



Advent Reflections

by Debbi Kapp (D), Margo Kahler (M), & Dottie Poczulp (d)

A: We wrote this devotional as a gift of love for our friends and family members; however, it was a blessing for each of us to read the scripture assigned to each day and put it into our own words, life, or experiences!

B: We ask you to do the same. Read the scripture, then the reflection and let your mind come up with your own thoughts or experiences. Then share them.

C: We are not professional writers; we are just Christians who meet regularly in our covenant group and love sharing Christ with others.

DAY 1. Jeremiah 33:14-16**(d)**

"Watch for this--a time is coming!" I was in Maryland a couple of years ago, it really wasn't all that long ago, I was having high tea with my dear friend. Our talk found its way to our God, and I felt such a warm feeling over how my friend, who is Jewish, and I share a loving and righteous God. In our relationship it feels we are so far apart by distance, but not in our shared beliefs. As I prepare for this advent season, I am looking at how much we are alike with others around us & not about what separates us. My dear friend has the same love of family, same love for God, same love of our long-term friendship. It makes me think about so many of my friends and what brought us together and what keeps our relationship strong. God has set things right for us, for me. The tree of life started with David!

DAY 2. Psalm 25: 1-10**(M)**

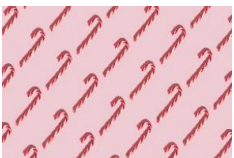
As a child, life felt cruel, lonely, and unlovable. Unlike David, who put all his trust in the Lord, I could not believe that there was a God. If God existed, where was He, why didn't He help me? After years of cutting myself off from any attachments to others, I realized the problem was within me; thanks to being encouraged to go to the "Walk to Emmaus" retreat. I was shown what I was missing, and that God was waiting for my call for help. It was not an easy road but with Jesus holding my hand all the way, together we changed me into a trusting soul believing God does exist and is my salvation.

Day 3. 1Thessalonians 3:9-13**(D)**

When we first moved to Oregon, I missed all of our dear friends and family in Arizona so much. We bought a house we could afford, but it can be a good hour from the family and especially the new baby we moved to be nearby. I prayed to see all their faces, both in Arizona and in Portland. My prayers were answered as I explored our immediate homeland, found volunteer activities, met new friends in Woodburn, and tried not to dwell daily on loneliness. And now Sarah and her family want to move here. If they can remain in Portland as they want to, it will be a dream come true for us. I still miss Arizona and so many precious people all the time, wishing love will pour on them and a road will clear to them at some point, but we have both been able to look forward.

DAY 4. Luke 21:25-28**(d)**

So, there is currently an international summit going on to deal with our climate change and I am amazed as I read Luke 21:25-28 that we see where our lives are today was predicted all those years ago. The scripture states that the son of God will be coming in a cloud. I see God in many forms, do you? I see our creator in the cat purring on my lap, or the golden barrel cactus all aglow and lighting up the morning. I see God as the perkier little hummingbird that helps the plants around me grow. Right now, today, I see all the butterflies that are in the garden. Son of man coming in a burst of power and glory. I am in awe. Where do you see God today?

DAY 5. Luke 21: 29-36**(M)**

We are asked to live by avoiding sin and to be repentant, to not be overtaken by the worldly distractions of material things. I have found it is difficult to do this on your own, we might need someone or others to keep accountability for our actions. I now rely on friends in a Women's Bible Study group at church where we know that what is shared in this group is confidential allowing more freedom to express ourselves. The pandemic created a new means of sharing by zoom meetings. I also can share with dear friends once a week, long distance, in a devotional get together that creates another means of spiritual growth and accountability. God puts helpful ways of honoring Him into our journey.

Day 6. Matthew 24:36-44**(D)**

We arrived in Oregon in May 2017 and first visited our new church in June. John does not want to be involved in any ministries, although we did participate in a weekly food distribution, but that and the few one-time things I did (such as kitchen help for an event) ended with the pandemic. I am thinking I need to change that as we become involved again. I will be helping for the second year with Catechumenate, a new-to-us term for classes preparing adults for baptism, but especially would like to join a Bible study and search other ministry opportunities. Talking with Dottie and Margo, two of the best mentors of living deeply spiritual lives every day, models how to have Christ within and beside constantly. But I would like more models of that in my life. It's not that I don't strive to live as an example of Christ's love and teachings in my daily life, but I could be more conscious, vigilant, and alert about letting his light shine through me to others in my words and actions and also in my thoughts.

DAY 7. Mark 13: 24-37**(d)**

What is reconciling love, you know the love the prodigal son experienced. I want to cherish the God of the past. I remember days when my lifestyle was so trendy. God wasn't on my mind not one bit back then. Then I became a parent and I realized I wanted to raise my children with UNCONDITIONAL LOVE. I returned to church and the reconciling love that I received was so healing and it helped me parent these special babies in my life. God only cared that I was in his house, and he was in mine. His love is unconditional and endures forever.

DAY 8. Malachi 3: 1-4**(M)**

In preparing for Christ's coming, we must do for others. One year, through connections at University Medical Center, I got a needy family to help. When I delivered the gifts for the children, I could not believe the living conditions I was seeing. It was a 2-room house with dirt floors, in the front room were mattresses on the floor and in the corner was a small sparsely, limbed tree with no decorations. I had so much at home from combining all my parent's and my belongings. I gathered extra blankets, extra ornaments, and tinsel for the tree. I had an orange tree so I filled a large bag with as many oranges as I could put in it. The family loved it all, especially the oranges. What a wonderful feeling and memory of the spirit of Christmas and of giving rather than receiving.

Day 9. Luke 1:68-79**(D)**

My first full-time job at 18 during the summer before college was in a dry cleaner. Having led a rather sheltered existence, the other lady was my first daily interaction with someone of an entirely different economic and educational status. She was in her early 30's but her hands were misshapen from arthritis. Her husband was a grizzled, unshaven guy who wore sleeveless t-shirts. They taught me a lesson which I still strive to live up to about judgement. They were the nicest, kindest, best humans, and wonderful parents as well. I felt lucky to work with her. I have always felt so blessed to have had such a multitude of wonderful co-workers for the 40-plus years I worked in offices and at schools. There have been only a handful I can't say I enjoyed, but I didn't let on and maintained a civil relationship. I assume it was a two-way street; if anyone didn't especially like me, I never knew. I am still delivered from any enemies and hatred, most of the time walking through a path of peace and little conflict.

DAY 10. Philippians 1:3-6**(d)**

What is the best gift ever? I struggle to think what this means to or for me. I love this book in the bible. It states I give thanks for you, whenever I pray, I also make requests for all of you to God. It is right that I give thanks and praise. WHY? Because all of us share in God's grace & love. I love this concept of grace, undeserving love that continues to happen for us. That nothing in our world, our minds or imagination separates us from God. Is there any bigger gift we can hold onto than that?



DAY 11. Philippians 1: 7-11**(M)**

Through all the challenges that Paul endured in his life, he never forgot that God provides and loves. I, too, experienced challenges (verbal abuse and bullying) but used this to shape my life once I had accepted Christ as my Savior. I vowed to never treat anyone as I had been treated. Like John Wesley said, "Do no harm." I will never hurt another person's soul. I have been a listening ear for others who needed to relieve their stress or grief. I have been there; I know how it feels to need someone just to be there, so I was not alone. My best friend from childhood made me a cross stitch sampler which reads, "True friendship comes when silence between two people is comfortable." There are no better words to get us through each day.



Day 12. Luke 21-25-36**(D)**

I recently completed a novel set in Europe in the 1300s. It was a terrible time, and we would consider the way people treated each other to be barbaric. The next title I picked up was about France during the Nazi occupation in World War II. The deprivation, destruction, and dangers, not to mention the eventual realization of what was going on in the camps to the east, were horrific. I always appreciate the perspective that literature and the study of history gives me. Each era has events that seem to signal the end of the world as we know it. Right now, political divisions leave us downhearted, but they pale next to the threats of climate change, which might seem to be a sign of doom. People decry Facebook as destructive and damaging. My daughter sends me articles about how terrible it is. But it is a lifeline for me from pandemic isolation and depression over news and climate change, helping me keep in touch with near and distant friends, lifting my spirits with beautiful, charming photos, and helping me keep up with encouraging news, including positive ways we are fighting climate change. It keeps my "heart from being weighed down" (NIV).



Day 13. Hebrew 12:1-2**(d)**

I'm an easily emotional person. I cry for joy, sadness, happiness when I'm scared or worried. I just do. I get to spend time, weekly, with a special friend who is an adult that has special needs and difficulties. I think of him every day—one might say he inspires me. It wasn't all that long ago that he texted me to say, "Hey friend, just thinking of you today; hope you are having a good day—I know I am." I got teary eyed and then realized that God fills my day with beauty, and I fill it at times with struggle. My friend reminds me to focus on those who persevere even when life is hard. I know my friend gets bullied and feels hurt, sad—but often he reminds me to look at the One who brings our faith to unmeasurable joy.



DAY 14. Matthew 3: 1-12**(M)**

Ever since I have become a believing Christian, I have questioned why baptism is not reserved until the individual has reached the age of understanding. It would be so much more meaningful to receive baptism when you are overcome by the Holy Spirit within yourself. I would have loved to be rebaptized when I was a new "child of God." I found Jesus at the lowest point in my life, and I was driven to tears by the overwhelming sense of being loved. Imagine being baptized when in that frame of mind!



Day 15. Zephaniah 3:14-20**(D)**

Oh my, how I love to sing in church and always have. I was raised Baptist and the only thing I miss is the hymns. I have a memory of singing "Blessed Assurance" while doing the dishes at our first house in Phoenix, around 6th grade. The Episcopal church offers many favorites, but not the old gospel hymns and there's always one that I can't follow. I have forgotten how to read music from piano lessons in early elementary school. Singing brings so much joy to my heart and helps me feel God's love. It is such a feeling of unity with the congregation. In our liturgical service we have Rite I, in most churches the early service with fewer people and little to no music--all spoken liturgy--and Rite II, with many songs and sung portions of the mass. I am grateful for Rite II.



Day 16. Isaiah 12:2-6**(d)**

I needed to tell everyone, thank you everyone, I wanted to share how I love the Lord! I had just spent a 3-day retreat with approximately 100 women who also loved God and was transformed by the 3-day experience. I couldn't stop singing to Jesus. I just glowed with love and happiness, and I sang all the songs I could remember from this retreat. I learned during this special time with Jesus, this retreat, how He had done great things for me. I could see such bright radiance in all those who were there. My biggest take away was I could also see a joyous world away from there. What can you remember that brought you such joy just because you were at a certain place on a certain day and felt so much love and joy?



DAY 17. Philippians 4: 4-7**(M)**

Paul asks us to love and share God always. Allow God to take care of your worries and live-in joy. Being a witness to how God has changed my life is something I am willing to share with anyone who is struggling with their beliefs. I know I was changed emotionally by doing the Walk to Emmaus but never thought it was a physical change. As I went to work after the weekend, my co-workers noticed such a difference that they asked if I were considering becoming a pastor. Wow!



Day 18. Luke 3:7-14**(D)**

Variations of "Service is the rent we pay for living on this earth" are attributed to so many, from Shirley Chisholm to Muhammad Ali. My Aunt Loie is fond of it and she is my model for giving to several charities every month and volunteerism. My family gave to the church and various charities occasionally, but it wasn't talked about as a habit. I don't remember my parents volunteering much, other than my mom was a Girl Scout leader. Her health was never good enough to do much. John and I evolved into auto-giving as our income became more than paycheck to paycheck. I am anxious to get back to volunteering when the pandemic numbers improve, maybe sooner after the booster. There is so much deprivation and starvation in parts of the world and I can't imagine what it would be like without the billions of dollars poured out in charity and aid.



Day 19 Luke 3:15-18**(d)**

I love each holiday! I love to celebrate with dear ones. I can never wait for Christmas to arrive, ever! I want to celebrate Jesus, through loving, giving, sharing a meal with loved ones. I just can't wait. But in this Luke scripture the people had extremely great expectations of their Messiah. They confused him with John the Baptist, we confuse Christmas with gift giving. It's more of what will I do, not how will I wait for Jesus. I wait when I send out holiday cards. I wait for Jesus when I plan my Christmas meal. I wait for Jesus when I open the door and the family arrives for dinner. I wait for Christmas eve to worship the Son of Man who will take the sins away in our broken world. I wait as I pray and add devotion to this time of advent. I wait and prepare.



DAY 20. Micah 5:2-5**(M)**

Through all the suffering that life gives us, we need to remember that God is always with us. Micah is telling us that from lowly beginnings in Bethlehem comes a child who will save God's children. As we go about our daily lives, God is watching and holding our future. We must trust, not an easy task: trust we are loved, trust we will get through all the challenges life presents, trust one another to help us as a brother or sister. Allowing the need to control to rule our actions is not what God wants, give up that need and let Him lead us. What a comfort that can be.

Day 21. Luke 1:47-55**(D)**

Genesis tells us that God created Adam and Eve like himself, giving rise to an image of God as in a Michelangelo fresco. I envision God as a divine presence infused throughout the universe, manifested in nature and everything around us, but basically unfathomable to human understanding. Jesus is the miraculous human manifestation. I like to feel the Holy Spirit is a piece of God inside me. I don't know what most people think of when they say God answered my prayer, for example, but I feel it is the Trinity. Mary says God has done great things for her, performed mighty deeds with his arm, and brought down rulers from their thrones. This image of God as having super but human characteristics does not really fit my vision. I have not led a life without difficulties, especially in my marriage, but have many blessings. Why would God bless me but rain suffering on so many millions? I do believe in the power of prayer, but more as a comfort, giving hope, helping us to tap into our own mysterious spiritual abilities than the ability of a divine presence to grant us a job or a cure. I don't think God has a plan for us or what happens in our lives is according to plan, meant to be. But my personal theology is also flexible and open-minded, and I often wish I had a deeper sense of faith.

**Day 22. Hebrew 10:5-10****(d)**

Christ did it all for me. A new promise was made by God that through Christ there was no need for another sacrifice, Christ would be the last. We were to see and act differently when in God's presence. We did not have to bring sacrifices or gifts or participate in rituals. My younger self was a bit afraid of things. I would even get upset with myself for the same recurring, less-than-healthy behaviors. That was the old me, the one that really didn't study God's teachings. As a student of Christ, I constantly learn new truths for how to live my life. I put away my old self and I am created anew. My new self wants to know more and more about Jesus' day on this earth. I walk in those footsteps of Christ through study of scripture, through prayer, through thanksgiving and most of all through Joy. Christ is the Joy to the World!

**DAY 23. Luke 1: 39-45****(M)**

Can you imagine living and experiencing first-hand the birth of Christ. What a wonder for Elizabeth to feel such a reaction to Mary's visit. We relive the Christmas story every year, but can you sense the feeling of being a shepherd called to go to Bethlehem to witness the child. It would take me to my knees in impressive amazement at the realization. Being a disciple and witnessing Jesus's daily life left them still questioning. It took his resurrection and reappearance before they finally understood. Would we be the same experiencing all the miracle Jesus performed?

**Day 24. Luke 2:1-20****(D)**

When the kids were young, Christmas was always a mix of joyous activities and tiring work. One Christmas Eve, after Sarah and Joe had gone to bed, I was up late finishing wrapping and getting everything ready for the morning. I was exhausted. On impulse, I opened the front door and looked down the street toward the mountains, barely visible in the dark. The air was crisp and cold, and I breathed in deeply. Suddenly, I felt an overwhelming peace and "Silent Night" came to mind. Holy night, mother and child, so tender and mild, all is calm, all is bright, Christ the Savior is born! I slept in heavenly peace that night.

**Day 25. John 1-14****(d)**

I first met Jesus as a young child, around age 5, when I was told Jesus loves me! That was my first awareness of God, taught to me by Catholic nuns during summer Bible School. They shared with me who Jesus was in my life. (I wanted to be a nun my entire life however, my family wasn't Catholic.) The point was I was not even school age, and his love touched me so deeply that I was never ever without Christ's love. In the beginning it was the word. I craved being part of such a loving and precious family of God. So tonight, as I worship and sing out loud *Joy to the World the Lord has come*, I remember the day I heard that Jesus loves me and I remember that all of us are a part of a very special family. God's Christ child is born, our Jesus is with us.



Debbi Kapp is a retired schoolteacher and dear friend for over 40 years. She currently lives in Oregon with her husband and near her son, daughter-in-law, and grandchildren. Debbi's many years of teaching were and still are a vital part of her personal ministry.

Margo Kahler is a retired medical technologist in the clinical laboratory at a major hospital in Tucson, AZ. Margo serves on the covenant board of her church and is a dedicated servant of Christ who brings love to everywhere she goes.

Dottie Poczulp, once a family counselor, is now a ceramic studio owner with her daughter. Dottie shares her love of study & devotion with her two friends that helped to create this devotional. Dottie lives in Arizona and loves the beauty of the desert.