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The Light We Almost Missed
Learning to Recognize Emmanuel in the Ordinary

Advent 2026

Pastor John Q. LeCain

One morning I looked at a simple glass of water...

...and wept.

*That was the moment I realized I would never look at ordinary things the same way
again.*

An Author's Invitation

Welcome.

Before you turn the page, I'd like to invite you to do something that may seem a little unusual.

Slow down.

Not just while reading this book, but while living the days that lie ahead.

These reflections were not born at a desk. They grew quietly out of ordinary moments—a sunrise through a window, the stillness of a pond, the fragrance of fresh bread, the warmth of a candle's flame, the touch of a caring hand, and even a simple glass of water.

At first, I believed I was writing about those things.

Over time, I discovered they were writing about me.

Or perhaps more accurately, they were teaching me to see.

They reminded me that God's presence is often found, not in the extraordinary moments we spend our lives chasing, but in the ordinary moments we are tempted to overlook.

As you make your way through these Advent days, I encourage you to read only one reflection each day. Then close the book.

Carry that day's thought with you.

Look for it.

Listen for it.

Pray with it.

You may discover that the reflection continues long after you've finished reading the page.

My hope is not that you will simply complete another Advent devotional.

My hope is that, as Christmas draws near, you will begin to recognize Emmanuel in places you never expected to find Him.

If, somewhere along this journey, you pause before a window, smile at the song of a bird, linger over the aroma of fresh bread, or quietly hold a glass of water with tears of gratitude in your eyes, then these pages will have accomplished exactly what I prayed they might.

For grace rarely shouts.

It usually rustles.

May this Advent become more than a season of preparation.

May it become a season of awakening.

Welcome.

Let's walk toward Bethlehem together.

Jesus' Invitation

Come and See

"Come and see."

— **John 1:39**

These are among the first recorded words of invitation spoken by Jesus in the Gospel of John.

He did not begin with an explanation.

He did not offer a lecture.

He extended an invitation.

Those first disciples accepted His invitation, and nothing in their lives was ever the same.

This little book is offered in that same spirit.

You are not being asked simply to read.

You are being invited to walk.

To notice.

To wonder.

To discover.

As you journey through these Advent reflections, resist the temptation to hurry ahead. Read one reflection each day. Then carry it with you into the ordinary moments of your life.

Look through your window.

Listen to the quiet.

Watch the sunrise.

Light a candle.

Share a meal.

Hold a simple glass of water.

And ask, with an open heart:

“Lord, what would You have me see today?”

Perhaps, as the first disciples discovered long ago, you will find that Christ has been nearer than you ever imagined.

His invitation still stands.

Come and see.

Grace rarely shouts. It usually rustles....

Part One

Learning to Notice

Every journey begins with a single decision.

Not the decision to travel farther, but the decision to slow down.

We live in a world that measures success by speed. We hurry from one responsibility to the next, often believing that if God wishes to speak, He will surely find a dramatic way to interrupt our busy lives.

Yet throughout Scripture, He so often chooses another way.

He speaks through a burning bush, a mustard seed, a loaf of bread, a shepherd's song, a gentle whisper, a child in a manger.

He comes quietly.

Perhaps He still does.

These reflections are not asking you to find something new. They are inviting you to notice what has been there all along.

As you begin, resist the temptation to read quickly. Read slowly. Pause often. Let each reflection become less a lesson and more a conversation.

For every journey toward Emmanuel begins with learning to notice.

Window - November 29

Scripture

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light.” — Matthew 6:22

Reflection

I have spent many hours walking through forests, along beaches, and beside quiet lakes. Those moments have shaped my faith in countless ways.

Yet, if I am honest, I have probably spent even more time looking through a window.

A window beside my desk.

A hospital room window.

The window of an airplane.

The kitchen window at home.

A window overlooking the ocean.

I have discovered that windows are remarkable gifts.

They invite us to pause.

To notice.

To see life we might otherwise rush past.

Birds gathering at a feeder.

Rain tracing gentle paths across the glass.

Children laughing.

Neighbors walking together.

The changing colors of another sunset.

But windows have another gift.

When darkness falls and the lights come on inside, the same pane of glass that once revealed the world begins to reflect my own face.

The view changes.

Now I am the one being seen.

Perhaps that is how God uses His Word.

Sometimes Scripture is a window through which we see His creation, His kingdom, and His work in the lives of others.

Other times, the very same Word becomes a mirror, revealing what is happening within my own heart.

Both are gifts.

Both invite transformation.

Faith requires both kinds of seeing.

To recognize God's presence in the world around us.

And to recognize the places within ourselves where His grace is still at work.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God gives us windows not only to admire His creation but also to discover the person He is quietly shaping within us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open the eyes of my heart. Help me to see Your beauty in the world around me and Your loving work within me. When I look outward, let me notice Your presence. When I look inward, let me trust Your grace. May every window become an invitation to see more clearly through the eyes of faith. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you find yourself looking out a window, don't hurry away.

Spend one minute looking outward.

Then spend one minute in quiet prayer, asking:

“Lord, what do You want me to see... and what do You want me to become?”

Window

A quiet pane, so clear and bright,
Invites my eyes beyond the frame;
To fields of green and morning light,
Where every day speaks of Your name.

The seasons pass before my gaze,
New mercies bloom with every view;
Each changing sky, each sunlit haze,
Declares Your faithfulness anew.

Yet when the evening shadows fall,
The glass reflects the face I wear;
You gently whisper, loving all,
“Come, let My grace still meet you there.”

So may I look with open eyes,
Through every window You provide;
To see Your world, Your truth, Your love,
And Christ reflected deep inside.

Quiet – November 30

Scripture

“Be still, and know that I am God.” — Psalm 46:10

Reflection

There is something about quiet that has always drawn me.

Not emptiness.

Not loneliness.

Quiet.

It has become one of God’s greatest gifts in my life.

I have found it while sitting beneath the shade of a tree. Walking along a wooded path. Watching the first light of morning. Gazing through a window as rain traced its slow journey down the glass.

And sometimes I have found it in the company of people I love.

We often think quiet means that nothing is happening.

Perhaps the opposite is true.

In quiet, we begin to notice what the noise has been hiding.

The rhythm of our own breathing.

The song of a distant bird.

The whisper of the wind.

The gratitude we had forgotten to express.

The gentle voice of God that has been speaking all along.

Our world teaches us to fill every silence.

Music in the background.

Television in the corner.

A phone always within reach.

Yet God rarely competes with the noise.

He waits.

Not because He has stopped speaking, but because He knows that love is never forced.

It is received.

The older I grow, the more I realize that quiet is not something I create.

It is something I enter.

Like stepping into an old cathedral, quiet reminds me that I have entered holy ground.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God often speaks loudest when the world grows quiet enough for us to listen.

Prayer

Lord, quiet my restless heart. Help me to lay aside the noise that distracts me from Your presence. Teach me to welcome silence not as emptiness but as sacred space where Your Spirit gently meets me. May I learn to hear Your voice in the stillness and carry that peace into every conversation and every day. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Find five quiet minutes today.

Leave your phone behind.

Do not ask God for anything.

Simply sit in His presence.

Then quietly pray:

“Speak, Lord. Your servant is listening.”

Quiet

The morning woke without a sound,
As dawn embraced the waiting sky;
No trumpet call the day had found,
Yet grace was gently drawing nigh.

The leaves conversed in whispered tones,
The sparrow sang a simple prayer;
Creation spoke without its words,
And taught me God was already there.

I sought You once in wind and fire,
In voices strong and wonders bright;
Yet found You met my heart's desire
Within the hush of morning light.

For quiet is no empty place,
Nor silence merely passing air;
It is the doorway to Your grace,
Where listening becomes a prayer.

So still my heart, O Lord, each day,
Until my hurried thoughts depart;
And in the quiet, gently stay,
To hear Your whisper in my heart.

Sunrise – December 1

Scripture

“Weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” — Psalm 30:5

Reflection

Every year, Diane and I spend a week at Cocoa Beach. Our room faces the beach, and while she enjoys a well-earned night’s sleep, I quietly slip out before dawn and wait.

It has become one of my favorite prayers.

The beach is hushed.

The waves keep their steady rhythm.

The horizon is still hidden beneath the darkness.

Nothing seems to be happening.

Then, almost imperceptibly, the sky begins to change.

A trace of lavender.

A ribbon of gold.

A blush of crimson.

And before I realize it, the sun breaks free above the ocean.

Over the years I have taken well over a thousand photographs of those sunrises.

Friends have sometimes asked, “Don’t they all look the same?”

Not at all.

No two mornings have ever been alike.

The clouds are different.

The colors are different.

The sun in a different place.

Even the feeling of the morning is different.

Yet every sunrise carries the same promise.

The darkness did not win.

Life is beginning again.

Perhaps that is why I never tire of watching.

Each sunrise reminds me that God is endlessly creative.

He has never repeated a single dawn.

If He cares enough to paint a new masterpiece across the sky every morning, perhaps He is also creating something new within me.

Perhaps today's mercy will not look exactly like yesterday's.

Perhaps today's grace will arrive in a color I have never seen before.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

Every sunrise is God's quiet reminder that His faithfulness is never routine.

It is new.

Every morning.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the gift of each new day. As the sun rises, awaken my heart to Your presence. Help me leave yesterday's fears behind and receive today's mercies with gratitude. Open my eyes to the beauty You create, the hope You offer, and the new beginning You place before me. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you see a sunrise—or even the first light of morning—pause before beginning your day.

Take one slow breath and pray:

“Lord, thank You for this morning. Help me see the new thing You are creating today.”

Sunrise

Before the dawn has found its voice,
The sea still whispers to the shore;
The waiting heart makes quiet choice
To trust that light will come once more.

Then colors bloom where darkness lay,
No morning painted quite the same;
The Artist greets another day
And softly calls me by my name.

Each sunrise tells my soul anew
That night can never always stay;
Your mercy breaks like morning dew
And lights the path before my way.

So let me greet each rising sun
With thankful heart and opened eyes;
For every dawn proclaims the truth:
Your faithful love will always rise.

Song – December 2

Scripture

“The Lord your God is in your midst... He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you by His love; He will rejoice over you with singing.” — Zephaniah 3:17

Reflection

There are some songs we never really forget.

Years may pass before we hear them again, yet somehow every note remains tucked away in our memory. A familiar melody can carry us back to childhood, a family gathering, a church pew, or a quiet drive through the countryside.

Songs have a way of becoming part of us.

I’ve often wondered why God chose music as one of His gifts to the human heart.

Perhaps it is because songs can reach places that ordinary words cannot.

A melody can comfort us when explanations fail.

A hymn can strengthen faith when prayers seem difficult to find.

A simple chorus can linger in our hearts long after the last note has faded.

Then I remember something even more wonderful.

Before Scripture ever tells us to sing to God, it tells us that **God sings over us.**

Imagine that.

The Creator of the universe rejoices over His children with singing.

Long before I found my voice in worship, God was already surrounding me with His love.

Long before I knew the words to any hymn, His song was being woven into my life.

Perhaps that is why songs have such power.

They remind us that we were created to live in harmony with the One who first sang over us.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The sweetest song we will ever hear is the one God has been singing over us all along.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the songs that have carried me through seasons of joy and sorrow. More than that, thank You for the everlasting love with which You rejoice over Your children. Quiet my anxious heart, tune my life to Your grace, and help me live each day in harmony with Your love. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Today, when you hear a song—whether from a choir, a bird, the radio, or someone softly humming—pause for a moment.

Whisper:

“Lord, help me hear the song of Your love today.”

Song

Before I found a hymn to sing,
Before my lips could speak Your praise,
Your love became the song of spring
That gently filled my nights and days.

Its melody through sorrow flowed,
Its cadence echoed deep within;
It walked beside me on the road
And called me home again and again.

Now every song that stirs my heart,
From robin's trill to chapel choir,
Becomes a small and sacred part
Of Heaven's everlasting fire.

So teach me, Lord, to pause and hear
The music woven through each day;
For every faithful note draws near
The Song that never fades away.

Dew – December 3

Scripture

“I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon.” — Hosea 14:5

Reflection

There is something magical about walking outside early enough to discover the dew.

Before the sun has climbed high enough to warm the earth, every blade of grass glistens. Tiny droplets cling to flower petals like jewels. Spider webs become works of art, each delicate thread adorned with diamonds that vanish before the day has fully begun.

The dew never makes a sound.

It asks for no attention.

Most mornings it arrives while the world is still asleep.

Yet everything it touches is refreshed.

I have often paused to admire those tiny drops, wondering how something so small could transform an ordinary lawn into a field of sparkling beauty. Nothing has changed except the light.

Perhaps that is true of God’s grace as well.

His blessings often arrive quietly. They seldom announce themselves with great fanfare. More often they appear in a kind word, an unexpected phone call, a moment of forgiveness, the laughter of a grandchild, the embrace of a friend, or the peace that settles over us during prayer.

Like the dew, God’s grace is gentle.

It refreshes rather than overwhelms.

It nourishes without demanding recognition.

And when the warmth of the day comes, the dew disappears—but not before it has given life to what needed it most.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God's greatest gifts are often the quiet ones that appear before we are fully awake to notice them.

Prayer

Gracious Father, thank You for the gentle ways You care for me each day. Forgive me for rushing past the quiet gifts You scatter along my path. Open my eyes to recognize Your grace in the ordinary moments of life. Refresh my spirit as the morning dew refreshes the earth, that I may become a source of encouragement and hope for others. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you see dew on the grass or resting upon a flower, don't hurry past it.

Pause.

Watch it catch the morning light.

Then whisper this simple prayer:

"Lord, help me notice the quiet gifts You have already placed before me today."

Dew

Before the dawn awoke the sky,
And songs of birds embraced the day,
The dew had come so silently,
To bless the earth in its own way.

It crowned each blade with crystal light,
Each blossom wore a jeweled grace;
No trumpet hailed its brief delight,
Yet heaven smiled in every place.

So gently falls God's tender care,
Unseen by hurried hearts at times;
His mercies glisten everywhere,
Like morning's quiet, sacred signs.

Though soon the warming sun will rise,
And every shining drop depart,

Its blessing lingers in our eyes,
And leaves fresh hope within the heart.

Lord, make me like the morning dew,
A quiet gift where'er I roam;
Refreshing souls with love that's true,
Until You call Your children home.

The Pond – December 4

Scripture

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.” — Lamentations 3:22–23

Reflection

There is a pond near our home that has become one of my favorite places.

I often return to the pond near my home.

Not because something extraordinary always happens there.

But because something different always does.

Some mornings an alligator slips almost unnoticed through the still water.

Another day a great blue heron stands patiently along the shoreline, waiting for just the right moment.

An anhinga dries its wings in the morning sun.

An osprey circles overhead before plunging into the water.

Turtles gather on a fallen log.

And once each year, almost like welcomed pilgrims, pelicans arrive to fish before moving on.

No two visits are ever quite the same.

Yet every visit reminds me of the same truth.

God’s creation is wonderfully alive.

Not hurried.

Not anxious.

Simply alive.

Watching the pond has taught me that God delights in variety.

He paints no two sunrises exactly alike.

He never repeats a cloud.

No two birds sing in precisely the same way.

Even the seasons tell the same story with different colors.

Perhaps that is why I return.

The pond reminds me that God's faithfulness is never boring.

It is endlessly creative.

Every day He offers another glimpse of His imagination, another reminder that the Creator still delights in His creation.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God rarely repeats Himself, yet He is always faithful.

Every new day carries fresh evidence that His mercies truly are new every morning.

Prayer

Creator God, thank You for the beauty that surrounds me each day. Open my eyes to notice the wonders I have too often hurried past. Teach me to delight in the variety of Your creation and to trust that Your mercies are as fresh as each new morning. May every bird, every breeze, every ripple on the water remind me that You are near. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Spend ten quiet minutes watching one place in God's creation.

Resist the urge to hurry.

Simply notice.

Then ask yourself:

"Lord, what are You showing me today that I have never seen before?"

The Pond

The morning wrapped the pond in peace,
As sunlight crowned the waking shore;
Each gentle breath proclaimed release,
From hurried lives that asked for more.

An alligator, slow and wise,
Slipped softly through the mirrored glass;
A heron watched with patient eyes,
Content to let the moments pass.

The osprey traced the heavens high,
An eagle drifted on the breeze;
The turtles warmed beneath the sky,
While life awakened through the trees.

Then came, as if by heaven's grace,
A pelican from distant sea;
A welcome guest in this small place,
Another verse in God's decree.

No day repeats the one before,
Yet every dawn sings just as true;
God paints His mercies evermore,
In scenes forever fresh and new.

So let me linger by the shore,
With open eyes and grateful heart;
For every wonder whispers more:
The Master's hand is in each part.

Mockingbird – December 5

Scripture

“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them... Are you not of more value than they?” — Matthew 6:26

Reflection

Outside my window, a mockingbird flew back and forth, carrying one small leaf at a time.

I smiled as I watched.

Then another memory quietly returned.

Years ago, during my rehabilitation, there was another mockingbird outside my window. Each day I would hear its song. One morning I answered with a whistle of my own. The bird answered back. The next day we did it again. Soon it became part of my daily routine.

Different notes.

Different rhythms.

Different songs.

Yet somehow it became a conversation.

I never imagined the mockingbird was speaking for God. But through those moments, I became aware that God was speaking to my heart.

The bird sang because that is what mockingbirds do.

I answered because that is what grateful hearts eventually learn to do.

Looking back now, I wonder if God had placed that little singer outside my window long before I ever noticed it. Perhaps the song had always been there. I was simply still enough to hear it.

Today, outside my window I watched another mockingbird gathering leaves to build its nest, I realized something else.

Faith is often built the same way.

One small act of hope.

One whispered prayer.

One encouraging word.

One hymn remembered.

One promise trusted.

One day at a time.

The nest is not finished in a single flight.

Neither is the soul.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God is quietly building something beautiful in us, one ordinary day at a time. Sometimes He uses the voices of friends. Sometimes He uses silence. And sometimes He uses the song of a mockingbird outside a window.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for speaking in ways I often overlook. Open my ears to hear Your voice in Scripture, in the kindness of others, and in the beauty of Your creation. When I become anxious or discouraged, help me to pause, listen, and remember that You are always nearer than I imagine. Build my faith patiently, one day, one prayer, one note at a time. Amen.

Today's Invitation

If you hear a bird singing today, stop for just a moment.

Listen.

Then quietly pray:

“Lord, teach me to hear Your song in the ordinary moments of this day.”

Mockingbird

A mockingbird upon a limb
Poured out a bright and cheerful song;
The morning air grew full with him,
As if he'd known my heart all along.

I answered with a timid tune,
Unsure if he would sing once more;
He filled the silence very soon,
And joy came gently to my door.

He built his nest with leaf and thread,
One patient journey at a time;
So God, with grace, my spirit led
Through ordinary days sublime.

Now when I hear a bird take wing,
I smile before the day has stirred;
For heaven still has songs to sing,
Sometimes through just a little bird.

Shooting Star – December 6

Scripture

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.” —
Psalm 19:1

Reflection

There is something magical about an August night.

When the Perseid meteor shower reaches its peak, I find myself looking upward more than usual. The darkness that hides so much during the day suddenly becomes a canvas filled with possibility.

Then it happens.

A streak of light races across the sky.

It lasts only a heartbeat.

If I blink, I may miss it.

Yet somehow that brief flash remains in my memory long after it has disappeared.

People often speak of wishing upon a shooting star.

I find myself doing something different.

I give thanks.

That fleeting light reminds me how many moments of grace God has woven into my life. Most lasted only a short while—a conversation with a friend, a child’s embrace, an unexpected kindness, a sunrise over the ocean, a prayer answered in a way I never anticipated.

None of those moments lasted forever.

But each one illuminated my life.

Perhaps that is how God often works.

He gives us flashes of His glory—not so we can hold onto them forever, but so we will remember where to look.

A shooting star is gone almost as soon as it appears.

Its beauty lies not in its duration but in its ability to fill us with wonder.

Faith can be like that.

There are moments when God's presence breaks into our ordinary lives with unexpected clarity. We cannot always explain them or recreate them, but we are forever changed because we experienced them.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

Some of God's brightest gifts are not meant to last forever.

They are meant to awaken wonder that lasts a lifetime.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the moments of wonder You place along my journey. Keep my eyes lifted toward You and my heart open to the surprises of Your grace. Help me never become so busy that I fail to notice the beauty You scatter across my days. And when those moments pass, let their light continue to guide me toward You. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Tonight, if you have the opportunity, step outside for a few moments.

Look toward the heavens.

Whether you see a shooting star or only the quiet stars above, whisper:

"Lord, thank You for filling my life with moments that remind me of Your glory."

Shooting Star

Across the velvet, midnight sky,
A ribbon flashed with fleeting grace;
It vanished almost from my eye,
Yet wonder lingered in its place.

So often, Lord, Your blessings shine
In moments brief, too soon they seem;

A gentle word, a hand in mine,
A hope restored, a quiet dream.

Though passing lights may quickly fade,
Their memory warms the heart anew;
For every spark Your love has made
Still points my grateful soul to You.

So teach me not to harbor the light,
And to treasure every gift You send;
For every star that crowns the night
Draws me to You, my truest Friend.

Part Two

Discovering Wonder

Something beautiful happens when we begin to notice.

The ordinary begins to shimmer with meaning.

A candle becomes more than wax and flame. A pond becomes more than water. The fragrance of fresh bread, the touch of a hand, the quiet after the rain—each begins to tell a story that reaches far beyond itself.

Creation has always been speaking of its Creator.

We simply learn to listen with new ears and see with new eyes.

Wonder is not reserved for mountaintops or miracles. More often, it waits patiently in the familiar rhythms of everyday life, inviting us to pause long enough to receive the gift hidden within the commonplace.

As you continue this journey, may your sense of wonder deepen. May the ordinary become extraordinary, not because the world has changed, but because your heart is awakening to the grace that has always been near.

Leaf – December 7

Scripture

“He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.” — Psalm 1:3

Reflection

Leaves are so common that we seldom notice them.

We admire forests in autumn and flowering trees in spring, yet the individual leaf often escapes our attention. It hangs quietly from its branch, unnoticed, asking for nothing.

Yet every leaf performs an extraordinary work.

Day after day it receives the light of the sun and quietly transforms that light into life for the entire tree. It does not cling to the light. It receives it, changes it, and shares it.

Perhaps that is why Scripture so often compares faithful people to flourishing trees. A life rooted in God does more than survive. It quietly receives the light of Christ and allows that light to nourish others.

Advent invites us to become like the leaf.

We cannot create the Light of the World. We can only receive Him. As His light fills our hearts, it begins to shape our words, our kindness, our patience, our forgiveness, and our hope. Before long, someone else is strengthened because Christ’s light has quietly passed through us.

Most people never stop to admire a single leaf.

Yet without leaves, forests cannot flourish.

In much the same way, the unnoticed acts of faithfulness—a listening ear, a gentle word, an offered prayer, a simple act of generosity—often become the quiet work through which God brings life to others.

Perhaps the light we almost missed is this:

Light was never meant to remain with us.

Like the leaf, we receive it so that others may live in its blessing.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Light of the World. Fill my heart with Your light today, not so that I might keep it for myself, but so that Your love may quietly reach others through me. Teach me to be faithful in the ordinary moments that often go unseen, trusting that You are at work in ways I may never fully know. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Today, whenever you notice a leaf, pause for just a moment and pray:

“Lord Jesus, let Your light shine through me today.”

Leaf

A quiet leaf upon the tree,
No trumpet marks its faithful role;
It drinks the light that all may see,
Then gives its life to feed the whole.

It does not boast of what it bears,
Nor seek the praise of passing eyes;
Content to serve through countless cares,
It lifts the tree toward open skies.

So may my heart, O Christ, receive
The Light that dawned in Bethlehem;
And, like the smallest autumn leaf,
Reflect Your grace again through them.

Teach me to live with humble art,
Where hidden gifts and mercies start;
Until another comes to see
Your holy light alive in me.

Seed – December 8

Scripture

“Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” — John 12:24

Reflection

Whenever I plant a seed, I am tempted to look for signs of life the very next day.

Of course, nothing appears.

The soil looks exactly as it did before.

Yet beneath the surface, everything is changing.

The seed is softening.

Its outer shell is breaking open.

Tiny roots are reaching downward before a single green shoot reaches toward the light.

Long before anyone sees life above the ground, life has already begun below it.

I wonder if God often works that way within us.

There are seasons when we pray faithfully, study His Word, worship, serve, and wait. From the outside, it may seem that little is happening. We wonder why we have not grown more patient, more forgiving, or more trusting.

But God is rarely in a hurry.

Like a gardener, He works where human eyes cannot see.

He loosens the hard places of our hearts.

He deepens our roots before He enlarges our branches.

He teaches us to draw strength from Him before asking us to bear fruit for others.

Perhaps that hidden work is the most important work of all.

When the first tender shoot finally pushes through the soil, we celebrate the new growth.

God smiles because He has been watching the miracle unfold all along.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The seasons when we think nothing is happening may be the seasons when God is doing His deepest work.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for working patiently in the hidden places of my life. When I become discouraged because I cannot see growth, remind me that You are preparing me beneath the surface. Give me the courage to trust Your timing, deepen my roots in Your love, and help me grow into the person You created me to be. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you see a seed—or even the fruit that once held one—pause for a moment and pray:

“Lord, keep growing what only You can see.”

Seed

A tiny seed beneath the ground
Lies hidden from the human eye;
No trumpet makes a joyful sound,
No branches yet reach toward the sky.

Its shell must yield, its roots descend,
Before its leaves can greet the sun;
The hidden work must first begin
Before the growth is ever known.

So, Lord, when silence fills my days
And little change appears in me,
Remind my heart Your quiet ways
Are shaping what I cannot see.

For every root that You impart,
Though buried deep and out of sight,
Will someday lift a faithful heart
To bloom beneath Your gracious light.

Crocus – December 9

Scripture

“See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?” — Isaiah 43:19

Reflection

There was always something magical about the first crocus.

After a long New York winter, snow still covered much of the ground. Trees stood bare. The wind still carried winter’s chill.

Then, almost unnoticed, a single purple blossom would push through the snow.

It didn’t wait until winter was over.

It simply trusted that spring was already on its way.

I’ve often wondered what gives that little flower such courage.

Perhaps it isn’t courage at all.

Perhaps it simply responds to the warmth that has already begun beneath the frozen ground—a warmth no one else can yet see.

Isn’t faith something like that?

We often pray for all the snow to disappear before we dare to hope again. Yet God so often plants hope while winter is still lingering around us.

The crocus reminds us that resurrection begins before every trace of winter is gone.

Hope is not the absence of hardship.

Hope is the quiet confidence that God is already at work beneath the surface.

Looking back over my life, I can remember seasons that felt frozen. I wondered if warmth would ever return.

Then, often in the smallest ways, God allowed a crocus to bloom.

A kind word.

A prayer.

A friend.

A moment of laughter.

A verse of Scripture.

None of them ended winter overnight.

But each one whispered the same promise:

“Spring is coming.”

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God’s new beginnings often appear while yesterday’s snow is still on the ground.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, when the winters of life seem long, help me notice the crocuses You place along my path. Give me eyes to recognize hope before circumstances have fully changed. Remind me that Your resurrection life is already at work, even when I cannot yet see spring in all its fullness. Thank You for every small sign of Your faithful love. Amen.

Today’s Invitation

The next time you notice a flower growing where you least expect it, pause and whisper:

“Lord, thank You for the spring You are already bringing.”

Crocus

Beneath the snow so cold and deep,
Where winter held the silent land,
A crocus stirred from hidden sleep,
Awakened by the Master’s hand.

It did not wait for skies of blue,
Nor fear the frost that lingered still;
It simply trusted what it knew:
That spring would surely climb the hill.

So when my heart grows tired and worn,
And hope seems buried out of sight,
Lord, help me greet each hidden morn
With faith before I see the light.

For every crocus, small yet bold,
Proclaims what Easter taught anew:
No winter's grip can always hold—
Your love makes all creation new.

Apple Blossom – December 10

Scripture

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit.” — John 15:5

Reflection

One of the joys of living in New York was watching the apple orchards awaken each spring.

From a distance, the hills seemed covered with clouds of white and pink blossoms. They were breathtaking.

But walking through the orchard was even more beautiful.

Each blossom seemed to promise something yet unseen.

No one looked at an apple blossom expecting it to remain a blossom forever.

Its beauty was found not only in what it was, but in what it would become.

That is true of us as well.

There are seasons when God fills our lives with blossoms—moments of inspiration, fresh beginnings, answered prayers, and new possibilities. We naturally want to hold on to them.

Yet blossoms are not meant to last.

They are meant to become fruit.

When the petals gently fall to the ground, it can seem as though something precious has been lost. In truth, something even more wonderful has begun. Hidden beneath what the eye can no longer see, the fruit is quietly forming.

How often have I mistaken the falling petals for an ending, when God was preparing a beginning?

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God’s most beautiful work is often taking shape after the blossoms have fallen.

The blossom does not mourn becoming an apple.

It simply fulfills the purpose for which it first bloomed.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the seasons of blossoms in my life and for the quiet work You continue after the petals have fallen. Teach me not to cling to passing moments of beauty, but to trust that You are always shaping lasting fruit within me. Help me abide in You, that my life may bear fruit for Your glory and for the blessing of others. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you notice a blossom—or remember one—pause for a moment and pray:

“Lord, make my life fruitful in ways I cannot yet see.”

Apple Blossom

The orchard woke in robes of white,
With petals dancing in the breeze;
Each blossom caught the morning light
And graced the waiting, silent trees.

Yet none were fashioned just to bloom,
Or linger through the passing days;
They held within their sweet perfume
The promise of more lasting praise.

The petals fell, the branches swayed,
As hidden fruit began to grow;
What seemed a loss was simply made
The path by which God's gifts would show.

Lord, teach my heart this gentle art:
To trust when seasons change their hue;
For every blossom You impart
Prepares the fruit You long to do.

Deer – December 11

Scripture

“He will cover you with His feathers, and under His wings you will find refuge.” —
Psalm 91:4

Reflection

Many years ago, before I entered the ministry, my work often took me to northern New Jersey. During the week, I rented a small cottage tucked beside acres of protected woodland.

Behind the cottage was a simple concrete patio with two chairs and a barbecue grill. On warm evenings, after work, I would sit outside with a good book before preparing supper.

It wasn't long before I realized I wasn't alone.

A doe and her fawn often emerged from the woods.

At first, they remained at a distance.

The little one would venture only a few cautious steps while its mother watched from the edge of the trees. I learned never to rush the moment. I simply kept reading, pretending not to notice, allowing trust to grow at its own pace.

Each evening, the little deer became a little bolder.

Then one evening, while I was absorbed in my book, I suddenly sensed something beside me.

I turned just enough to see a small head peering over my shoulder, as though the fawn had decided to read with me.

I smiled but did not move.

For several evenings after that, we quietly shared that little patio.

The fawn explored.

I read.

And always, somewhere beyond the edge of my vision, its mother watched.

Looking back, I realize I wasn't simply watching nature.

I was being given a glimpse of God's heart.

How often have I ventured into unfamiliar places, taking timid steps into seasons I did not fully understand?

How often has God allowed me to explore while never taking His loving eyes from me?

Like that mother deer, He never forced me forward.

He never abandoned me to discover life alone.

He remained near, quietly watching, patiently protecting, lovingly allowing me to grow.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God often watches over us so gently that we mistake His quiet presence for His absence.

Yet His loving eyes never leave His children.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your patient love that never rushes me and never leaves me. When I step into unfamiliar places, remind me that Your eyes are always upon me. Help me trust You more deeply and reflect that same gentle patience toward others. Amen.

Today's Invitation

If you see a deer today—or simply remember one—pause for a moment.

Whisper:

“Lord, thank You for watching over me, even when I cannot see You.”

Deer

A quiet wood, an evening fair,
A book beneath the fading sky;
A timid fawn approached with care,
While watchful eyes stood close nearby.

I turned to find a gentle face
That peered beside me, calm and still;
No words were shared, no hurried pace,
Just quiet trust and peaceful will.

Beyond the trees, the mother stayed,
Her loving watch both near and true;
She let her little one be brave,
Yet never lost her watchful view.

So walks my Lord beside my days,
With patient love that sets me free;
He grants me room to learn His ways,
Yet never turns His eyes from me.

Campfire – December 12

Scripture

“Our hearts were burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us.” — Luke 24:32

Reflection

There are few places I enjoy more than sitting around a campfire.

The chairs are rarely arranged in perfect circles. Someone is always tending the fire. Another is poking at the glowing logs just to see the sparks dance into the night. Someone eventually begins telling a story. Before long, another joins in. Then someone starts singing, and voices that might never have sung alone find confidence together.

A campfire has a way of turning strangers into neighbors and neighbors into friends.

The warmth reaches farther than the flames.

So do the stories.

I’ve often wondered why conversations around a campfire seem deeper than those we have in brightly lit rooms.

Perhaps it’s because the fire asks nothing of us except that we stay.

There are no schedules to keep.

No screens demanding attention.

No hurry.

Just warmth, light, laughter, silence, and people willing to be present with one another.

The more I read the Gospels, the more I think Jesus understood that kind of holy presence.

After His resurrection, He prepared a charcoal fire on the shore of Galilee. As the disciples came ashore, they found breakfast waiting. Around that fire, Jesus did not begin by correcting Peter for his failure. He began by feeding him.

Only then did He ask, “Do you love Me?”

The very place that could have become a reminder of Peter's greatest shame became the place of his greatest restoration.

That is what Jesus does.

He meets us around the fires of our lives—not to leave us in regret, but to warm our hearts with grace and call us forward once again.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

Christ still builds campfires.

Wherever people gather in His name to share stories, offer forgiveness, break bread, and encourage one another, He quietly takes His place among them.

The warmth we feel is often more than the fire.

It is His presence.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for every place where people gather in love, honesty, and friendship. Build within me a heart that welcomes others as You welcomed Your disciples beside the fire. May my words bring warmth, my listening bring peace, and my life reflect the quiet hospitality of Your grace. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you sit around a campfire—or even light a candle—pause for a moment.

Remember someone who has helped warm your life with kindness, encouragement, or forgiveness.

Offer thanks to God for them.

Then ask:

“Lord, whose heart can I help warm today?”

Campfire

The daylight slipped beyond the hill,
As evening wrapped the earth in grace;

We gathered where the world grew still,
And found a home in that small place.

The embers glowed with gentle light,
Each spark a fleeting, golden prayer;
Old stories danced into the night,
While laughter warmed the cooling air.

We sang of days both bright and dim,
Of journeys long and roads unknown;
And somewhere in each heartfelt hymn,
Christ made our simple circle home.

As Peter found upon the shore,
A fire can heal what once was lost;
Love speaks our names forevermore,
And grace outshines our deepest cost.

So keep my heart, Lord, burning bright,
With welcome, hope, and mercy's flame;
Until all those who share my light
Leave knowing You have called their name.

Candle – December 13

Scripture

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” — Psalm 119:105

Reflection

My wife and I often light a candle before sharing a meal.

Sometimes it is just the two of us. Sometimes friends gather around the table. The meal is never extravagant. The conversations are rarely planned. Yet the simple act of lighting a candle somehow changes the room.

Its light is gentle, never demanding attention.

Still, I often find my eyes drawn to its quiet flame.

I watch it dance almost imperceptibly with the movement of the air. There are moments when I lose myself in its flickering light, only to realize that it has gently called me back—to the laughter around the table, to the story someone is telling, to the gratitude of sharing another meal together.

The candle has become less of a decoration and more of an invitation.

An invitation to be fully present.

Perhaps that is why candlelight has accompanied sacred moments for centuries. Its light is never harsh. It doesn't reveal everything. It simply offers enough light to remind us that darkness never has the final word.

Faith often works that way.

We pray for floodlights while God offers a candle.

We long to see the entire journey while He faithfully illuminates the next faithful step.

Then I realized something I had overlooked for years.

A candle never burns for itself.

It quietly spends itself so that others may have light.

Its purpose is found not in preserving the wax but in offering the flame.

Isn't that the life Christ calls us to?

Jesus gave Himself completely so that the world might know the Father's love. Then He invited us to follow Him—not by seeking the spotlight, but by quietly spending our lives in acts of kindness, hospitality, forgiveness, compassion, and hope.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The most beautiful lives are often those that, like a candle, gently spend themselves so that others may see the light of Christ.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Light of the world. Thank You for the quiet ways You illuminate my life each day. Teach me not merely to enjoy Your light but to reflect it with generosity and love. May I never cling so tightly to my own comfort that I fail to spend myself in service to others. Let my life, like a simple candle, become a quiet witness to Your grace. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you light a candle, pause before the meal begins.

Watch its flame for a moment and remember:

A candle never burns for itself.

Then ask yourself:

“Lord, how can I spend myself today so that someone else may know Your light?”

Candle

A single flame, so soft and small,
Awoke the quiet of the room;
Its gentle light embraced us all,
And turned our table into bloom.

It danced without a hurried pace,
As stories filled the evening air;
Its silent glow bestowed a grace
That drew our hearts to linger there.

It asked for neither praise nor fame,
Nor sought to keep its wax complete;
It lived to offer light and flame,
Until its work was full and sweet.

So Christ has called our lives to shine,
Not clutched in fear or held apart;
But spent like candles, by design,
To warm another's weary heart.

Prism – December 14

Scripture

“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you.” —
Isaiah 60:1

Reflection

I have always been fascinated by prisms and pieces of cut glass.

At first glance, they seem ordinary enough. Clear. Colorless. Almost unnoticed.

Then the sunlight finds them.

What entered as a single beam of white light suddenly emerges as brilliant ribbons of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet dancing across the room.

The colors were never absent.

They were simply hidden within the light until something allowed them to be seen.

That is what captures my imagination.

You never really notice the light entering the glass.

You notice the beauty that comes out.

Perhaps that is one of God’s quiet invitations for those who follow Christ.

We spend much of our lives praying for more of His light.

More wisdom.

More grace.

More love.

And rightly so.

Yet maybe God is asking a different question.

What becomes visible after My light has passed through your life?

Does compassion emerge?

Does forgiveness become visible?

Do patience, kindness, generosity, and hope begin to color the lives of those around you?

The prism creates no light of its own.

Its beauty lies entirely in allowing the light to pass through it.

So it is with us.

The more closely we walk with Christ, the more His light reveals the beauty He has been creating within us all along.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

People may never notice when God's light enters our hearts.

But they should be able to see its colors reflected in the way we live.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Light of the world. Let Your light shine so completely through my life that others see not me, but the beauty of Your love, mercy, joy, and peace. Make me like a prism in Your hands, reflecting the richness of Your grace wherever You place me. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Find a piece of glass, a crystal, or even a window where sunlight shines through.

As you watch the light, quietly pray:

"Lord, let Your light pass through me today, so that someone else may see Your beauty."

Prism

A beam of light, so pure and bright,
Passed quietly through crystal clear;

No eye could trace its silent flight,
Yet heaven's colors soon drew near.

The ruby's flame, the sapphire's glow,
The emerald's gentle, living hue;
What seemed but simple light to know
Became creation born anew.

The prism claimed no light its own,
It simply let the radiance stream;
Its hidden gift was gently shown,
By yielding to the Maker's beam.

So let my heart be clear, O Lord,
Transparent to Your holy flame;
Until the colors of Your Word
Bring hope and honor to Your name.

May those who meet me day by day
See love where once was fear or pride;
And through the light upon my way,
Catch just a glimpse of Christ inside.

Aroma – December 15

Scripture

“For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved...”
— 2 Corinthians 2:15

Reflection

Some of life’s sweetest memories arrive first through the sense of smell.

The smell of bread baking in the oven.

The fragrance of flowers after a spring rain.

The salty air that tells you the ocean is just beyond the dunes.

The clean, crisp scent of a mountain morning.

Long before our eyes confirm what is there, our sense of smell already knows.

An aroma has a remarkable gift.

It announces a presence.

A familiar fragrance can transport us years into the past. One breath may remind us of a grandmother’s kitchen, a childhood Christmas, a favorite vacation, or a garden lovingly tended.

God has woven memory into fragrance.

Perhaps that is why Scripture speaks of prayers rising like incense and of Christ’s followers becoming “the aroma of Christ.”

People may not always remember our words.

But they will remember how they felt in our presence.

Did we bring peace?

Did we leave kindness behind us?

Did our words carry hope?

Did our lives point beyond ourselves?

Like the fragrance of fresh bread drifting through a neighborhood, a Christ-filled life quietly invites others to draw near.

It does not force.

It simply fills the air with grace.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The sweetest fragrance a Christian carries is not perfume or flowers.

It is the unmistakable aroma of a life shaped by Christ.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, let my life carry Your fragrance wherever I go. May my words bring encouragement, my actions reflect kindness, and my presence offer peace. Fill my heart so completely with Your love that others encounter You before they ever hear me speak. Make me, by Your grace, the pleasing aroma of Christ in a world longing for hope. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time a familiar fragrance catches your attention, pause before moving on.

Take a slow breath.

Thank God for the memory it awakens.

Then ask yourself:

“Lord, what fragrance does my life leave behind in the hearts of those I meet?”

Aroma

The scent of bread, still warm and sweet,
Drifted softly through the air;
It called the heart before the feet,
With quiet joy beyond compare.

A garden breathed its fragrant song,
As blossoms greeted morning's light;
The ocean whispered all along,
Before it ever came in sight.

The mountain breeze, so crisp and clear,
Awoke the soul with every breath;
Its freshness seemed to draw me near
The One who conquered sin and death.

So may my life, by grace renewed,
Bear Christ where'er my footsteps roam;
With kindness, mercy, gratitude,
Inviting weary hearts toward home.

For love is like a sweet perfume,
It lingers when our words are done;
Its fragrance quietly fills the room,
And speaks of Christ, God's Holy One.

Touch – December 16

Scripture

“Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man.” — Mark 1:41

Reflection

Touch is one of God’s simplest gifts.

We scarcely think about it until someone reaches for our hand.

A hug between old friends.

The gentle hand of a parent upon a child’s shoulder.

The reassuring squeeze that says, “I’m here.”

The touch of cool water on thirsty lips.

The warmth of a coffee mug on a cold morning.

The smoothness of a stone picked up during a walk.

The softness of a flower petal.

So much of life is experienced through our hands.

Yet some of the deepest touches are invisible.

We have all said, “That story touched my heart.”

Or, “Your kindness touched me.”

No hand reached inside us.

Yet something changed.

Our hearts recognized love.

Jesus understood the power of touch.

He did not heal from a distance when He could have.

Again and again, He reached out.

He touched the leper everyone else avoided.

He took children into His arms.

He lifted the fallen.

Even after His resurrection, He invited Thomas to touch His wounded hands.

Our Savior knew that love is rarely experienced from a distance.

It is felt.

Perhaps that is why even today His Spirit continues to touch lives through ordinary people.

A word of encouragement.

A handwritten note.

A meal delivered to a grieving family.

A prayer quietly offered.

A hand held in silence.

None of these seem extraordinary.

Yet each one carries the touch of Christ.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The hands that touch another with love often become the hands of Christ.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for every hand that has lifted me, comforted me, and reminded me that I am never alone. Make my hands instruments of Your compassion. May every embrace, every helping hand, every act of kindness, and every gentle touch reflect Your love to a world longing to know You. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Reach out to someone today.

Shake a hand.

Offer a hug.

Hold a hand in prayer.

Or simply place a reassuring hand upon someone's shoulder.

Then remember, and say:

“Christ still touches the world—often through our hands.”

Touch

A gentle hand, a warm embrace,
A quiet smile, a caring tone;
Such simple gifts of love and grace,
Can tell a soul, “You’re not alone.”

A mother's hand upon a brow,
A father's arm through joy and tears;
These sacred moments whisper now,
God's faithfulness throughout the years.

The Savior touched the broken soul,
The weary heart, the blinded eye;
His loving hands restored the whole,
And lifted hopes that seemed to die.

So let my hands bring healing, Lord,
With kindness in each thing I do;
May every touch reflect Your Word,
And gently lead the world to You.

For hearts are touched before they're won,
By mercy's quiet, faithful art;
The hands that serve in love become
The very heartbeat of Your heart.

Part Three

Awakening to Emmanuel

By now you may have noticed that these reflections have never really been about candles, windows, birds, ponds, flowers, or even a simple glass of water.

They have always been about Christ.

Every glimpse of beauty has been pointing beyond itself. Every ordinary moment has quietly whispered the same enduring promise:

Emmanuel. God with us.

Not only in Bethlehem.

Not only in moments of celebration.

But here.

Today.

In the quiet places of our lives.

The greatest gift of this journey is not discovering something that was hidden from God. It is discovering that our own eyes have been opened to His faithful presence.

As you enter these final reflections, may your heart rest in the joyful assurance that the Light we almost missed has never ceased to shine.

For Emmanuel has been walking beside you all along.

Condensation – December 17

Scripture

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” —
John 1:14

Reflection

As I reached for my glass of water, tiny droplets had gathered on its surface.

They seemed to appear from nowhere.

Yet they had been there all along.

The moisture had always been present in the air. It simply became visible when it encountered the coolness of the glass.

How often is God’s presence like that?

We pray for signs, waiting for something dramatic to happen, while all the while His grace surrounds us like the unseen moisture in the air. We breathe it without noticing. We live within it without realizing it.

Then something happens.

A conversation.

A quiet prayer.

A familiar hymn.

A word of forgiveness.

A child laughs.

A stranger smiles.

Suddenly, what was always present becomes visible.

That is the miracle of Christmas.

God did not begin loving the world in Bethlehem.

His love had always been there.

In Jesus, that love took on flesh so that human eyes could finally behold what had always filled heaven and earth.

Perhaps that is Advent's invitation.

Not to ask God to come closer.

But to recognize the One who has never left.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The Light was not absent.

It simply waited for our hearts to notice.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, open my eyes to Your presence today. When I am tempted to believe You are distant, remind me that You are Emmanuel, God with us. Help me to recognize Your grace in the ordinary moments that reveal Your love anew. May my life make Your unseen love visible to someone today. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you notice condensation on a glass, pause and whisper:

“Lord Jesus, help me see what has been here all along.”

Condensation

Upon the glass small droplets cling,
Like jewels no hand has placed thereon;
They quietly reveal a thing
That filled the air before the dawn.

Unseen the moisture always stayed,
Until the waiting glass made known
The hidden gift that God had laid
Within a world He calls His own.

So, too, Your love surrounds each day,
Though often hidden from my sight;
Then Christmas comes to show the way,
And flesh reveals eternal Light.

Lord, let my life, through joy and grace,
Reflect the love I have received;
Let others, seeing in my face,
The Christ loved and believed.

Tear – December 18

Scripture

“Jesus wept.” — John 11:35

Reflection

A tear is one of the smallest things we ever notice.

It forms quietly.

Sometimes it is brushed away before anyone else can see it.

Sometimes we hide it because we believe tears are signs of weakness.

Yet throughout Scripture, tears are never dismissed by God.

David wrote that God keeps our tears in His bottle. The prophets wept over God’s people. Peter’s tears marked the beginning of repentance. Mary Magdalene’s tears fell at the feet of Jesus. And in perhaps the most surprising verse in all of Scripture, Jesus Himself stood beside the tomb of His friend and wept.

The Son of God did not explain away sorrow.

He entered it.

A tear reminds us that love always carries the possibility of grief, compassion, gratitude, and joy. It is often the language of the heart when words can no longer bear the weight of what we feel.

Sometimes we weep because life is broken.

Sometimes we weep because beauty catches us by surprise.

Sometimes, as I did today, we weep because for one brief moment we recognize that God is nearer than we had imagined.

Perhaps tears are among God’s quietest gifts.

They wash our eyes.

And sometimes, after the tears have fallen, we begin to see more clearly than before.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

Light is often revealed through eyes that have learned to weep.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for never turning away from our tears. Thank You for weeping with those who weep and rejoicing with those who rejoice. When tears come from sorrow, hold me close. When they come from gratitude, deepen my wonder. And when they come because I have caught a glimpse of Your presence, let them remind me that You are Emmanuel, God with us. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time a tear comes to your eyes—whether from sorrow, gratitude, or joy—do not wipe it away too quickly.

Pause and whisper:

“Thank You, Lord, for helping me see.”

Tear

A single tear, so small, so clear,
Can speak where words have long grown still;
It tells of love that lingers near,
Of hearts surrendered to God's will.

The Savior wept by Lazarus' grave,
Not hiding sorrow from our eyes;
The One who came, the lost to save
Shared human grief beneath the skies.

Yet tears are more than grief alone;
They sparkle, too, with grateful light.
They mark the places love has grown
And turn our darkness into sight.

So if today one tear should fall,
Receive it as God's gentle sign:
For through the smallest drop of all,
His light may touch this heart of mine.

Thumbprint – December 19

Scripture

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” — Isaiah 1:18

Reflection

During Vacation Bible School, we invited each child to do something very simple.

One by one, they pressed a thumb onto an ink pad and gently placed that thumbprint on a wooden cross.

Soon the cross was covered with fingerprints.

Each one was unique.

No two were alike.

Just like the children themselves.

Then we lightly misted the cross with water.

Slowly, almost quietly, the fingerprints began to disappear.

As I watched those little fingerprints slowly disappear, I realized I wasn't just watching children learn a lesson.

I was watching the Gospel unfold before my own eyes.

The water did not erase the children.

It did not make one child like another.

Each child remained wonderfully and uniquely created in the image of God.

What the water revealed was something even greater.

The cross remained.

God's love remained.

His promise remained.

The marks faded, but His grace did not.

That is the miracle of Christ.

He does not erase who we are.

He removes what separates us from Him and restores us to the people He created us to be.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The water didn't erase the child; it revealed the cross.

Every time we remember our baptism, we remember that same promise. God's grace is greater than our failures. His love reaches deeper than our brokenness. The cross still stands, and so does His invitation to live as His beloved children.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for knowing me completely and loving me perfectly. Thank You that Your cross does not erase my identity but restores it. Wash away whatever keeps me from living as Your beloved child, and help me reflect Your grace to everyone I meet. Remind me each day that I belong to You. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Look at your thumb for a moment.

Notice the tiny ridges that no one else in the world possesses.

Then remember the waters of your baptism and quietly pray:

“Lord, thank You for making me uniquely Yours and washing me in Your grace.”

Thumbprint

Small fingers pressed upon the cross,
Each pattern one of heaven's own;
No two alike, yet each confessed
A child already loved and known.

Then gentle drops of water fell,
The darkened prints grew faint from sight;

I watched in silence and I knew
The Gospel bloomed before my eyes that night.

The cross stood firm when all was clear,
Its mercy neither washed nor worn;
For grace removed what stained the soul,
While love declared a life reborn.

So when I see my hands today,
Their lines remind my heart anew:
The Lord who formed each fingerprint
Has called me, washed me, and made me new.

Black Hole – December 20

Scripture

“Even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light with You.” — Psalm 139:12

Reflection

For many years, when I heard the words *black hole*, I imagined the darkest place imaginable—a place where light itself could not escape.

It became, in my mind, a picture of absolute hopelessness.

Yet the more scientists have learned about these mysterious places in the universe, the more they have discovered that black holes are not isolated in endless emptiness. Around them are brilliant disks of light, powerful streams of energy, and galaxies filled with countless stars.

Even at the edge of what once seemed to be complete darkness, light is present.

I find that thought deeply comforting.

Not because science proves my faith.

It doesn't.

But because it reminds me of something Scripture has been telling us all along.

There is no place where God is absent.

There are seasons in life that feel like black holes.

A diagnosis.

A broken relationship.

The death of someone we love.

A lonely night when answers refuse to come.

From where we stand, the darkness can seem complete.

Yet God's Word gently whispers another truth.

Even there...

He is present.

His light may not erase the darkness all at once.

Sometimes it comes as a single promise.

A faithful friend.

A whispered prayer.

A verse remembered in the middle of the night.

A peace that cannot quite be explained.

Those small lights do not deny the darkness.

They remind us that darkness never has the final word.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The places that seem most empty of hope are often the places where we learn to recognize God's presence most clearly.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, when my life feels surrounded by darkness, remind me that I am never beyond Your reach. Help me trust Your presence when I cannot yet see Your purpose. Open my eyes to every small ray of hope You place along my path, and let Your light guide me until the dawn comes again. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you look into the night sky, pause for a moment.

Remember that even where your eyes see darkness, God sees every star.

Then quietly pray:

"Lord, be my light when I cannot see the way."

Black Hole

The deepest night that eyes can know
Still rests beneath Your watchful care;
Where human sight sees only woe,
Your faithful light is always there.

The stars may hide beyond my view,
The path grows dim beneath my feet;
Yet every promise You make true
Turns fear and hope at last to meet.

No shadow stands beyond Your grace,
No grief can steal what You impart;
For even in the darkest place,
Your light still finds the waiting heart.

So when the night seems cold and long,
And answers fade beyond my sight,
I'll trust the One whose love is strong,
Who fills the darkest depths with light.

Mountaintop – December 21

Scripture

“They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles...” — Isaiah 40:31

Reflection

One of my favorite places in New York was a mountain overlook near North–South Lake in the Catskills.

The walk to the summit wasn’t especially difficult, but it required intention.

Step by step, the trail climbed through quiet forests until, almost unexpectedly, the trees opened and the valley stretched out below.

Every time I stood there, I noticed the same thing.

The world hadn’t changed.

Only my perspective had.

The winding roads looked straighter.

The forests seemed endless.

The little towns that had once felt so busy became quiet patches nestled among the hills.

From above, I could see connections that were hidden while I walked below.

Faith can be like that.

Most of our lives are lived in the valleys—in ordinary days filled with responsibilities, unanswered questions, joys, and disappointments.

Then, every so often, God grants us a mountaintop moment.

Perhaps it comes during worship.

Perhaps in prayer.

Perhaps while reading Scripture.

Perhaps while standing quietly before one of His breathtaking creations.

For a brief moment, we see life differently.

We remember that God has been guiding us all along.

The temptation is to stay on the mountain.

But Jesus never allowed His disciples to remain there.

Every mountaintop eventually leads back to the valley.

Not because the experience was over, but because the valley needed people whose vision had been changed.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

God doesn't take us to the mountaintop to escape life.

He takes us there so we can return to life with new eyes.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for the moments when You lift my eyes above the worries of everyday life. Give me the courage to climb when You call, the wisdom to see what You want to show me, and the grace to carry that vision back into the valleys where I live and serve. May every mountaintop deepen my trust in You and strengthen my love for others. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you find yourself on a hill, a balcony, a bridge, or any place that offers a wider view, pause for a moment.

Ask yourself:

"Lord, what are You helping me see from here that I couldn't see before?"

Mountaintop

The path climbed slowly through the trees,
Each step a quiet act of trust;

Until the hills embraced the breeze
And lifted eyes above the dust.

The valley lay beneath my feet,
Its winding roads now plain to see;
What once seemed tangled and complete
Was woven in Your harmony.

Yet mountains are not where we stay,
For love still waits in lands below;
You send us back another way,
With clearer hearts and steadier hope.

So when life's trail seems steep and long,
And hidden turns obscure my view,
Remind me every climb belongs
To drawing me, dear Lord, to You.

The Manger – December 22

Scripture

“She gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped Him in cloths and placed Him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them.” — Luke 2:7

Reflection

I grew up in a small town in upstate New York, surrounded by dairy farms. One of my closest friends lived on one of those farms, and I spent many happy hours there as a boy.

The milking barn had long wooden feed troughs filled with hay harvested from the surrounding fields. Morning and evening, the cows would gather there to receive the nourishment that sustained them.

I never thought much about those troughs.

To me, they were simply part of life on a farm.

The fields produced grass.

The grass became hay.

The hay nourished the cattle.

The cattle, in turn, gave milk, cream, butter, and so much more that nourished our families.

Even as a child, I sensed there was a beautiful rhythm to it all. Nothing lived for itself alone. Everything received. Everything gave. God’s creation worked together in quiet harmony.

Years later, those memories returned to me in a way I never expected.

Luke tells us that when Jesus was born, Mary laid Him in a manger.

A feeding trough.

Not a palace.

Not a cradle carved from cedar.

A place where hungry animals came to be fed.

What an astonishing choice.

The One who would later say, "*I am the Bread of Life,*" first rested in a place designed to hold food.

Suddenly the manger became much more than a detail in the Christmas story.

It became a promise.

From the beginning, God was declaring why His Son had come.

Just as the cattle found nourishment in the trough, all who hunger for hope, forgiveness, peace, and everlasting life would one day find their nourishment in Christ.

God has always been a God who feeds His people.

He fed Israel with manna in the wilderness.

He fed Elijah in his weariness.

He fed thousands with a few loaves and fish.

And in Bethlehem, He placed the Bread of Heaven into a feeding place so the whole world might know where true life is found.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The first bed of Jesus was also His first sermon.

Even before He could speak, the manger proclaimed that God had sent His Son to become the nourishment of the world.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Bread of Life, thank You for coming into our hungry world with humility and love. Feed my soul with Your presence. As You nourish me with Your grace, teach me to become a source of encouragement, kindness, and hope for others. May I never forget that the One laid in the manger still satisfies every longing heart. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Before your next meal, pause for a moment and remember the manger.

Offer this simple prayer:

“Lord Jesus, You are the Bread of Life. Nourish my soul today, and help me share Your life with someone else.”

The Manger

The meadow gave its golden hay,
The cattle gathered, side by side;
God’s quiet gifts, from day to day,
Were shared with all in humble stride.

A weathered trough, so plain and worn,
Held simple food for beasts to eat;
Who could have dreamed that Christmas morn
Would make that place divinely sweet?

There Mary laid her newborn Son,
No royal bed, no palace grand;
The Bread of Life for everyone
Was cradled by the Father’s hand.

The hungry came in every age,
For bread, for hope, for peace within;
Christ still invites us to His table,
To taste His grace and leave our sin.

So when I break my daily bread,
Or pause to thank God for His care,
I see the manger just ahead—
Love’s feast begins in Bethlehem there.

The Light of the World – December 23

Scripture

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”

— John 8:12

Reflection

Every morning, whether we are awake to see it or not, the sun rises.

It asks for nothing in return.

It simply does what it was created to do.

Its light slips quietly over the horizon, chasing away the darkness. Shadows retreat. Colors awaken. Birds begin to sing. A new day unfolds beneath its warmth.

We seldom stop to think about it.

We simply expect it.

Perhaps that is why Jesus chose such a familiar image when He declared, “I am the light of the world.”

The sun gives light to our eyes.

The Son gives light to our lives.

One reveals the beauty of creation.

The other reveals the heart of the Creator.

One marks the beginning of another day.

The other offers the beginning of a new life.

Long before we notice the sunrise, its light has already begun its journey toward us. In much the same way, long before we recognized Christ, He was already moving toward us in love.

Christmas reminds us that the Light of the World did not rise over Bethlehem like the morning sun.

He entered it as a child.

Quietly.

Humbly.

Almost unnoticed.

Yet from that humble beginning came a light that no darkness has ever been able to overcome.

Tomorrow we celebrate His birth.

Today, pause for a moment and watch the sun rise or remember its warmth upon your face.

Then remember the greater Light.

Perhaps the Light we almost is this:

For every dawn is a quiet promise that the true Light still shines.

And His name is Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Light that no darkness can overcome. As the sun faithfully rises each morning, remind me that Your love is just as constant. Open my eyes to Your presence, warm my heart with Your grace, and guide my steps by Your light. As Christmas draws near, prepare my heart to welcome You anew. Amen.

Today's Invitation

The next time you step outside, lift your face toward the morning light.

And say: "Thank God for the sun that warms the earth.

Thank you for the Son who has come to warm the human heart."

I receive both as gifts.

One lights my path.

The other lights my life.

The Light of the World

The morning sun climbs soft and slow,
Its golden rays the valleys fill;
It wakes the earth with gentle glow,
Yet speaks without a single thrill.

Its faithful light renews each day,
Dispelling night's uncertain fear;
It finds the weary on their way,
And whispers, "Morning now is here."

Yet brighter still than dawn's first flame
A greater Light broke through the night;
The Son of God to earth once came
To lead our hearts from dark to light.

The sun will set when day is done,
Its colors fading with the sky;
But never shall God's only Son
Withdraw His love or pass us by.

So when the morning greets your eyes
And warmth rests softly on your face,
Remember Christ, the Daystar prize,
Whose endless light is truth and grace.

Emmanuel – December 24

Scripture

“The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory...”
— John 1:14

Reflection

When I first began writing these reflections, I thought I was writing about ordinary things.

A window.

A candle.

Morning dew.

Quiet.

A pond.

The fragrance of fresh bread.

A gentle touch.

A glass of water.

I believed each one had a story to tell.

I was right.

But not in the way I first imagined.

Somewhere along the journey, something unexpected happened.

The ordinary stopped being ordinary.

It became sacred.

Not because the world had changed.

But, because my eyes had.

I found myself lingering over things I had hurried past for years.

Watching sunlight through a window.

Listening to the silence.

Holding a cool glass covered with tiny drops of condensation.

One morning, I looked at that simple glass of water...

...and I wept.

Not because there was anything extraordinary about the water.

But because, for the first time, I realized I was no longer simply looking at a glass.

I was seeing the Creator's fingerprints everywhere.

That was the moment I knew these reflections were alive.

I had not been writing about objects.

I had been writing about Emmanuel.

God with us.

God beside us.

God before us.

God behind us.

God hidden within the ordinary moments we so often overlook.

Grace rarely shouts.

It usually rustles.

It flickers in a candle.

It glistens in the morning dew.

It whispers in quiet places.

It waits beside a pond.

It rises in the aroma of fresh bread.

It reaches through the touch of another hand.

It sparkles on a glass of water.

It has been speaking all along.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

Emmanuel has never stopped walking through His creation.

The miracle is not that God occasionally visits ordinary life.

The miracle is that ordinary life has been filled with His presence all along.

Christmas is not only the celebration of His coming.

It is the awakening of our seeing.

May every candle remind you.

Every sunrise.

Every bird.

Every flower.

Every breeze.

Every quiet moment.

Every shared meal.

Every drop of water.

May they all gently whisper the same eternal truth:

Emmanuel.

God is here.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, thank You for opening my eyes to Your presence in places I once overlooked. Thank You for every ordinary moment that has become an invitation to wonder, every quiet reminder that You are with me, and every glimpse of grace that has awakened my heart. Continue to teach me to notice what You are doing all around me. May I never lose the childlike wonder of discovering You in the everyday. And when others look at my life, may they see not me, but the quiet light of Emmanuel shining through. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Before you close these devotions, pause for just a moment.

Look around the room.

Choose one ordinary object.

Do not ask what it is.

Ask instead:

“Lord...what are You trying to show me through this?”

Then carry that question into tomorrow.

The journey has not ended.

It has only just begun.

Emmanuel

The candle still will softly glow,
The morning dew will greet the day;
The quiet winds will gently blow,
The pond reflect the skies of gray.

The fragrance of the baking bread,
A flower opening to the sun;
A touch of kindness gently shared,
Will speak of Love to everyone.

The window frames another dawn,
The water sparkles in the light;

The stars still greet the coming morn,
The moon still guards the silent night.

The world has not become more dear,
Nor changed because these pages end;
We've simply learned that Christ is here,
Our Savior, Brother, Lord, and Friend.

So may our eyes remain awake,
Our hearts forever open be;
To find, in all that God will make,
His grace in quiet constancy.

For grace will seldom shout aloud,
It rustles softly through each day;
And those who learn to watch and hear,
Will never walk the same old way.

The Light we almost missed still shines,
In every gift from earth and above;
For every ordinary thing
Now whispers God's enduring love.

And when life's journey finds its end,
Beyond the setting of the sun;
We'll know the Voice we've heard all through
Was **Emmanuel**...
God with us...
Always.

The Lamb - Christmas Day

Scripture

“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, ‘Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!’”

— John 1:29

Reflection

Yesterday we stood beside the manger and whispered the beautiful name, *Emmanuel*—
God with us.

Today we linger a little longer.

The shepherds have returned to their flocks. The angels’ song has faded into memory.
The stable has grown quiet once more. Mary still treasures these things in her heart, while
Joseph watches over his young family with gentle care.

In the stillness, we notice something we may have overlooked.

There are lambs.

Perhaps they belong to the shepherds who hurried to Bethlehem after hearing the angels’
announcement. They are ordinary animals, hardly noticed amid the wonder of that holy
night.

Yet they quietly tell the rest of the story.

The Child lying in the manger did not come only to inspire us or to teach us how to live.
He came to give Himself.

Long before He carried a cross upon His shoulders, He was carried in His mother’s arms.

Long before the crown of thorns, there was the swaddling cloth.

Long before Calvary, there was Bethlehem.

The cradle and the cross were never separated in the heart of God.

That is why Christmas is more than the celebration of a birth.

It is the beginning of our redemption.

As we close this journey together, remember that the One we welcomed as Emmanuel is also the Lamb of God.

He entered our world in humility so that we might enter His kingdom in grace.

The Lamb was born.

Hope has a heartbeat.

Love has a name.

And because of Him, the story does not end at the manger.

It begins there.

Perhaps the Light we almost missed is this:

The Light is Jesus, Emmanuel.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, Lamb of God, thank You for entering our world with such humility and love. Thank You for being Emmanuel, God with us, and for becoming the sacrifice that brings us life. As this Advent journey becomes the joy of Christmas, help me to carry Your light, Your peace, and Your redeeming love into every day that lies ahead. May I never lose the wonder of the manger or the hope found in Your cross and resurrection. In Your holy name I pray. Amen.

Today's Invitation

Before the celebrations of this day come to an end, return once more in your heart to the manger.

Stay there for a moment.

Notice the Child.

Notice the quiet.

Notice the love.

Then remember:

The baby in the manger is the Lamb of God.

Receive His gift with gratitude.

Walk into the coming year with hope.

For Emmanuel is with you still.

The Lamb

The manger held no crown of gold,
No throne adorned with jeweled flame;
It cradled Love, both meek and bold,
The Lamb who quietly came.

The shepherds watched with wondering eyes,
As heaven touched the earth below;
The promised Hope from paradise
Lay wrapped in mercy's glow.

The Child whose tiny hands reached wide
Would one day bear salvation's cost;
The Lamb would gently be our guide
To seek the weak and lost.

Yet Christmas sings of more than pain,
For love has conquered fear and night;
The Lamb now lives, and shall remain
Our everlasting Light.

So kneel once more where cattle fed,
Where angels filled the sky above;
Receive the Living Bread instead,
The Lamb whose name is Love.

Epilogue

Keep Looking

The Christmas story has been told.

The angels have sung.

The shepherds have returned to their fields.

The wise men have begun their journey.

The Child has been welcomed.

Emmanuel has come.

The Lamb has been revealed.

And now...

so begins your story.

If these pages have accomplished anything, I hope it is not simply that you have enjoyed a collection of Advent reflections.

I hope they have changed the way you see.

Perhaps tomorrow morning you will pause before looking through a window.

Perhaps you will notice the quiet after a snowfall, the fragrance of fresh bread, the song of a bird, the warmth of a candle, the wonder of a sunrise, or the touch of a loving hand.

Perhaps you will look at a tear, a thumbprint, or the night sky and remember that ordinary things often carry extraordinary grace.

The world itself has not changed.

But perhaps your eyes have.

That has been my prayer from the beginning.

Not that these reflections would give you something new to believe.

But that they would help you recognize the Christ who has been walking beside you all along.

For grace rarely shouts.

It usually rustles.

So keep looking.

Keep listening.

Keep wondering.

Keep giving thanks.

And above all, keep walking with Christ.

For the journey to Bethlehem was never meant to end at the manger.

It continues wherever Emmanuel is welcomed.

May the Light of the World guide your steps.

May the Lamb of God fill your heart with hope.

And may you discover, again and again, that the ordinary moments of your life are quietly filled with the presence of God.

The reflections end here.

The pilgrimage does not.

Grace and peace be with you.

And remember:

Grace rarely shouts.

It usually rustles.

Now...

Look again.

If You'd Like to Continue the Journey...

Thank you for sharing these Advent reflections with me.

Writing has become one of the ways I continue to explore faith, grace, discipleship, hope, and the surprising places where God meets us along the road. If these devotions have encouraged you, you may also enjoy some of my other books:

The Crossroads of Discipleship

Reflections on following Christ when faith asks us to choose a road, take a step, and trust where God is leading.

Poems That Echo Grace

Poetry born from prayer, struggle, gratitude, hope, and the grace that so often finds us in ordinary moments.

The What the Donkeys Saw Series

Book One — The Weight of Heaven: No Ordinary Burden

The story of Jesus seen through an unexpected set of witnesses—the donkeys who carried, watched, waited, and discovered that no burden touched by Christ remains ordinary.

Coming Soon — Book Two: The Road Speaks: A Never-Ending Journey

The journey continues into the Book of Acts, as the good news moves beyond Jerusalem and the early church grows, widens, and discovers that the road begun with Jesus is far from finished.

Same road. A continuing story.

My published books are available through **Amazon**, with *The Road Speaks* coming soon.

There is no expectation that you purchase anything. These Advent devotions are freely offered as a gift. But if you would like to continue walking with some of the themes found here, I would be honored to have you join me on another page, another road, another part of the journey.

John Q. LeCain