

# THE **CROSS**

AT CHRISTMAS



# The Cross At Christmas

## 25 Day Devotional Through The Parables Of Jesus

**Are you ready to rock around the Christmas tree, students?!**

This journal is a 25-day countdown to Jesus' birthday. It is a guide that is meant to help you spend time in the presence of God this month instead of succumbing to the hustle and bustle of the holiday shopping, sipping, and Santas. The real Christmas tree is the cross.

Don't worry if you miss a day. The point is not religious badges or stars. The point is that we all would be on the naughty list if it wasn't for Jesus.

We want you to know Jesus in a real way and understand the gospel ("Good News") that Jesus came to proclaim.

This devotional is set up to take you through the "parables" that Jesus told in the New Testament books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It's not your typical look at the story of Jesus' birth. However, did you know that every part of Scripture whispers His name? Jesus told each of these stories to illustrate a truth about God; they will show you more about who Jesus is, why we celebrate His birth at Christmas, and what His presence means for our lives today. They are meant to "comfort the afflicted and [challenge] the comfortable"

For 25 days, together as a church family, we will countdown to Christmas by **reading** God's Words to us, **reflecting** on the truth Jesus was communicating to us about Himself, **praying** honestly, and **applying** what the Holy Spirit is prompting us to do.

Remember, Jesus didn't come to Earth so we could get presents, wear matching pajamas, or tinsel the tree. Instead, *He gave us the gift of Himself* when He was born on Christmas, later died on the cross, and rose again on Easter.

So, choose a quiet place each day, turn off your phone, and grab your Bible, because God is about to speak to you.



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# DAY 1: THE SALT & THE LAMP

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**Read:** Matthew 5:13-16

**Where is Christmas?** Jesus is the light our dark world needed. He is also salt that both preserves His people from being rotted by the world, and that makes life taste good.

**Reflect:** How have you been timid or lazy in your faith recently; hiding the light of Jesus “under a basket or bed?” How has your lack of “saltiness” made Jesus less attractive to the people around you?

**Pray:** Jesus, help me to take intentional times to disconnect from my phone, my schoolwork, Christmas traditions, Netflix, and my desires so I can truly listen to what you want to say to me this month. I want to know you more. Speak to me now through your Holy Spirit as I meditate on your Words to me.

**Apply:** Many people look for ways to serve during the Christmas season. How do you plan to serve? Instead of serving to feel good about yourself, how could you use those opportunities to speak up about Jesus so “everyone will praise your heavenly Father?”

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 2: THE SPECK & THE LOG

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**Read:** Matthew 7:1-5

**Where is Christmas?** Jesus came to Earth because everyone deserves judgment. Because of the sins of humanity (which started in Genesis 3), we all were separated from God and deserved His wrath. But because God loves all the people that He made, He did not want to be separated from us or judge us. He wanted to forgive us. The only way this could happen was if a perfect someone took our judgment for us. Only God Himself was a suitable sacrifice. So, He came to Earth as a human (Jesus), absorbed His own wrath on the cross, and offered us forgiveness and adoption into His family.

**Reflect:** How have you judged others recently and elevated their sins as worse than your own? What blind spots about your pride did God reveal to you through Jesus' parable?

**Pray:** Thank you God for your kindness! I deserved to be judged for my sin, but you loved me with an unstoppable love and absorbed the judgment for me. Help me to see others with that kind of love. Instead of labeling, ignoring, or holding bitterness and annoyance against certain people in my life, help me to love them and show them the kindness that you have shown me.

**Apply:** Ask the Holy Spirit to bring one person to mind that you have judged in some way. How could you tangibly show kindness to them this week? Ask God to help you start seeing this person who seems so different than you as the precious creation that they are. Each time you see them, let it be a reminder to humble yourself.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 3: CLOTHS & WINE SKINS

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**Read:** Matthew 9:16-17

**Where is Christmas?** Jesus was the Messiah. His coming was foretold for hundreds of years before His birth. In this parable, Jesus addressed both His cousin's followers and the Jewish teachers, the Pharisees. He explained to them through this illustration that when He stepped into time, He came not to *abolish* the laws God had given in the Old Testament, but to *fulfill* those laws perfectly in a way God's chosen people (the Israelites) never could. Jesus is the only perfect person who ever lived, and His birth ushered in what Christians call the "new covenant." No matter how hard the Israelites tried to keep God's first covenant (the old covenant), they couldn't. This parable is not about throwing God's laws away but putting our trust in Jesus instead of our ability to "be good."

**Reflect:** How have you gotten too wrapped up in *legalism* (following religious rules to earn God or man's favor or trying to "be good") or *licensure* (thinking God's rules don't apply to you because of Jesus' forgiveness)?

**Pray:** God, I know that I could never keep all your commands. My best day of trying to "be good" still falls short of your glorious standard of holiness. Thank you for fulfilling the law and keeping my end of the covenant as well as yours. Help me not take your sacrifice lightly either, but help me to fix my eyes on you and let good works be an overflow of my heart that loves you. Amen!

**Apply:** Look at the clock. Turn your phone off and spend five uninterrupted minutes in complete silence. As thoughts come to your mind, ask God to speak to you about His love for you. Specifically meditate on the truths from this illustration that your worth does not come from trying to "be good," but from being God's child. When five minutes has passed, ask God to fill your cup today with those truths and that the overflow would be serving others.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## Day 4: The Sower, The Weeds Among Wheat, The Growing Seed

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**Read:** Matthew 13:1-30, Mark 4:26-29

**Where is Christmas?** God is like this good farmer. He always sows seeds of His Word and His kingdom. Jesus was born into this world as “The Word” of God (John 1:1-3). He was God! No longer did the Jews have to simply read the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament) to know what God was like. Jesus came to Earth and showed them! He explained to His disciples and the listening crowd in these parables that God’s job is to bring His kingdom to Earth. It is God alone that draws hearts to Himself. However, our response to God’s love for us should be a receptive and soft heart to His words. Will we love Jesus who was born in a manger with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Or will we be like the weeds separated in the end and thrown away?

**Reflect:** How have trials and suffering, self-focus, money, busyness, and worry made your spiritual growth difficult? How could you cooperate with the Holy Spirit in making your heart’s “soil” more fertile?

**Pray:** Holy Spirit, I cannot do anything on my own accord to look more like Jesus. I can’t get the rocks and weeds and enemies tricks out of the “soil” of my heart. Do the work that only you can do that I might bring glory to God the Father. I know I can only approach Him because of Jesus. Thank you for writing yourself into history that I might know you and have eternal life—the harvest feast in heaven. Amen.

**Apply:** Prayerfully make a list of 10 qualities of Jesus that you want to be formed in you! Rather than trying harder to achieve these virtues, simply let the Holy Spirit bring to mind opportunities for you to be stretched in these areas this Christmas season. Give God glory when you see the soil of your heart transforming.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 5: THE MUSTARD SEED

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**Read:** Luke 13:18-19

**Where is Christmas?** Just like a mustard seed is tiny, yet can produce a large plant, Jesus came into the world small and insignificant. Yet, He changed the entire course of human history and the eternities of those who have and will trust in Him as Savior and Lord when He died on the cross and resurrected on the third day.

**Reflect:** Seeds are programmed to do a job: germinate and produce a plant that reproduces itself with fruit. The gardener simply plants the seeds. The rain waters it. The sun causes it to grow. God orchestrates these things. Contrast the seed's "program" with this concept: How have you been tempted to not trust in God's ability to do the "heavy lifting" in your life? How have you taken your future into your own hands? How have you trusted in your own cleverness to make yourself successful in life?

**Pray:** Jesus, thank you that I don't have to create rain or sun-shine. Thank you that you will accomplish your mission and the weight of the world doesn't rest on me. However, thank you that you chose to include a person as small as me to go on the grand adventure of bringing your kingdom here in my world. Amen!

**Apply:** In this parable, the seed was planted in a simple garden or field, not in a fancy fashion. How is the Holy Spirit prompting you right now to share the "Good News" right in your backyard? Who are people in your circle of influence who need to rest in the shade of the gospel the way the birds do in this parable?

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 6: THE LEAVEN

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**Read:** Matthew 13:33-34

**Where is Christmas?** Jesus often talked about how “the kingdom of God” is hidden. In this parable He explained that the kingdom of God is active in the world even when we can’t see it yet. It’s “already” here, but it’s “not yet” fully revealed. When Jesus was born, He had come to save the world from sin, but the full restoration of all things has “not yet” happened. Jesus will make all the wrong things right for those who trust in Him as Savior and Lord when He returns.

**Reflect:** This “kingdom of God” begins with an inner transformation of the heart. How has God been changing your heart this year or even since the start of this devotional?

**Pray:** God, thank you that you are at work bringing your kingdom to the ends of the Earth. Thank you for letting me be a part of this sacred work. Give me boldness and humility to join you. Give me peace as I wait on the “not yet” in my life. Thank you for the hope of heaven. Amen!

**Apply:** The woman in this parable used enough flour to make bread for 100 people. That’s a lot of people! The point is to show that God’s kingdom is growing, and the Holy Spirit is at work. What is one way God wants you to bring His kingdom to a larger audience this Christmas season? What bold steps does He want you to take to share the gospel with your city, your state, and the world?

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 7: HIDDEN TREASURE

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**Read:** Matthew 13:44

**Where is Christmas?** Just like the treasure in the field was hidden in this parable, Jesus' divinity seemed hidden in His humble birth. The Jews anxiously awaited the Messiah to free them from Roman rule, they certainly didn't expect a baby to save the day. Over the course of His life and ministry, you can see repeatedly how Jesus' way of doing things (the kingdom of God) continued to be unexpected, but they always led to healing, freedom, and the glory of God. It may seem weird (or hidden) to non-Christians that we worship a baby being born on Christmas, but for those of us who have found Him (the treasure), we are willing to do what is unpopular and uncommon in order to give Him our whole lives.

**Reflect:** What ways of the "kingdom of God" are uncommon or unpopular to the people in your circle of influence? (Don't just think about what Christians are "against" but also counter-cultural things that we are "for.") What other less valuable "treasures" have you held onto since coming to know Jesus that you should have "sold" in order to give your whole life to Him?

**Pray:** Jesus, help me to see that you are the greatest treasure this world has to offer. Keep my eyes fixed on you as my goal in life, not success, money, pleasure, or the approval of others. Take my mind and heart into a deeper understanding of your love for me and your authority over my life. Help my passion for you to inspire others to worship you too. Amen!

**Apply:** Since Jesus is the greatest treasure, who do you know that doesn't realize this truth? Write them a note this week that communicates how much they mean to you, but also how much you want them to seek out Jesus like the treasure in the field instead of other things they may be placing their hope in.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 8: PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

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**Read:** Matthew 13:45-46

**Where is Christmas?** This parable is similar to the one about the treasure. But instead of the focus being on the treasure's "hiddenness," the focus of this one is on the searching. The merchant in this parable searched for fine pearls. We are all searching for something valuable to fulfill us. All of our searching will leave us empty unless we are searching for Jesus. Two-thousand years ago, the Jewish leaders should have recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but many missed Him because they got sidetracked with secondary issues. King Herod should have sought for the true king of the Jews but instead he searched for more power and popularity. The wise men were the ones who got it right when they followed the star in search of the one who would save the world from their sins.

**Reflect:** Where has your heart been searched for affirmation and fulfillment in things other than Jesus? How have those pursuits let you down? What would it look like for you to search for relationship with Jesus more than anything else? Who could you invite to join you in your pursuit?

**Pray:** Jesus, I have been so distracted that I have stopped searching for you with my whole heart. My mind knows that sports, activities, friends, a significant other, good grades, health, or approval of my parents and teachers won't satisfy me, but I struggle to live out what my mind knows. Remind me today that you are the "pearl of great price" that I should seek out as my primary passion and focus. I know when I put you first, everything else will work out the way you want it to. Amen.

**Apply:** Invite a friend today to join you in your pursuit of Jesus. Tell them what God has been speaking to you about and start praying together or doing a Bible study regularly. It could be as simple as sending each other a text each day with prayer requests or as big as reading the Bible together during lunch at school.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 9: THE NET

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**Read:** Matthew 13:47-50

**Where is Christmas?** Just like the net drawing fish, the true story of Christmas (God coming to Earth) is a story that has and will continue to draw people’s attention from all over the world. Many people are captured by the “thrill of hope” and the “wonders of His love.” But sadly, like some of the fish that are discarded in this parable, when Jesus returns, some people who have said they are Christians but not truly followed Him will be revealed.

**Reflect:** How have you been tempted to simply believe in Jesus but not follow Him? What parts of the Bible are difficult for you to obey and submit to God’s ways? Even though our good works don’t save us, God sees if our hearts love Him and want to submit to His Lordship.

**Pray:** God, I want to be like the fish that are chosen to be kept in this parable. I don’t want to pretend to be a Christian, live hypocritically, or simply follow the rules and hope that will get me into heaven. I know it is through Jesus alone that I am righteous and forgiven. Soften my heart to submit to your ways and have a relationship with you, not just having a religion. Amen.

**Apply:** At the beginning of His ministry, when Jesus first called Peter and Andrew to follow Him, He told them they would no longer fish for sea creatures but instead become “fishers of men.” Our job is not to force people to become Christians but simply to “cast our nets” like this parable. With that in mind, where does God want you to cast your net and tell that group of people about Jesus? Is it your sports team or afterschool activity? Is it your lunch table? Is it the group you game with online? Take one step this week to be bold, rely on the Holy Spirit, and cast the net of the gospel.

**What did God speak to you?**

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# DAY 10: THE HEART OF MAN

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**Read:** Mark 7:14-23

**Where is Christmas?** Every person has a sinful nature inside of them. All those things that Jesus mentioned that are inside of a person can't be removed by trying harder. Jesus was born to cleanse our hearts of sin and make them white as the snow some of you are hoping for this Christmas. God had put some dietary laws into place in the Old Testament for God's people, the Israelites, but Jesus demonstrated that those were temporary to set them apart from other nations. Now Christians are set apart because of their righteousness given to them through Jesus' atoning work on the cross.

**Reflect:** What aspects of your sinful nature give you the most trouble? Look at the list Jesus gives for examples. How has trying hard to stop doing these things by yourself left you feeling defeated? What would it look like for you to focus on replacing those passions with a greater passion: Jesus?

**Pray:** Lord, I don't want to do the things my sinful nature urges me to do. I want to do more of what pleases you. I can't do either in my own strength. I need you, Holy Spirit, to change me from the inside out. Please give me the courage to open up about my struggles. Make me look more like you. Thank you for coming to Earth to die for my sins. Thank you for loving me at my worst, and not only when I was being "good."

**Apply:** Prayerfully decide who you will confess your sin to from your small group and then do it! Everyone is struggling with their sin nature and when we tell a trusted Christian friend or mentor, we can find help and healing in our time of need.

**What did God speak to you?**

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# DAY 11: THE SHEEP IN THE WELL

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**Read:** Matthew 12:9-14

**Where is Christmas?** The Jewish leaders were so focused on obeying the rules that they missed God's heart behind His commands. Jesus was born not to get rid of the law, but to fulfill it. No one could live up to the Old Testament laws God gave. Only God Himself could, in Jesus. That's why Jesus could be a perfect sacrifice for our sins on the cross: He was perfect. In Jesus' many interactions with the Pharisees, He tried to communicate this truth and show them the heart behind the law (it wasn't wrong to rescue the sheep). Christmas is a reminder that our goal as Christians is not to "try hard to be good," but instead to trust in Jesus and live a life that glorifies God and loves others well.

**Reflect:** Think of a time when you judged someone who didn't follow Jesus for acting in an immoral way instead of showing them the love of God. How does God want you to tangibly love your enemies and people who are explicitly enemies of Him?

**Pray:** My default, Lord, is to either try and "not do the bad things" or "do enough of the good things." Either way, I feel like a failure. God, I know this is because you are the only righteous person. None of us could be good enough to be close to you. That's why you sent Jesus to Earth on Christmas, so we could be forgiven and be close to you, our holy God. Help me to fix my eyes on you and not religion. I want to have a moment-by-moment awareness of your Holy Spirit and be guided by your Word so I can glorify you and love others. Amen.

**Apply:** Who is a person in your life that feels like someone you shouldn't hang out with because of their beliefs? What is one way you could bless them this week instead of judging them?

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 12: UNFORGIVING SERVANT

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**Read:** Matthew 18:23-35

**Where is Christmas?** God is our master and we owed Him a high price for our sin and rebellion against Him. The cost was death. But our master is good and kind just like the master in this parable, and so He wrote Himself into history 2,000 years ago to not just cancel the debt but pay for it Himself. Jesus was born to die, and His death allows us to have full access to our master. Christmas was for the cross that canceled our debt. We are forgiven and God is calling us to forgive as well.

**Reflect:** Who do you have unforgiveness towards? What do you think it will take to forgive them? How might understanding the depths of Jesus' forgiveness for you help you to forgive this person? Forgiveness does not mean that what the person did was not wrong, but unforgiveness often hurts you more than them.

**Pray:** God, it is so hard for me to forgive certain people in my life. What they did was wrong, and I am hurt. But I don't want to live in the bondage of unforgiveness and bitterness. I want to be free, and I want others to be set free as well. Help me to forgive. Amen.

**Apply:** Offer forgiveness to the person who has wronged you. This may not mean you take any physical action but begin the process in your heart. Reach out about your hurts to a small group leader or pastor. Ask for their help or for the name of a local counselor/therapist who can help you forgive those who have wounded you.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 13: LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

**Read:** Matthew 20:1-16

**Where is Christmas?** The kingdom of God that Jesus began ushering in on Christmas is a kingdom that may seem upside down to the world. The King of Kings was born amongst animals? The first shall be last and the last shall be first? The thief on the cross inherits the same eternal life as a missionary who has served God faithfully in an impoverished area for 40 years? Jesus will invite everyone to come and be a part of working in His kingdom up until the moment He returns as the book of Revelation says. Instead of complaining, God is inviting us to gratitude and praise for the adventure it is to follow and serve Him.

**Reflect:** What areas of your life do you struggle with complaining or ingratitude? How quick are you to see the negatives about your situation?

**Pray:** God, I want to thank you for inviting me to serve you in your kingdom. What an adventure it is to use my time, talents, personality, treasure, and experience to tell everyone about your love and faithfulness. Help me to live in gratitude. Amen.

**Apply:** Make a list of 100 things you are thankful for. If you can't get to 100 things today, keep working on the list until you reach 100. Keep the list somewhere that you can see it so that it can help your heart praise God instead of complaining.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 14: TWO SONS

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**Read:** Matthew 21:28-32

**Where is Christmas?** Unlike this parable of the two sons, Christmas is about the one and only perfect Son of God who didn't hesitate to come to earth to save God's lost children. Aren't you so glad that God is faithful to pursue us, sacrifice for us, and forgive us, even when we are faithless? Hallelujah!

**Reflect:** How have wrong motives, hesitation, laziness, apathy, or doubt caused you to give up all together on doing something God has called you to do? Based on this parable, what does Jesus ultimately want us to do even if we experience any of those things?

**Pray:** God, ultimately, I want to follow you. I know that often I won't want to. I may hesitate or have the wrong motives. I may question you, your Word, or your character. I know what matters most to you is that I ultimately follow you. You have the authority over my life and your ways are better than mine. Help me submit to you and your Word and never turn away from you. The hope of eternal life is in you and with you. Amen.

**Apply:** What is something God has been nudging you to do that you have been procrastinating on or abandoned all together? Today, do it. Just follow and obey. See what God does through your act of obedience.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 15: THE DIVIDED KINGDOM

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**Read:** Matthew 12:22-28

**Where is Christmas?** Jesus was the “King of David” the crowd was wondering about. The Messiah was prophesied to be born from the lineage of David. That is why Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem. Jesus was from David’s family tree. The Old Testament prophets also foretold that the Messiah would be a healer. Jesus was a healer. This parable is a simple illustration that Jesus couldn’t possibly cast out demons if He was using Satan’s power. Why would Satan want Him to do that if that was the case? Ultimately the Pharisees simply did not want to accept the truth that Jesus was the Messiah. They came up with any excuse to dismiss all the signs.

**Reflect:** If an atheist asked you what proof you have that Jesus was a real person who lived, died, and rose again, the God exists, and that the Bible is trustworthy—what would you say?

**Pray:** God, thank you for fulfilling all your promises in Jesus. Thank you for sending Jesus to be a healer. Strengthen my faith in you. Help me to believe because I have evidence but also help me believe when I can’t fully understand. Give me eyes to see the ways you are answering prayers every day and help me in the areas of my life where I need healing. Amen.

**Apply:** Reach out to your small group leader or youth pastor to help you build your knowledge of the evidence for God, the Bible’s validity, and Jesus’ resurrection. Having a “defense” for why you believe what you do is called “apologetics.” Ask for resources and ask them to sit down with you and share with you so you can know more of why you believe what you do so that you can give an answer when non-Christians ask.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 16: 10 VIRGINS

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**Read:** Matthew 25:1-13

**Where is Christmas?** This parable is all about being ready. The Jews were anxiously waiting for the Messiah to come, and yet many missed Him when He was born in a manger. They were expecting someone who would overthrow the Romans. Just like the five foolish women, people who are not ready for Jesus' return (He is coming back again) and who have not known Him in this life, won't be able to go and join the "wedding feast of the Lamb" (heaven).

**Reflect:** What does it look like to wait expectantly for Jesus to return?

**Pray:** Jesus, my heart is quick to procrastinate and fall asleep like the foolish five virgins. Thank you for showering your grace on my life. Help me to wait expectantly for your return and tell as many people as possible about you, the bridegroom, in the meantime so they can join me at the wedding feast in heaven. Amen.

**Apply:** Start a new habit. Every day when you wake up, before you start getting ready for the day, say this quick prayer as you center your heart on Jesus: "Lord, if today be the day you return, find me ready."

**What did God speak to you?**

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# DAY 17: 10 TALENTS

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**Read:** Matthew 25:14-30

**Where is Christmas?** Just like the three servants of the wealthy master were entrusted with his fortune until he returned, we as followers of Jesus are entrusted with multiplying the message of the gospel to every tribe, nation, and tongue before Jesus' second coming. Jesus came to the Earth - fully God and fully man - to be the bridge for humanity to get close to God again. Jesus brought God's kingdom to Earth, but He imparted to His followers in this parable that they were to continue this work until He comes back again to restore all things. We have a job to do: bring the good news about forgiveness of sins through Jesus alone to the world.

**Reflect:** Which servant are you most like if the "talents" are sharing the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection with others? How is the Holy Spirit convicting you right now of hoarding the good news about salvation from death and hell? If you really believe what you say you do, why are you ignoring those who are perishing?

**Pray:** God, I know fear is holding me back from sharing your good news. Instead of sharing the hope that I have, I have been hoarding it. I need your Holy Spirit to help me. I'm afraid and I don't know fully what to say. Use me supernaturally to multiply your kingdom so heaven will be crowded!

**Apply:** Who are five people in your life that haven't accepted Jesus as their Savior and Lord? When you give someone a high five, let it be a reminder to pray for these five people in your life and for the Holy Spirit to give you opportunities to share the gospel with them.

**What did God speak to you?**

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# DAY 18: GOOD SAMARITAN

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**Read:** Luke 10:29-31

**Where is Christmas?** The Samaritans and Jews had a long history of discord. For various reasons, they hated each other. Yet, the Samaritan (not God's chosen people group) showed not just one act of kindness to the Jew (God's chosen people), but ongoing mercy and care. Just like the Samaritan man showed mercy to his enemy, Jesus was born into this world to show mercy to His enemies. Yes, we were all enemies of God before Jesus died on the cross (Romans 5:10)! Now we can be brought into God's family when we repent of our sins and believe in Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection.

**Reflect:** Who are your enemies? Who are your rivals? Who are the people that have different beliefs than you? Who are the people that drive you crazy? Who are the people you judge for their sin that you weigh as worse than your own? What does Jesus think of these people?

**Pray:** Jesus, thank you for forgiving me, healing me, and bringing me into your family when I was your enemy because of the sin in my heart. Thank you for your kindness to me and your ongoing care of me. Thank you that I am not alone in my troubles. Help me to love my enemies and help them to see you in my actions. Amen.

**Apply:** How is the Holy Spirit prompting you to show your enemies ongoing love and self-sacrificial giving and not simply one act of kindness?

**What did God speak to you?**

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# DAY 19: FRIEND @ MIDNIGHT

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**Read:** Luke 11:5-13

**Where is Christmas?** Jesus was the answer to hundreds of years of prayer. The Jews longed for the Messiah to come. The prophets of the Old Testament foretold it. Yet, there was still a period of a few hundred years between Malachi and Matthew. Jesus didn't come when or how the Jews expected Him to, but when He was born in a manger, He was the best gift and worth waiting for.

**Reflect:** How have you lost heart in prayer? Or how have you seen God work in your heart and life through prayer? Why do you think Jesus told this parable right after He taught His disciples the Lord's prayer?

**Pray:** Go before God now in prayer, asking, seeking, and knocking for what you and those you love need right now.

**Apply:** Start a prayer request group chat with your small group from youth group. Make it normal to ask for prayer and actually pray for the needs of others as well as your own. Lift up each other in prayer because God knows what you need and gives good gifts to His children.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 20: THE RICH FOOL

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**Read:** Luke 12:13-21

**Where is Christmas?** The long waited for Messiah, Jesus, was expected to conquer Rome. The Jews rightfully anticipated a king. Jesus ended up not being the king they looked for. He was not born into riches. He never sought His fame or fortune. In fact, He was homeless and frequently told those who followed Him and who He healed to keep quiet about what He had done. Consumerism is not new to the 21<sup>st</sup> century although the internet doesn't help our quest for the newest, next, and nicest. The first Christmas should be a reminder of just how little we need. While we are focused on the presents that we are going to get and give, God's son was born in a stable. He didn't have a baby registry from Pottery Barn or a Nike sweatsuit as His "going home outfit." Denying yourself of the next thing has always been very hard to do, but we are not even guaranteed to live tomorrow. What we need most is the cross of Jesus Christ and His resurrection power.

**Reflect:** Be real and radical with yourself right now. How have you rationalized greed in your own life?

**Pray:** Father, you know how many days I have left on this Earth. I don't want to spend them gathering up more pleasures and delicacies and items for myself. I need your help in this area because consumerism is so normalized. Give me a heart of giving all year round, not just during Christmas time. Amen.

**Apply:** Take the radical step and ask your parents to spend half as much on your Christmas presents this year and instead ask them to donate the rest to your church, missions, or the poor in your area. Think of one area where you spend the most money consistently and think about how you might replace it with a cheaper option. With your excess, take up the practice of tithing 10% of your income to your church.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 21: INVITED GUESTS

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**Read:** Luke 14:7-14

**Where is Christmas?** It is so like God that the first worshippers of baby Jesus were shepherds. Shepherds were not the first invited to parties. They were probably pretty smelly! Yet, they were available. This parable alludes to how the Jews, as God's chosen people, were the first invited to accept Jesus but they rejected Him. Jesus then offered His salvation to everyone else; good and bad alike. If a person lets go of other distractions and comes to Jesus with a humble heart and not in self-righteousness, they get to sit at His table and eat with Him. How fitting that Jesus was laid in a manger; a feeding trough. His humility should astound us, and we should drop whatever we are doing to go to His party and dine with Him.

**Reflect:** What distracts you from delighting in God's presence and following Him wholeheartedly? How have you judged people you see as less righteous than yourself for coming to church or youth group? How have you written them off because of the bad things they have done?

**Pray:** Jesus, humble me now. I know that I have prioritized honors classes and sports and activities and my social media feed over you. I have chosen the mundane tasks instead of feasting with you. This Christmas season, take away my pride and help me to see where I have judged others. Give me your eyes to invite people to the wedding feast of the Lamb no matter who they are and what they have done. I know that you are the one who changes people's hearts and actions, and I am a needy sinner just like the rest of humanity. Amen.

**Apply:** Think of a person or group of people who are currently living a life of sin that you have judged. As you ask God to help you stop judging them, consider sitting with them at the lunch table at school—not to condemn but to show them God's love through your friendship. We don't need to agree with people's choices or soften our beliefs in God's Word to love them. God will transform their hearts. It is our job to love them and tell them about the good news.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 22: LOST COIN

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**Read:** Luke 15:8-10

**Where is Christmas?** It may be easy to think the focus of this parable is on how great the woman is because she found the lost coin. But don't forget, she lost it in the first place! Thank God that He will never loses us! Even though hundreds of years spanned between the Old Testament prophets and Jesus' birth as accounted in the Gospels, God had not lost us or His promise to send His Son, the Messiah, to save us from our sins.

**Reflect:** Some scholars say this group of three parables about lost things are about how some Christians get deceived or "lost" because of false teaching. What "worldly" teachings are you most tempted to accept because they feel more comfortable to you?

**Pray:** Jesus, following you is often unpopular and uncomfortable. Sometimes I am tempted to give up hope and believe that you lost me. Help me to seek out THE TRUTH and not just "my truth." Don't let me forsake the Bible and your ways just because it isn't always easy. Instead, fill me with faith and help me to pursue solid and logical reasons for the belief I have in you. Thank you that you are not afraid of my doubts and sovereign over my life. Amen!

**Apply:** This week, look up Sean McDowell's YouTube channel. Browse his videos and watch a few about big questions that you have about the Christian faith.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 23: THE PRODIGAL SON

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**Read:** Luke 15:11-32

**Where is Christmas?** You have probably always thought this parable was about the younger brother. But Jesus told this parable to the Pharisees to communicate a message about both sons. He wanted the Pharisees to see that both sons' hearts were far from the father. The son who lived in direct rebellion to the law and the son with pride and bitterness were equally bad. Both sons only wanted the father for his things. Jesus implied that the Pharisees were like the older brother and ended this parable without saying whether the older brother came into the feast. In both cases, the father goes to his sons. He doesn't wait for them to come to him. This is exactly what Jesus did when He came to Earth as a baby. God came to us. You may have heard the word "Emmanuel." It means, "God with us." God is just like the father in the parable, full of grace and mercy even when we directly disobey him and when we are prideful of our good deeds that we think will save us.

**Reflect:** Which brother are you more like? Do you focus on "doing all the good things" and end up prideful? Or do you often focus on "not doing the bad things" and end up failing? How is God calling you to a relationship with Him, not for the things He will give you, but because of His love for you?

**Pray:** Father God, thank you for coming out to me even when I used you for your stuff. Thank you that you sent your Son Jesus, God-in-the-flesh, to put an end to the cycle of sin and animal sacrifice and paid for my freedom once and for all. Thank you that you have put your Holy Spirit (God's presence) into the heart of everyone who calls you Savior and Lord. Refocus my mind on you today and not on "doing good works" or "not doing the bad stuff." I want to embrace you as my perfect Father. Amen.

**Apply:** Without distractions, spend an extra 15 minutes today worshipping God for being your perfect Father. You can worship through music, journaling things you are thankful for, drawing a picture, taking a walk outside in nature, or simply praying.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 24: PERSISTENT WIDOW

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**Read:** Luke 18:1-8

**Where is Christmas?** Ever since Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden because of their sin in Genesis 3, all of humanity has been longing for a savior. It was thousands of years between that sad day and the day Jesus was born in a manger. Can you imagine the prayers of the Israelites during that time? They certainly didn't wait patiently and faithfully as evidenced by the entirety of the Old Testament. Yet, God was still faithful to send Jesus into time, at just the right time in history, so that our prayers could be heard by God. Without Jesus' death on the cross for us, we couldn't go directly to God in prayer because we were not holy. Now followers of Jesus are holy and have full and bold access to our perfect Father because of Jesus absorbing our unholiness on the cross.

**Reflect:** Just like the widow in this parable, you are needy and dependent. Why is that the case? What areas of your life do you feel out of control and in need of God's intervention? What has your prayer life been like? How have you given up on prayer and on God's intervention too quickly? According to Jewish law, widows had the right to special protection, and yet this figurative woman was not given justice without her constant nagging. Since God is a just judge, who is honorable, trustworthy, and kind, why are you so quick to lose faith in Him when your prayers are not answered right away or in the way you hoped? What hope do we have even in the face of suffering and death?

**Pray:** God, thank you for being a righteous judge and a good father. Thank you that I can trust your character, that you know what is right and you will bring justice. Sometimes I grow weary of praying and I question what your plan is, but I know that your ways are better than mine and your timing is perfect. Give me endurance to continuing praying and not give up. Give me hope that you will set all things right again. Let me be one of the faithful ones you find when you return. Amen!

**Apply:** Create a prayer wall in your room, closet, or on your mirror. Write your prayers on Post-It notes or index cards, attach pictures, and write the date that you started praying for different things. That way, when God answers your prayers, you can also write the date it was answered. It is easy to forget to give God praise when He answers our prayers, but He is working even when it is not on your timetable or in the way you thought.

**What did God speak to you?**

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## DAY 25: PHARISEE AND TAX COLLECTOR

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**Read:** Luke 18:9-14

**Where is Christmas?** Jesus had a humble birth and a humble life. Even though He was fully God and lived a perfect life, He always directed praise to God the Father and depended on Him in prayer because He was fully man. We need to repent of our pride and self-righteousness found in our religious adherence just as much as we need to repent of sins like lying, cheating, lust, and greed. Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection reminds us that we are sinners saved by the undeserved love of God.

**Reflect:** Search your heart now. How quick are you to pat yourself on the back for being "very religious?" What is God speaking to you now about pride, humility, and His glory?

**Pray:** God, thank you for the cross that reminds me how dependent I am on you. Holy Spirit, bring to mind any areas of pride and self-righteousness. I praise you for the gifts and talents you have given me and give you all the glory for the fruit in my life that makes me look more like you. You deserve all the credit. Amen!

**Apply:** This week, ask the Holy Spirit to help you not draw attention to yourself. Instead of relying on the praise of others or praising yourself for doing good, practice directing that praise to God instead.

**What did God speak to you?**

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**YOU DID IT! CHRISTMAS IS HERE.**  
The waiting for the ultimate gift is over!

Jesus has come to bring us back into a relationship with God. There's no coal in your stocking this year or any year because Jesus took the punishment for our sin so that we could be in right relationship with God. That is what we celebrate when we remember Jesus coming to Earth on Christmas morning.

What did God speak to you from your time in Jesus' parables this month?

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What part of the Bible are you going to explore next?

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Who will you invite to join you?

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