructive forces in the unseen world.

However, we should never allow ourselves to slip into a cheap form of triumphalism, believing God is going to rescue all Christians from the deadly conflicts in this world. That would be an affront to the martyrs through the ages and an insult to the little ones who did not escape Herod's soldiers then... or the gunman's bullets this morning. Nevertheless, in every war there are casualties and atrocities.

But for those who know Him, our losses are real, but only temporal, and not eternal! God has a plan for His people. He is accomplishing His purpose, no matter what our seen and unseen enemies may do. Every action of our enemies will always play into His plan for our lives. Jesus came to rescue us from the enemies of our soul, both in this world and the world we cannot see.

Is this your God? Do you reject the notion that God is the author of evil? Do you embrace the truth that God will ultimately triumph over all? He truly is the Lord of Lords. He is the King.

Then he arose, took the young Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, "He shall be called a Nazarene." - Matthew 2:21-23

Joseph's obedience was instrumental at every step in this story, wasn't it? With every direction, he responds with obedience. Apart from his sensitive, passionate pursuit of God's purpose for his life, Joseph could have been a casualty in the conflict surrounding the birth of Jesus. He had a very significant role to play.

And so do you, especially on a day like today. So listen carefully and obey immediately!

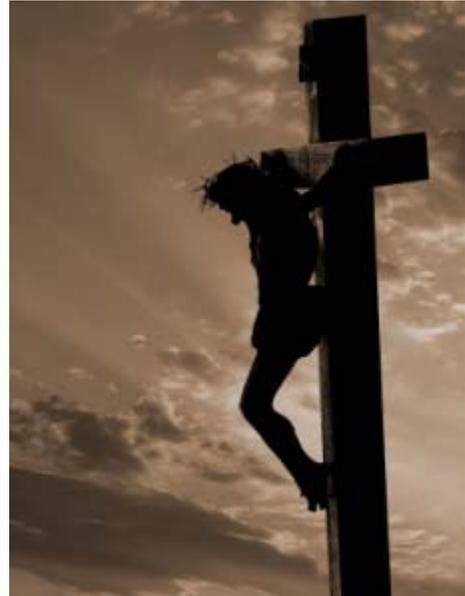
We will shed tears along the way, commingled with His own, but the time for weeping will fade as the Victor puts down every evil and every darkness in the universe... and in our hearts. We will dance in eternity before the One born in Bethlehem—the One who was born for battle and ushered in the Christmas Revolution!

Day Fifteen

"...but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." - Hebrews 9:26

In the process of getting a divorce after five painful years of separation, Chip and Cindy Altemos had begun seeing other people. Then without warning, Chip's health began to deteriorate rapidly. After Chip was hospitalized with kidney failure, Cindy made the decision to donate a kidney to her soon-to-be ex-husband. "There was no way I could walk around with two kidneys and he had none," she said. "It was the right thing to do." The transplant took place on February 21, 2007.

Recuperating in the hospital, a surprising thing began to happen. Chip said, "We slowly fell back in love again." The couple reunited as a result of Cindy's act.



Such sacrificial love carries with it the power to transform the recipient. Have you ever been loved like that? Whether you realize it or not, the baby born in Bethlehem grew up to love you deeply! The writer of Hebrews writes about the overwhelming, personal nature of Christ's love for you.

For me, He went where I could not go.

"For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." - *Hebrews 9:24*

In the Old Testament, the Tabernacle contained an inner sanctuary where God's presence was believed to dwell. On the annual Day of Atonement, a high priest was allowed to enter that space and represent the people of God (9:7). He carried with him the blood of an animal sacrifice—killed to atone for the sins of the nation. No one else could enter there. Not me. Not you. No one was worthy.

When Jesus entered heaven following His death on the cross, He was worthy. Going before the very face of God as sacrifice and priest, Jesus entered God's space "for us"—literally on our behalf. He is our access into God's presence. He did it for me!

For me, He gave what I could not give.

"...not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another..." - *Hebrews 9:25*

Intimate contact with God came at great cost. Before a God who is holy, I am helplessly immersed in sins that will keep me from ever knowing His love. When no other human being could rescue me, Jesus "would offer Himself" as the atoning sacrifice for my sins. Only one

without guilt could die for the guilty (2 Cor 5:21). He suffered (9:26), bore my sins as his own (9:28), and then put them away (9:26). He did it for me!

For me, He offers what I cannot imagine.

"He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." - **Hebrews 9:26**

When I think that sin bars me from access to God's presence, it leaves me with a sense of hopelessness. Even if I repent and "make it right," sin recurs in my life. In the Old Testament, the high priest made atonement for the sins of Israel every year—a constant reminder that the way to God was opened ever-so-briefly through an imperfect, sacrificial system. No one could imagine an access to God that was always available.

Jesus opened up the way to God "once" for all time (9:26-28). Stressing the finality of Jesus' sacrifice and decisive handling of my sins, the writer of Hebrews wants me to know that the doorway to God's presence is permanently and always open to me. I will never be good enough to enter God's space on my own merits, but I will always be welcome there. It really is hard to imagine, but He did it for me!

For me, He is coming.

"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation." - **Hebrews 9:27-28**

According to the writer of Hebrews, Jesus will leave the Holy Place of Heaven again and will come for His people, to complete the salvation begun during His first coming. The purpose of salvation goes beyond forgiveness. Salvation is about God coming after a people for Himself. He is not coming again because my sins have been inadequately done away with. He is coming for me!

How do I respond to a Savior who does so much for me? When Jesus returns, the Bible says He is coming for a people who are eagerly waiting for Him (9:28). Does your life reflect a core longing in your heart to be where He is?

Has your life been changed by the Christmas Revolution?

Source for the story: Associated Press, "Kidney Saves Marriage," FoxNews.com, 6 May 2007, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,270337,00.html>.

Day Sixteen

I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. - Galatians 2:20

Although 40 percent of Americans report attending a Christian church on any given weekend in the United States, the actual attendance is less than 17 percent. And that number grows smaller each year. It's no wonder that when we speak collectively to our culture about anything, no one is listening. Churches appear to have all of the same problems as society. Molestations, embezzlements, adulterous affairs, lawsuits, and internet porn wreak as much havoc in the church as anywhere else. We are powerless in the face of sin... and we are not reflecting the life of Christ to anyone.

Our greatest need is to know Him and His life.

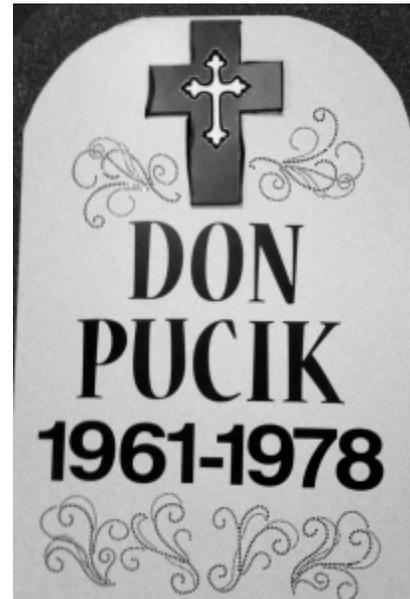
Paul writes that Christ "*loved me and gave himself up for me.*" We preach and teach this, with the result that the best church members will try to be good and worthy of His sacrifice, focused on asking forgiveness when they fail. However, most believers never go past this point. The "good Christian life" becomes all about human efforts and His approval (or disapproval) of me: I do my best and He applauds (or frowns), forgiving me when I fall short. But the message of forgiveness and the eradication of my offenses is only part of the gospel; we need to know how to live now.

Paul's assertion is stunning: "*I have been crucified with Christ.*" Christ not only died for me, but I also died with Him. The word crucified describes an event occurring in the past that is complete, but with consequences flowing into the present. For the person who has been born again (John 3:3, 5, 16), trusting in Christ to rescue them from the penalty and the power of sin, Paul is saying that salvation is intensely personal. You were saved, not by a transaction of new life in exchange for your trust in the Gospel, but through a union of His Spirit with your spirit (1 Corinthians 6:17). Christ lives in you and you are one with Him (Colossians 1:27). Writing about this in his 1907 *Systematic Theology*, seminary professor A.H. Strong declared,

"Christ and the believer have the same life. They are not separate persons linked together by some temporary bond of friendship,— they are united by a tie as close and indissoluble as if the same blood ran in their veins."

Consequently, what is true of Christ's relationship to sin, the Law, and the Father has become true of every believer. Sin is no longer your master (Romans 6:6). He is. This truth fuels a new ability to resist temptation, knowing that your spirit is no longer enslaved by sin, but the core of who you are has changed. He is with you. He is your life.

You will never consistently overcome sin habits and addictions in your life by trying to keep the "rules", but through a moment-by-moment, dependent relationship with the One who rules over all things! Your new life unfolds through an internal conversation and love affair fueled by the



presence of the Holy Spirit within you. He speaks. He directs and guides. He strengthens. He unveils His wisdom and releases His power... to you, in you, and through you.

God's Word (the Bible) becomes alive for the person who has been united with Christ. As the believer reads, reflects, and responds to the God-breathed text (2 Timothy 3:16), the Spirit applies the truth to the believer's heart, contributing to an ongoing internal transformation into the likeness of Christ. As we look at Him in the Scriptures, we come to know Him, and we become like Him. Our thoughts change. We begin to care about the people and things He cares about. We begin to act like He acts.

But it's more than the imitation of Christ. It's the life of Christ being formed and released through the human heart.

Paul puts it like this, "*it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.*"

So, since I trusted Christ to save me in 1978, it's no longer about *me*. My short earthly life ended then. I died with Christ. My spirit is united with Christ and hidden in Christ (Colossians 3:1-2). In the realm of the Spirit, my spirit is alive in the Presence of God. The change in my heart cannot be undone (Romans 8:1-4). All of my sins remain forgiven (Hebrews 10:10-13). On this side of heaven, I will still have good days and bad days (and I do), but my union with Christ never changes. His work within me is incessant and will not fail. Not only will He one day express His rule throughout all creation, but He seeks to rule the deepest recesses of my heart. And whatever He starts, He finishes (Philippians 1:6)!

So, my life as a Christ-follower will be misguided and mishapen if I am consumed with *me* correcting me, or *me* straightening me out, or *me* trying to make something out of me. It's not about *me* trying to be right or achieve a right standing before God. It's not about "how am I producing for God?" Jesus produced everything necessary to give me full and eternal acceptance before a holy God -- that never changes. I am out of the "production" business for God.

I am called to live simply by "*faith in the Son of God.*" The One born in Bethlehem launched the Christmas Revolution... in my life! And He is ready to do the same for you.

Source for church attendance in the United States: David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis: Groundbreaking Research Based on a National Database of Over 200,000 Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 28-30.

Day Seventeen



*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. - **1 John 5:11-13***

Bubbles... float... to the surface.

John makes the case throughout his letter that when God is at work on the inside of a person, His activity "bubbles up" into changed thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

God begins to transform a person from the inside out, beginning at the moment when that person abandons self-rule (sin), yields himself to the love and governance of God the Father, and believes that Jesus Christ bore his sins

(past, present, and future) on the cross (John 3:16; 1 Peter 2:24; Romans 10:9-10). Salvation begins with a sincere expression of faith in Jesus upon hearing the good news.

But how can I know that He has come into my life? How can I know for sure that God is at work within me?

John's purpose in writing his letter is to lead Christians to a place of great assurance and certainty that they are, in fact, children of God. His argument is simple: the "bubbles" of God's activity on the inside will surface in the believer's life. It is certain and it is inevitable over time.

A few years ago, I composed some diagnostic questions based on John's insights. These are not practices to strive for... but "bubbles" of change associated with God's activity within a human heart over time. John's "bubbles" are indicators of the presence of God.

1. Am I dealing with a God of revelation or imagination? (1 John 1:5)
2. Am I living the way I want or the way He wants? (1 John 1:6-7)
3. Am I hiding or exposing sin in my life? (1 John 1:8-10)
4. Am I struggling against sin in my life? (1 John 2:1-2)
5. Am I motivated by love for God to yield to His directional control over my life? (1 John 2:3-6)
6. Am I drawn to love Christian brothers? (1 John 2:7-11)
7. Am I pursuing this life's rewards or the next? (1 John 2:12-17)
8. Am I sensitive to doctrinal error? (1 John 2:18-27)
9. Am I longing for purity in my life as a pathway into my Father's presence? (1 John 2:28-29; 3:1-10)
10. Am I responding to Christians in need with "deeds"? (1 John 3:11-22)
11. Am I conscious of the Holy Spirit's activity in my life? (1 John 3:23-24; 4:1-6)
12. Am I growing in love because of my experience of God's love? (1 John 4:7-21)
13. Am I exercising faith in God? (1 John 5:1-13)

Who is the active agent of change inside the Christian? The Son of God... the One born in Bethlehem!

The kind of confidence we are supposed to have comes from recognizing that inside us something has changed forever—that God has changed us and come to live inside us through His Son. John doesn't write, "He who has the Church has life," but rather, "He who has the Son has life."

Salvation does not occur when we come inside the church, but when the Son comes to live inside us... the life-changing consequence of the Christmas Revolution!

Day Eighteen

Editor's Note: Today, we have a guest reflection from my wife, Gail (aka "the hot blonde"). Enjoy!

Luke 1:13 (The Voice Translation)

Messenger: Zacharias, your prayers have been heard. Your wife is going to have a son, and you will name him John. He will bring you great joy and happiness – and many will share your joy at John's birth.



Luke 1:25 (TVT)

Elizabeth: I have lived with the disgrace of being barren for all these years. Now God has looked on me with favor. When I go out in public with my baby, I will not be disgraced any longer.

Luke 1:30-45 (TVT)

Messenger: Mary, don't be afraid. You have found favor with God. 31 Listen, you are going to become pregnant. You will have a son, and you must name Him "Savior," or Jesus. Jesus will become the greatest among men. He will be known as the Son of the Highest God. God will give Him the throne of His ancestor David, and He will reign over the covenant family of Jacob forever.

Mary: But I have never been with a man. How can this be possible?

Messenger: The Holy Spirit will come upon you. The Most High will overshadow you. That's why this holy child will be known, as not just your son, but also the Son of God. It sounds impossible, but listen – you know your relative Elizabeth has been unable to bear children and is now far too old to be a mother. Yet, she has become pregnant, as God willed it. Yes, in three months, she will have a son. So the impossible is possible with God.

Mary (deciding in her heart): Here I am, the Lord's humble servant. As you have said, let it be done to me. And the heavenly messenger was gone. Mary immediately got up and hurried to the hill country, in the province of Judah, where her cousins Zacharias and Elizabeth lived. When Mary entered their home and greeted Elizabeth, who felt her baby leap in her womb, Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Elizabeth (shouting): You are blessed, Mary, blessed among all women, and the child you bear is blessed! And blessed I am as well, that the mother of my Lord has come to me! As soon as I heard your voice greet me, my baby leaped for joy within me. How fortunate you are, Mary, for you believed that what the Lord told you would be fulfilled.

As I read the Christmas story this year, I was struck with fresh awareness of the personal costs of embracing God's favor. Elizabeth and Zacharias had endured years of unmet desire to have a

baby. Elizabeth wore an aura of public disgrace and shame because God had not blessed them with a baby of their own. God's messenger revealed to Mary that Elizabeth was "now far too old" to naturally bear a child. Elizabeth and Zacharias must have thought the time had passed and their deepest longing would never be met.

But God's purposes and timing was perfect. The pregnancy and birth of Elizabeth and Zacharias' son would be part of God's confirmation to Mary that He was indeed at work in all of their lives to do miraculous things and to bring about the arrival of the Savior.

For Elizabeth, God had looked on her with favor. When she went out in public with her baby, *she would no longer be disgraced.*

God's messenger told Mary that she, too, was favored and blessed by God. But for Mary accepting the motherhood of Jesus and trusting God at work in her life would mean *embracing public disgrace and shame.*

Can you imagine the whispers, the hushed conversations, the doubtful looks from those who had once been Mary's friends and neighbors? Who would believe her even if she told them that her son, Jesus, was born of the Holy Spirit, a unique part of God's plan to save us all? Even her loving, honorable husband-to-be, Joseph, had to be encouraged in a dream by a messenger of God to take Mary as his wife and to trust that she had been faithful to him.

Mary embraced God's plan. She trusted Him. She couldn't begin to know all of the personal costs, but she decided in her heart as God's humble servant, "*As you have said, let it be done to me.*"

When God's favor intervenes and His blessings appear to be burdens, He always has a special purpose. I don't always understand or appreciate His favor. That is the time when I most need to decide in my heart to trust Him, to put the unanswered questions behind me, to embrace Him, His favor, and His purposes whatever the cost.

Editor's Comment (Don): Trusting God in the midst of my questions... a significant lesson drawn from the Christmas Revolution!

Day Nineteen

Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name JESUS. - Matthew 1:24-25

Are you ready for Christmas? In the New Testament, Joseph illustrates the gifts God most desires from you and me. What are they?

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was as follows: After His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not wanting to make her a public example, was minded to put her away secretly. - Matthew 1:18-19



How would you have reacted? You make the shocking discovery that your fiancé is expecting someone else's baby! The Jewish engagement in Joseph's day was arranged by parents on behalf of their children. It lasted for one year and was a legally binding agreement: the couple was already considered man and wife.

So Mary's apparent indiscretion was an outrage. The shame and the embarrassment must have been overwhelming. Although stoning was no longer the ultimate punishment for this sin (Deuteronomy 22:23), Joseph still possessed the ability to hurt Mary deeply. In his mind he only had two choices:

1. a very messy, public legal proceeding involving charges of gross immorality; or
2. a very quiet divorce involving two witnesses.

Joseph pursued justice and mercy. He determined to do what was right; but he would do no harm to Mary. He chose to handle the matter quietly. Joseph displayed a merciful spirit.

Vengeance and retaliation should never be found in our relational toolbox. On one occasion a Samaritan village denied Jesus and his followers customary hospitality because of their race—a true hate crime. The angry disciples asked Jesus whether they should call down fire from heaven to destroy the village. Jesus quietly replied: "*You do not know what kind of spirit you are of.*" (Luke 9:55)

Joseph possessed **a merciful spirit**... ready for Christmas!

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit." - Matthew 1:20

As Joseph continues to reflect over his options, an angel from God appeared to him in a dream and explained what was really happening to Mary. In the announcement, the angel said to Joseph "*do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife.*"

Joseph was afraid, but of what? Was he afraid of Mary? No. He obviously cared for her very much, genuinely struggling to know how to respond to her condition. Was he afraid others would think he was the guilty father of Mary's child? Surely not. The humiliation of Mary through public charges would have been sufficient to clear him of being the father.

Joseph was afraid of offending God. The baby was not his. Mary's baby and Mary's heart belonged to another man (or so he would have thought). In Leviticus 21:7 the priests who stood before God were forbidden from marrying a woman like Mary—would making Mary his wife now offend God? Joseph was clearly torn between his love for Mary and his desire to honor God in everything he did.

He struggled to maintain **a tender, sensitive conscience**... ready for Christmas!

*But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." So all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying: "Behold, the virgin shall be with child, and bear a Son, and they shall call His name Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us." - **Matthew 1:20-23***

The words from the angel were stunning! In a few phrases, Joseph learned the truth about the baby and Mary. The angel calls Joseph a "son of David," but the baby has no earthly father, for he is "of the Holy Spirit." His name will be Jesus—meaning "the Lord saves"—because his mission in life will be to rescue the people of God from their own sins. And the most stunning news item of all? Joseph understands that he is being commanded to take Mary as his wife (verse 24).

Up to this moment Joseph has been developing a well-reasoned, biblical course of action. He is going to do what is right, but not at Mary's expense. He is wondering if there are any other options—the angel appears in a dream "while he thought about these things." He is open to new information. He is ready to revise his thinking as he contemplates the best course to take. He is teachable.

Joseph was easily re-directed by God because he had **a teachable attitude**... ready for Christmas!

*Then Joseph, being aroused from sleep, did as the angel of the Lord commanded him and took to him his wife, and did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus. - **Matthew 1:24-25***

Joseph awakened with a set of instructions from God Himself. The dream represented a life-defining encounter with the will of God. Joseph acts immediately, receiving Mary as his wife and giving the name Jesus to the baby born a few short months later.

Joseph does not hesitate. Once he reaches a conclusion regarding God's will, Joseph **decisively and aggressively obeys God**... ready for Christmas!

Joseph... a man who demonstrates the right way to get ready for the Christmas Revolution!

Day Twenty

And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years. - Luke 1:6-7

Although they loved and served God, Zacharias and Elizabeth wrestled quietly with years of personal sorrow, grieving over their inability to have a child. Have you ever had this thought: "If God really loved me, then He should..."? Doubt is a dark seed that can bear the bitter fruit of disappointment. Do you struggle with doubts about God or His love for you?

Zacharias was a godly man who had desired a child for many years. In spite of the social disgrace associated with barrenness, he and his wife continued to walk faithfully with the Lord. I believe that he dealt with questions concerning the Lord's care for him. He kept the rules and did all of the right things, but God did not grant him the privilege of parenthood. However, during a once-in-a-lifetime experience of leading prayer in the Jerusalem Temple, Zacharias had a stunning encounter with an angel. He was a key figure in the stories surrounding the birth of God's Son in Bethlehem. The Christmas Revolution was coming!



But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. And he will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He will also go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, 'to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children,' and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord." And Zacharias said to the angel, "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years." - Luke 1:13-18

The angel told Zacharias that his prayer had been heard. What prayer? The prayer for a son. He was still praying for a child! Elizabeth was past the years of normal childbearing, so was he expressing faith and hope in a miracle? It doesn't appear to be so. It seems more likely that over the years, the heart-felt petitions had become empty, unthinking, and routine repetitions. We can surmise this because Zacharias did not believe the angel's birth announcement concerning John. Zacharias was a dedicated man going through the motions of faith.

It happens to many in church. In too many pews around the world, believers have allowed faith to become the sum of their religious activities and routines. Prayers become empty. Songs are sung without feeling. Activities are performed without the engagement of the heart. Jaded by life's disappointments, those times when it seems God does not "come through," there are Christians who become convinced that God is not listening. In too many pulpits, there are pastors who rarely exercise personal faith, preoccupied with a numbing staccato of religious activities and routines. Possessing little or no capacity to believe, these dear ones are saying the

words... singing the songs... praying the prayers... living a life, but on the inside they are running on "empty." Their hearts are disengaged.

Like Zacharias, they need a word from God. Sometimes in our efforts to hear God, we forget that God has already spoken to us in the Bible. In the face of disorienting questions, the Scripture alone will provide the emotional and intellectual handles to grasp all available truth about my experience. Although Scripture may not provide an answer to every question I have, it is in the Bible that I will find sufficient insight to calm the troubled waters of my soul. God speaks to us through the Scripture. It is not the only way He speaks, but it is an immediate source of truth and life that He wants you to explore. His written Word will help you discern and evaluate every other "Word" you will ever receive from God.

After the miraculous conception and birth of his son John (the Baptist), Zacharias became a mighty fountain of biblical truth! In a heartfelt eruption of realization and insight, he says God was acting in our lives "*to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all the days of our life.*" (Luke 1:74-75)

God had never stopped caring for Zacharias or His people. Zacharias came to see that God really does hear us when we cry out to Him. God will deliver us. Circumstances may be confusing and hurtful, but our experience in the midst of those circumstances doesn't have to be that way. Zacharias learned to be fully engaged with the Father in every remaining moment of his life. Never again would he follow God out of habit or routine. He was going all the way for God! We are not called to a lifeless and joy-less existence. No enemy of the human soul will succeed. The Lord will rescue His people. We can truly "serve Him without fear."

Disappointment grows in the gap that lies between my expectations of God and my experience of God. If you don't see God acting on your timetable, it does not mean He has failed to act or hear you. Guard your heart! The angel's announcement to Zacharias means that great blessing belongs to the person who does not trip over his unfulfilled expectations of how God is going to do something. Never let go of God's promises—but hang loosely to your expectations... God's fulfillment of His promises may be very different from what you expect! In the meantime, you can't start rejoicing right now in the mighty acts of God on your behalf. There's no need to wait.

Overcoming disappointment with an anticipatory joy and a patient faith... this is where each of us finds our own pathway into the Christmas Revolution!

Day Twenty-One



But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. - Galatians 4:4-5

I was born with the name Donovan Donnelly. Following my parents' divorce, my mother did her best to raise me as a single parent in the 1960's. I recall with fondness Mom's bedtime stories, the rich aroma of my grandfather (he liked cigars), my day care center friends, and long, endless summers... I think I was a happy child. But then things got serious: I started the first grade. As you can see from the image below of my "Social Characteristics" (X = Needs to Improve), I was easily distracted, impulsive, and quite talkative!

I was surrounded by supportive influences. My mother and my grandfather were gentle, nurturing fixtures in my little world. Living in a mobile home park on the outskirts of San Antonio, Texas, I spent most of my time outside, running around with neighborhood buddies and creating a vast array of childhood "adventures." But deep down, I felt a little "different" from the other kids. I wasn't different. I just felt different.

Then my mother began dating a young Air Force pilot. I liked him. He was like a Dad to me. Then they married... and my step-father became my father: he *adopted* me as his son. My young mind easily embraced all of the changes. My new name was Donovan Pucik. I really liked that. I didn't feel "different" anymore. I had a Dad and a Mom now.

When he signed the adoption papers:

- he gave me his name;
- he assumed complete responsibility for me as his son;
- he gave me all of the rights and privileges of a son;
- he became my father; and
- he *chose* to do it -- he chose *me*.

The baby born in Bethlehem was the Son of God. But God seeks others to become part of His family. He seeks you and me. When a person trusts in the Person and work of the Son (click [here](#) to learn what that means), God the Father adopts him or her into His family.

What does it mean to be "adopted" by God?
For me it means...

- I was not always a son, but now I will always be His son. "*But when the fullness of the time had come*"

Social Characteristics-Work Habits						
	S - Satisfactory			X - Needs to improve		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Uses time wisely		X	X	X	X	X
2. Follows directions		X	X	S	S	S
3. Respects authority		X	X	X	X	X
4. Completes assignments		X	S	S	S	S
5. Accepts responsibility		S	S	S	S	S
6. Contributes to the group		S	S	S	S	S
7. Works well independently		S	S	S	S	S
8. Exercises self-control		X	X	X	X	X
9. Takes pride in work		X	X	S	S	X
10. Respects others		S	S	S	S	S
11. Cares for school property		X	S	S	S	S
12. Controls talking		X	X	X	X	X
13. Practices neatness		X	X	S	S	X
14.						
15.						

- I have a new Father or authority in my life. I am not alone in this world. *“God sent forth His Son”*
- I have a Father who paid a great price to make me His son. The life of Jesus is the "value" He placed on my life. *“to redeem those who were under the law”*
- I have a Father who wants to be intimate with me. *“And because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts”*

For this believer in Christ, my true relationship with God is that of an adopted child... *He chose me through the Christmas Revolution!*

Day Twenty-Two

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me the One to be Ruler in Israel, whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting." - Micah 5:2

His birthplace was foretold. Nearly 750 years before Jesus was born, Micah the prophet recorded God's words to a little, insignificant village in Judah: Bethlehem. When the wise men asked where the Messiah would be born, Herod's scholars immediately turned to Micah's text (Matthew 2:4-5). Later as He walked among the people of Israel, when people debated whether Jesus was the Messiah, they referred again to the prophet's words concerning Bethlehem (John 7:41-42).

But the prophet also spoke of the Messiah's mission. He would be a "Ruler" of God's people, His activities ("goings forth") flowing from a timeless past ("*from of old, from everlasting*")... Micah was describing no ordinary man! And He would be no ordinary ruler, either.



There is no question that the kingdom of God is coming and will be fully expressed at His Second Coming (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). But what about now?

The kingdom Jesus preached...

- is "at hand" - immediately accessible to His hearers (Matthew 4:17);
- is something someone must desire or "seek" (Matthew 6:33);
- is received with the simple trust and dependent heart of a child (Luke 18:17); and
- requires a new birth (an internal, spiritual renewal from God) in order to enter it (John 3:3, 5).

Jesus demonstrated the kingdom -- or the active rule of God -- by casting out demons, healing the sick, and quieting killer storms (Matthew 12:28). But He did not come to simply rule over nature. Nor did the "Ruler" prophesied by Micah strive to exert raw power, forcing all humanity into submission.

No, **Jesus came to rule your heart...** a place you voluntarily yield to Him.

In the early part of the eighteenth century, Philip Doddridge wrote these verses:

*Hark the glad sound, the Saviour comes, the Saviour promised, long; **let every heart prepare a throne, and every voice a song.***

Doddridge writes, "*Let every heart prepare a throne.*" In the ancient world, the symbol of an empty throne was found among many different religions. From Zeus to Buddha, the vacant seat of authority was a way of describing a power greater than self. In the ancient mosaics of the early and medieval church, the *hetoimasia*, or "prepared throne," was a way of depicting the place where Jesus was to come and rule.

In your heart, are you sitting on the throne? Or have you stepped aside and prepared the throne of your heart for the "Ruler" born in Bethlehem?

It's His rightful place... and your way to a very personal and powerful Christmas Revolution!



Monastery Decani (Serbian Orthodox) - 1327

Day Twenty-Three

*When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy. And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshiped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented gifts to Him: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. - **Matthew 2:9-11***



They fell down and worshiped Him... stunning.

These travelers arrived as much as two years after the birth of Jesus. The young family was living in a house in Bethlehem, not overnighting in a stable. The shepherds had long since come and gone. Jesus was walking by now.

The text does not tell us the wise men were kings, nor that there were three of them. They are the Magi... scientists and religious scholars who combined astronomical observation with astrological speculation. It is likely that they knew some Jews where they came from... and they would have been equally aware of the Jewish hopes for a Messiah. They traveled a great distance, led by a star that had the capacity to be movable, and then motionless. These men who had spent most of their lives peering at the night sky recognized something special about the star and attached great significance to it.

I have so many questions for these guys.

- what are your names?
- how many of you were there?
- where did you go after you saw the baby?
- what did you do for the remainder of your lives?
- why did you fall down and worship...a toddler?

The word *worship* used here finds its root in the Greek word *proskuneo*. *Pros* means "towards" and *kuneo* means "to kiss." It means *to lie prostrate*, literally leading with the lips towards the object of honor. These men fell down and did that... before a toddler. Somehow these men put it together: this was no ordinary baby.

Yes, they gave the gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But long before they gave their gifts, these dear men gave themselves.

Models for you and me, the wise men show us the way to the Christmas Revolution!

Day Twenty-Four

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" -
Luke 2:8-14



They were just doing their job. Ordinary men... extremely ordinary. The shepherds of the Christmas story were among the poorest in society: you will

never read about a wealthy shepherd. And of all the people on the planet, God sent an army of angels to inform them that His Son was being born in Bethlehem in real time.

The news was for every person on the planet ("*all people*"), and when properly understood, the news causes "*great joy*." What were they told?

- There was a birth.
- The birth was in the city of David (Bethlehem).
- It was the birth of a Savior.
- The Savior is identified as the Christ (the anointed One or the Messiah).
- The Savior is the Lord.
- The Savior will be found as a newborn in a feeding trough.

Then the countless assembly of angels shouted out, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!*" The word "*peace*" was commonly used to describe the cessation of hostilities in a war. The same word is used in Romans 5:1, "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*" For the one who places faith in Christ for forgiveness and salvation, God erases all sin from the relationship. You can draw near. You can know His favor. He is able to respond to you with "*goodwill*."

God is not at war with you.

However, your experience of God's peace is not automatic. It is conditional... dependent on your readiness to lay down your defenses and cease hostilities on your part. You don't need to fight your way through life. You don't need to live as if everything depended on you. You don't need to hide. You can stop running.

You have a Savior.

The first ones to learn about the Savior born in Bethlehem were not the rich and powerful, the mighty and influential, the successful and famous... the first ones granted access to the Savior were the ordinary ones!

He has good news for you, if, like me, you feel pretty ordinary. The Savior has been born... for us! It's the Christmas Revolution!

Day Twenty-Five

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. -

Isaiah 9:6-7

Christmas is not always a happy time.

- For some, it is a reminder that they feel terribly disconnected and alone.
- Many first responders, medical staff, "essential personnel," and military service men and women will miss some or all of the holiday gatherings with their families, who will miss them deeply.
- When someone dear has died, this day will be reminder of the absence. Grief can resurface, barricading the heart from joy.
- And there are other losses, crises, and hurts that can kill the traditional spirit of celebration... an unhappy marriage or divorce, a family tension or conflict, unemployment, illness, and countless other forms of human pain and suffering.



Isaiah was a sensitive man who was weary of living in such a world of hurt and loss.

Isaiah lost king Uzziah after a prosperous 58-year reign. Admired for his efforts at religious reform and his personal devotion, Uzziah had impacted a nation—and a young man named Isaiah. Uzziah's passing cast a long shadow over the future of the nation. Isaiah's hero and spiritual leader was dead.

Isaiah began to seek God more than ever during dark and disturbing times. The world seemed as if it was reeling out of control. Then God gave Isaiah a powerful vision of His glory and power (Isaiah 6). Later, in Isaiah 9, God revealed details concerning a future Messiah who would restore order to a chaotic and corrupt world. Convinced of the rule of God in his life and in the world around him, Isaiah was transformed by the Christmas Revolution!

Let me say it again: Isaiah was gripped by a vision of the kingdom of God ushered in by the birth of a child – it would color the rest of his life and work.

You may feel life is reeling out of control and the world is a dark and painful place. And it is. You are not wrong about that. Isaiah saw it too and longed for change... real hope that Someone was going to come and reshape, reform, renew, and recreate all of life! Peering through time to observe what God was doing behind the scenes in human history, Isaiah saw the child... and he penned a poetic song describing the Son of God upon whose shoulders all authority will rest: *Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace!*

That child was born in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago, but He is near you at this moment. He lives and He is not hiding in some far away corner of the universe. He is no Santa Claus, but He does see you always. He knows you.

The world you are living in can be filled with hope and light by opening the door to your heart. What do I mean by that? "Opening the door" includes...

- placing your trust in Him for salvation from sin and death (John 3:16-17),
- yielding to Him the reins of your life... He wants to change you from the inside out (Matthew 11:28-30, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29),
- letting Him come into your needs (Matthew 6:25-34),
- letting Him speak and obeying what He says (Matthew 4:4, 2 Timothy 3:16-17),
- taking responsibility for your sins, then seeking and accepting His forgiveness -- His death on the cross was God's way of wiping away your sins... Jesus died in your place (1 Peter 2:24, 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Ephesians 1:17, 1 John 1:9), and
- falling down before Him in worship (like the wise men). Rising from the dead, Jesus became Lord over everything that would be Lord over you (Philippians 2:9-11).

The King is here. He patiently waits for you to get that. It's the bottom line of the Christmas Revolution.

Need more guidance? Explore further by visiting <http://peacewithgod.jesus.net>.

Conclusion: How Jesus Changed My Life

By the end of my junior year of high school, the world had become a very dark place for me. Raised in a military family, I attended seven elementary schools and two high schools by the time I was 14. Most of my elementary years were spent in Roman Catholic private schools. I was an altar boy. Thinking I might become a priest, I spent a few days after my eighth grade year exploring a Vincentian seminary for high school students in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. My parents asked me to delay the journey to becoming a priest until after high school... I did.

After a brief period in a Catholic high school for boys in Little Rock, Arkansas, my family relocated to Wright-Patterson Air Force Base just outside Dayton, Ohio. For the first time since the fourth grade, I found myself attending a very large, public school. It was a rude awakening, but I adapted. I got involved in sports. I made good grades, and some good friends, but I was deeply unhappy.

I distanced myself from my family. God seemed unwilling or unable to make anything better. I was angry at God. I stopped attending church. I began to engage in self-destructive behaviors -- hurting myself and those closest to me. No longer thinking about becoming a priest, I was finding my world to be an increasingly dark and hopeless place.



Not long after that, a friend and her family invited me to a different church. I began to attend services. It seems like they were always in church -- Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night, and more! But I was listening too... and learning truth about myself and about God. The preachers used the Bible and referred to it as "God's Word." I could read it for myself. I didn't have to take anyone else's word -- God provided a way for me -- and anyone else -- to learn about who He really is. He wants to us to know Him. With questions mushrooming in my mind, I asked to meet with a pastor.

He shared the following Bible passages with me:

- *For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that **whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.** (John 3:16)*
- ***He who believes in Him is not condemned;** but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:18)*
- ***There is none righteous, no, not one;** there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. (Romans 3:10-12)*
- ***For all have sinned** and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)*
- ***But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.** Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. (Romans 5:8-9)*
- ***If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.** For with the heart one*

*believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
(Romans 10:9-10)*

I took them home and read them. I thought about them a lot. I kept listening to the messages that were being taught and, over time, the Lord opened my heart to the truth -- the good news -- that life could be different. I saw what I had been doing to myself and to others was sin -- sin that I could never get rid of on my own. I realized I was blaming God for problems I had created in my own life. I needed a Savior.

I saw the way out through the cross of Jesus Christ.

In the fall of 1978, I trusted Jesus Christ to forgive all of my sins and to change my life. He became a real presence in my life. He rescued me from a future that was dark and empty. He took over the directional control of my life... I wanted Him to lead me.

The change was immediate and dramatic. I wish I could tell you that I never made mistakes -- that I stopped sinning -- that I never had another dark day. But that wouldn't be true. However, what I did have was this incredible, awesome new Person in my life. I wasn't perfect and pure -- but I knew Someone who was. And He had forgiven me for all my sins. He had a will and a plan for me. He loved me. The world was no longer a dark place. C. S. Lewis in his book *Mere Christianity* describes where I was in 1978:

God became man to turn creatures into sons: not simply to produce better men of the old kind but to produce a new kind of man. It is not like teaching a horse to jump better and better but like turning a horse into a winged creature. Of course, once it has got its wings, it will soar over fences which could never have been jumped and thus beat the natural horse at its own game. But there may be a period, while the wings are just beginning to grow, when it cannot do so: and at that stage the lumps on the shoulders--no one could tell by looking at them that they are going to be wings--may even give it an awkward appearance.

I certainly had those "lumps on the shoulders" and I didn't fly much in the beginning! But I have changed... and I continue to change because of His work in my heart.

Would you like to explore the same Bible truths that enabled me to know God personally? In the Bible, the apostle John wrote, *"These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."* (1 John 5:13). God wants you to know! Let me encourage you to explore this website by Billy Graham, who has helped thousands of people come to know Jesus in a real, personal way:

<http://peacewithgod.jesus.net>.

On a journey with Him... and loving every step!

- Don

