The Meaning of the Manger

theFormed.life

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The Meaning of the Manger

Where on earth does God live? From the beginning pages of the Bible to the very end, God's heart to dwell among his people on his good earth reverberates with ever-increasing clarity, culminating in the remarkable crescendo of Revelation.

Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and will be their God.

- Revelation 21:3

This Advent season, join us as we explore together *the meaning of the manger* across the whole of Scripture.

As we view the manger in celebration of the birth of our Savior, we must not forget the journey that brought Emmanuel. The tree of life laden with the fruit that brought temptation and sin into the Garden of Eden leads to the establishing of the 12 wandering tribes of God's chosen people, and the creation of the temple that provided a place for God to dwell *with them*.

At long last, the hope of the faithful who waited for the Messiah is fulfilled. The birth of the Church, Christ's bride, provides true and lasting salvation for all, and we believe it is the primary context in which we are to experience the life God designed. Now, in our own time of waiting and staying faithful, we look forward to the soaring vision of the New Heavens and New Earth provided in Revelation.

Let's examine together the Scripture that showcases various ways in which God has been *Emmanuel*—God with us—on earth.

Discipline: Practicing the Presence of God

God is with us; he is not far off, he is near. The spiritual discipline of practicing the presence of God recognizes this truth, consciously acknowledging the reality that God is already present with us by his Holy Spirit.

When we practice the presence of God, we focus on cultivating a continuous awareness of God's nearness throughout every moment of life. When we realize that the mundane is actually sacred, we can commune with God in every thought, task, and interaction. By growing more mindful of *God with us*, whether through breath prayers, silent attention, or intentional acts of worship, we shift our hearts away from our own anxieties or spiritual forgetfulness and toward a loving and constant conversation with God.

“God is forming us into a new people. And the place of that formation is in the small moments of today.”

-Tish Harrison Warren, *Liturgy of the Ordinary*

How do I make the most of my journal?

01

Sign up.

This journal is a companion to theFormed.life, a place to process what you're learning through prayer, sermons, songs, and confessions. It's a place to help you capture prayer requests and questions to discuss in groups. This journal is where you record your personal story in the journey, but to receive our daily emails, please visit theFormed.life.

02

Carry it with you.

Bring this journal to church gatherings on Sundays for your sermon notes, community group gatherings, and your daily quiet time. If it's not with you, you won't use it.

03

Use it daily.

Write something in it every day. Each day there is space to capture what God is saying and doing. God wants to hear you, and sometimes we need to see our own feelings, thoughts, and desires written out to process what God is doing in our lives.

Lord Jesus Christ,

Fill me with thy Spirit that I may be occupied with his presence. I am blind—send him to make me see; dark—let him say, 'Let there be light'! May he give me faith to behold my name engraven in thy hand, my soul and body redeemed by thy blood, my sinfulness covered by the life of pure obedience. May his comforts cheer me in my sorrows, his strength sustain me in my trials, his blessings revive me in my weariness, his presence render me a fruitful tree of holiness, his stirring make me ceaseless in prayer, his animation kindle in me undying devotion. Send him as the searcher of my heart, to show me more of my corruptions and helplessness that I may flee to thee, cling to thee, rest on thee, as the beginning and end of my salvation.

Answer my prayers, O Lord, for thy great name's sake.

Adapted from *The Valley of Vision*

Emmanuel God With Us

Go tell it on the mountain
The one that we've been waiting for
The King of our salvation
Born on this day, our Savior Christ the Lord

Go tell it on the mountain
Over the hills and everywhere
That we can be forgiven
The weight of all our sin He came to bear

Emmanuel, God with us, Emmanuel, King Jesus
The Savior of the world is born

Go tell it on the mountain
Humbly in a manger lay
Mercy sent from Heaven
The angels fill the sky with highest praise

Go tell it on the mountain
This baby born of virgin birth
The ruler of all nations
The Glory of our God has come to earth

Emmanuel, God with us, Emmanuel, King Jesus
The Savior of the world is born

-Chris Tomlin

Following along with theFormed.life
(Weekly Flow)

Monday:	Silence in the Presence of God
Tuesday:	Abiding Prayer in the Presence of God
Wednesday:	Scripture in the Presence of God
Thursday:	Work in the Presence of God
Friday:	Acceptance in the Presence of God
Saturday:	Attention in the Presence of God
Sunday:	God's People in His Presence

MONDAY _/_/_

Silence in the Presence of God

READ: Genesis 2:8–14

What seemingly trivial details in this passage point to the abundance of life in God's presence?

How do you see life flowing out of God's presence in the garden into the world?

FOCUS:

Take a few minutes to sit in silence with God. Turn off music or find a location without background noise, as you are able. Approach this time as a nonverbal prayer with no pressure to actively speak with God. Sit with God while acknowledging his presence.

PRAY:

Imagine one area of your day which regularly feels rushed, burnt out, or too busy. Imagine that space while also imagining what it would feel like to recognize God's presence there with you. What would it look like to prayerfully interrupt this busy space with a few seconds of silence with God?

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Abiding Prayer in the Presence of God

READ: 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18

Prayer isn't just a formal event but a continuous attitude. The goal is to build a constant, felt awareness of God's presence throughout your daily tasks. How does seeing prayer as an ongoing conversation rather than a scheduled meeting change how you view your relationship with God?

Look up a few translations of 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (such as NIV, NLT, or CSB). Write out the various interpretations of the phrase "pray without ceasing." How do the translations help you understand the idea of abiding or continual prayer?

FOCUS:

Pick three times in your day to remind yourself to be in abiding prayer (e.g. while washing dishes, while walking to the office, before a meeting, etc.).

PRAY:

Choose one or two breath prayers from the following examples or write out your own prayers to embrace as you practice the presence of God today. A breath prayer is a rhythmic, meditative practice of connecting with God.

Examples: "Lord Jesus Christ (inhale), have mercy on me, a sinner (exhale)," "The Lord is my shepherd (inhale), I shall not want (exhale)," "Speak Lord (inhale), your servant is listening (exhale)," or "You are my strength (inhale), my soul trusts in you (exhale)."

WEDNESDAY _/_/_

Scripture in the Presence of God

READ: Genesis 3:8

Meditate on this passage by reading it in silence once and out loud a second time. What stands out to you from this passage?

Read the theFormed.life blog

FOCUS:

Read the blog on theFormed.life about this Advent series. What are the central themes or key concepts? Which ones are most interesting to you?

PRAY:

Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. We beg you to give us real understanding of what we need, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet we know that understanding and good intentions are worthless unless rooted in your graceful love. So we ask that the words of Scriptures may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts.

Origen of Alexandria

Work in the Presence of God

READ: Genesis 1:28

Part of the phrase "to subdue" or "to have dominion" over creation means to steward it and care for it. The work of caring for ourselves, others, and creation is a part of God's good design for his world from the beginning. How does engaging in this co-creative work with God function as a daily discipline for "practicing the presence of God"? Does it remind you of your identity as an agent of his ongoing will in the world?

An excerpt from *"Why Your Work Matters"* by Tom Nelson

How might your work—whether paid or unpaid—be an act of worship and a way of participating in God's ongoing creative and common good work in the world? How can you consciously acknowledge God's presence with you and through you?

FOCUS:

Take some time to consider your awareness of God's presence in your paid or unpaid work. Write down one way you currently experience God's presence. Write down one way you want to grow in awareness of his daily presence.

PRAY:

Spend time praising God for his presence with you whether or not you are aware of it in the moment. Ask him to help you truly look for ways to recognize he is always with you.

FRIDAY _/_/_

Acceptance in the Presence of God

"Transformation is actually carried out in our real life, where we dwell with God and our neighbors...we must accept the circumstances we constantly find ourselves in as the place of God's kingdom and blessing. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are."

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

READ: Psalm 42

The psalmist asks, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me?" This question acknowledges the reality of inner turmoil. How does accepting the reality of your own emotional state, even when it's painful, help you move toward a better awareness of the presence of God?

How does the psalmist remind himself of the presence of God even in the midst of difficult-to-accept circumstances?

FOCUS:

We need to accept our real circumstances to experience God's presence in them. Write down areas of "less than ideal" circumstances in your life. On top of each area you name, write "God, you are present with me here."

PRAY:

Read Psalm 139:1–12 as your prayer today, then write your own prayer in response.

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Attention in the Presence of God

"Attention is the beginning of devotion." Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays*

READ: Psalm 46

Another translation of "be still" is to "cease striving." What did the psalmist mean when he wrote "be still and know that I am God"?

What could "being still" while growing in attentiveness to God look like in a world full of noise and constant activity?

Read or listen to this poem to help practice the discipline of attention this Advent season.

FOCUS:

Reading poetry can cultivate our ability to pay attention as we slow down and savor the cadence, beauty, and detail reflected in the poet's work.

PRAY:

Use your five senses as cues to turn your attention toward God. Pick out one thing for each sense that you see, smell, taste, touch, and hear in this moment, and pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for them.

SUNDAY _/_/_

Emmanuel in the Garden

READ: Genesis 2:8–14

FOCUS:

Practice acknowledging the presence of God in the corporate gathering of his people in the worship services today.

PRAY:

Pray that you might be a means for someone else to be reminded of God's presence as you interact with others today.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY _/_/_

Silence in the Presence of God

READ: 1 Kings 8:1–9:9

In 8:22–53, what are three themes from Solomon's prayer?

FOCUS:

Take a few minutes to sit in silence with God. Turn off music or find a location without background noise, as you are able. Approach this time as a nonverbal prayer with no pressure to actively speak with God. Sit with God while acknowledging his presence.

PRAY:

Imagine one area of your day which regularly feels rushed, burnt out, or too busy. Imagine that space while also imagining what it would feel like to recognize God's presence there with you. What would it look like to prayerfully interrupt this busy space with a few seconds of silence with God?

TUESDAY

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Abiding Prayer in the Presence of God

READ: Hebrews 4:14–16

What reasons do we have to be confident that we can come boldly to God in prayer, remaining constantly in his presence without the fear or need to "clean up" before we approach him?

Jesus was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin." How does knowing that Jesus personally understands your specific struggles and weaknesses change your motivation and willingness to be honest with him as you practice his presence in prayer?

FOCUS:

Write a few sentences describing what you hope abiding prayer might look like in your life.

PRAY:

Choose one or two breath prayers from the following examples or write out your own prayers to embrace as you practice the presence of God today. A breath prayer is a rhythmic, meditative practice of connecting with God.

Examples: "Lord Jesus Christ (inhale), have mercy on me, a sinner (exhale)," "The Lord is my shepherd (inhale), I shall not want (exhale)," "Speak Lord (inhale), your servant is listening (exhale)," or "You are my strength (inhale), my soul trusts in you (exhale)."

WEDNESDAY

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Scripture in the Presence of God

READ: Exodus 40

Meditate on this passage by reading it in silence once, and read Exodus 40:34–38 out loud a second time. Write out key phrases. What stands out to you from this passage?

Watch the BibleProject video

FOCUS:

Week 2: Watch the short BibleProject video discussing the temple as a biblical theme. How do you see God's presence at work in the era of the temple, and how does this impact your understanding of his presence with you and with his people now?

PRAY:

Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. We beg you to give us real understanding of what we need, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet we know that understanding and good intentions are worthless unless rooted in your graceful love. So we ask that the words of Scriptures may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts.

Origen of Alexandria

Work in the Presence of God

READ: Exodus 31:1–5

This passage is the first time in all of Scripture that the Spirit of God fills someone–and it's a craftsman for his labor! We never do our work alone. In what areas of your daily responsibilities or workspace is it most difficult to recognize that God's Spirit is with you?

Have you ever believed that some work is more valuable to God than others? Do you believe God's presence is experienced more in some forms of work than in others? How does this passage help break down these ideas and affirm that God is equally present in all forms of honest labor?

FOCUS:

Consider your awareness of God's presence in a loved one's work. What stands out to you? Consider encouraging them with what you've noticed. For example, name some of the ways you see God using their gifts at work.

PRAY:

Spend time praising God for his presence with you whether or not you are aware of it in the moment. Ask him to help you truly look for ways to recognize he is always with you.

FRIDAY _/_/_

Acceptance in the Presence of God

"Transformation is actually carried out in our real life, where we dwell with God and our neighbors...we must accept the circumstances we constantly find ourselves in as the place of God's kingdom and blessing. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are."

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

READ: Psalm 86

David cries out that he is needy. What does it mean to accept your own state of spiritual or emotional neediness?

How can this acceptance, rather than a feeling of self-sufficiency, become the starting point for genuine prayer and an awareness of the presence of God?

FOCUS:

All of us need to accept our real circumstances to experience God's presence in our lives. Think about a loved one who is experiencing challenging times. Write down their name/circumstance followed by "God, you are present with [name]." Seize opportunities today to pray for them.

PRAY:

Read Psalm 139:7–16 as your prayer today.

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Attention in the Presence of God

"Attention is the beginning of devotion." Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays*

READ: Psalm 91:1–2

What could the psalmist mean with the phrase "dwell in the shelter of the Most High"? What images, sensations, or ideas arise from the verb "to dwell"?

Verse 2 is a declaration of faith: "I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" How does the act of verbally affirming your trust in God deepen your awareness of his presence? What does it feel like to intentionally speak these words to God when you're feeling anxious or afraid?

Read or listen to this poem to help practice the discipline of attention this Advent season.

FOCUS:

Reading poetry can cultivate our ability to pay attention as we slow down and savor the cadence, beauty, and detail reflected in the poet's work.

PRAY:

Use your five senses as cues to turn your attention toward God. Pick out one thing for each sense that you see, smell, taste, touch, and hear in this moment, and pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for them.

SUNDAY _/_/_

Emmanuel in the Temple

READ: 1 Kings 8:1–9:9

FOCUS:

Practice acknowledging the presence of God in the corporate gathering of his people in the worship services today.

PRAY:

Pray that you might be a means for someone else to be reminded of God's presence as you interact with others today.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY _/_/_

Silence in the Presence of God

READ: Luke 2:1–17

What specific, tangible details highlight the humble, unassuming, or inconvenient circumstances surrounding Jesus' birth (illustrating the humility of Jesus to be born as God in human flesh)?

What specific actions, characters, and announcements elevate the birth of Jesus beyond a normal event (pointing to the majesty and wonder of Jesus' birth as God in human flesh)?

FOCUS:

Take a few minutes to sit in silence with God. Turn off music or find a location without background noise, as you are able. Approach this time as a nonverbal prayer with no pressure to actively speak with God. Sit with God while acknowledging his presence.

PRAY:

Imagine one area of your day which regularly feels rushed, burnt out, or too busy. Imagine that space while also imagining what it would feel like to recognize God's presence there with you. What would it look like to prayerfully interrupt this busy space with a few seconds of silence with God?

TUESDAY

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Abiding Prayer in the Presence of God

READ: Philippians 4:6–7

We are called to bring our worries and concerns before God in prayer. What worry has been weighing on you, and what would it look like for you to surrender that worry to God through prayer?

Paul encourages us to make our requests known to God with thanksgiving. Why do you think he links gratitude with prayer? How does adding an element of thanksgiving change your perspective when you're asking God for help in a difficult situation?

FOCUS:

Write a reminder (e.g. on your phone or a sticky note in your calendar) for a specific time today to remind yourself to abide in prayer.

PRAY:

Choose one or two breath prayers from the following examples or write out your own prayers to embrace as you practice the presence of God today. A breath prayer is a rhythmic, meditative practice of connecting with God.

Examples: "Lord Jesus Christ (inhale), have mercy on me, a sinner (exhale)," "The Lord is my shepherd (inhale), I shall not want (exhale)," "Speak Lord (inhale), your servant is listening (exhale)," or "You are my strength (inhale), my soul trusts in you (exhale)."

WEDNESDAY

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Scripture in the Presence of God

READ: John 1:1-18

Meditate on this passage by reading it in silence once and out loud a second time. Write out key phrases in the space below. What stands out to you from this passage?

Watch the BibleProject video

FOCUS:

Watch the short BibleProject video discussing Jesus as the Word of God. How do you see God's presence at work in the incarnation of Jesus, and how does this impact your understanding of his presence with you and with his people now?

PRAY:

Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. We beg you to give us real understanding of what we need, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet we know that understanding and good intentions are worthless unless rooted in your graceful love. So we ask that the words of Scriptures may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts.

Origen of Alexandria

THURSDAY _/_/_

Work in the Presence of God

READ: Colossians 3:23–24

How does the constant awareness that your primary audience is God transform a feeling of resentment or obligation in "working for people" into a sense of honor and dedication in "working for the Lord"?

How does this shift in perspective change how you approach tasks you find boring, difficult, or unappreciated in your responsibilities or workplace?

FOCUS:

Take time to consider a past moment in your work life–paid or unpaid–when you felt the presence of God. What did you sense? How did that impact you at that moment? Invite God to show up in similar, tangible ways in your life today.

PRAY:

Spend time praising God for his presence with you whether or not you are aware of it in the moment. Ask him to help you truly look for ways to recognize he is always with you.

FRIDAY _/_/_

Acceptance in the Presence of God

"Transformation is actually carried out in our real life, where we dwell with God and our neighbors...we must accept the circumstances we constantly find ourselves in as the place of God's kingdom and blessing. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are."

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

READ: Psalm 55

The psalmist declares he will "throw" or "cast" his burden on the Lord. What does it mean to cast your burden on him?

How can you practice the discipline of accepting that you are not in control and intentionally entrust your burdens to God?

FOCUS:

We need to accept our real circumstances to experience God's presence in them. Write down areas of "less than ideal" circumstances in your life. These can be similar or different from previous weeks. On top of each area you name, write "God, you are present with me here."

PRAY:

Read Psalm 139:13–24 as your prayer today, then write your own prayer in response.

SATURDAY

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Attention in the Presence of God

"Attention is the beginning of devotion." Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays*

READ: 1 John 3:18–24

Verse 24 states that when we keep his commandments, "he abides in us, and we in him." How does the act of obeying God help you to become more attentive to his presence and abiding with him?

Read or listen to this poem to help practice the discipline of attention this Advent season.

FOCUS:

Reading poetry can cultivate our ability to pay attention as we slow down and savor the cadence, beauty, and detail reflected in the poet's work.

PRAY:

Use your five senses as cues to turn your attention toward God. Pick out one thing for each sense that you see, smell, taste, touch, and hear in this moment, and pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for them.

SUNDAY _/_/_

Emmanuel in the Manger

READ: Luke 2:1–7

FOCUS:

Practice acknowledging the presence of God in the corporate gathering of his people in the worship services today.

PRAY:

Pray that you might be a means for someone else to be reminded of God's presence as you interact with others today.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY _/_/_

Silence in the Presence of God

READ: Acts 2:1–13

What happens as a result of the Spirit of God coming to dwell with people?

How do the sounds and sights described in verses 2–4 relate to other biblical accounts of God's presence, such as at the burning bush (Exodus 3:1–15), Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16–19) or the temple (2 Chronicles 7:1–3)?

FOCUS:

Take a few minutes to sit in silence with God. Turn off music or find a location without background noise, as you are able. Approach this time as a nonverbal prayer with no pressure to actively speak with God. Sit with God while acknowledging his presence.

PRAY:

Imagine one area of your day which regularly feels rushed, burnt out, or too busy. Imagine that space while also imagining what it would feel like to recognize God's presence there with you. What would it look like to prayerfully interrupt this busy space with a few seconds of silence with God?

TUESDAY

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Abiding Prayer in the Presence of God

READ: Matthew 6:9–13

Many of us are familiar with the Lord's Prayer. Imagine you are reading it for the first time. What elements stand out as beautiful, surprising, or challenging?

The prayer shifts from focusing on God's character (hallowed be your name) and will (your kingdom come, your will be done) to our personal needs (give us...forgive us...lead us). How does centering on God's nature and purposes help align your heart with God's, transitioning from focusing on what you lack to resting in the sufficiency of his all-encompassing presence (abiding)?

FOCUS:

Write a few phrases of the Lord's Prayer to meditate on throughout your day.

PRAY:

Chose one or two breath prayers from the following examples or write out your own prayers to embrace as you practice the presence of God today. A breath prayer is a rhythmic, meditative practice of connecting with God.

Examples: "Lord Jesus Christ (inhale), have mercy on me, a sinner (exhale)," "The Lord is my shepherd (inhale), I shall not want (exhale)," "Speak Lord (inhale), your servant is listening (exhale)," or "You are my strength (inhale), my soul trusts in you (exhale)."

WEDNESDAY

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Scripture in the Presence of God

READ: Ephesians 2:19–22

Meditate on this passage by reading it in silence once and out loud a second time. Write down key phrases. What stands out to you from this passage?

Read the BibleProject blog

FOCUS:

Read the BibleProject blog "How God's Presence Came to Dwell with All His People." How do you see God's presence at work in his people now?

PRAY:

Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. We beg you to give us real understanding of what we need, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet we know that understanding and good intentions are worthless unless rooted in your graceful love. So we ask that the words of Scriptures may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts.

Origen of Alexandria

THURSDAY _/_/_

Work in the Presence of God

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12

Our daily work is a sacred space to practice God's presence. How does Paul present the value of working and leading a quiet life?

How can engaging in purposeful, quiet work be an act of worship and a way of demonstrating your love for God and others?

FOCUS:

What aspect of your paid or unpaid work makes you feel the closest to God? What makes you feel the most distant? Ask God for wisdom and opportunities for more closeness and less distance.

PRAY:

Spend time praising God for his presence with you whether or not you are aware of it in the moment. Ask him to help you truly look for ways to recognize he is always with you.

FRIDAY

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Acceptance in the Presence of God

"Transformation is actually carried out in our real life, where we dwell with God and our neighbors...we must accept the circumstances we constantly find ourselves in as the place of God's kingdom and blessing. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are."

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

READ: Psalm 57

Note the contrast between verses 6 and 7–8 in this psalm. Describe this contrast and tension in your own words.

Write out a short list of what you see David accepting and acknowledging about his circumstances.

FOCUS:

All of us need to accept our real circumstances to experience God's presence in our lives. Think about a loved one who is experiencing challenging times. Write down their name/circumstance followed by "God, you are present with [name] here." Seize opportunities today to pray for them.

PRAY:

Read Psalm 139:1–16 as your prayer today, then write your own prayer in response.

SATURDAY

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Attention in the Presence of God

"Attention is the beginning of devotion." Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays*

READ: Psalm 27

Focusing on verse 8, what are ways you could focus on "seeking God's face" this week?

The psalmist's heart immediately responds with a desire to seek God. What might be holding your heart back from that immediate, eager response? How can you cultivate a deeper desire to be attentive to God's presence, especially when you feel distracted?

Read or listen to this poem to help practice the discipline of attention this Advent season.

FOCUS:

Reading poetry can cultivate our ability to pay attention as we slow down and savor the cadence, beauty, and detail reflected in the poet's work.

PRAY:

Use your five senses as cues to turn your attention toward God. Pick out one thing for each sense that you see, smell, taste, touch, and hear in this moment, and pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for them.

SUNDAY _/_/_

Emmanuel in the Church

READ: Acts 2:1–13

FOCUS:

Practice acknowledging the presence of God in the corporate gathering of his people in the worship services today.

PRAY:

Pray that you might be a means for someone else to be reminded of God's presence as you interact with others today.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY _/_/_

Silence in the Presence of God

READ: Revelation 7:9–17

What phrases or themes stick out to you from verses 15–17?

What does the shepherding presence of God provide for his people?

FOCUS:

Take a few minutes to sit in silence with God. Turn off music or find a location without background noise, as you are able. Approach this time as a nonverbal prayer with no pressure to actively speak with God. Sit with God while acknowledging his presence.

PRAY:

Imagine one area of your day which regularly feels rushed, burnt out, or too busy. Imagine that space while also imagining what it would feel like to recognize God's presence there with you. What would it look like to prayerfully interrupt this busy space with a few seconds of silence with God?

TUESDAY

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Abiding Prayer in the Presence of God

READ: Romans 8:26–27

What does it mean for the Holy Spirit to "help us in our weakness"? Can you think of a time you wanted to pray but couldn't find the right words?

The Holy Spirit intercedes for us and the Spirit's intercession is as "groanings too deep for words." Does this bring comfort and how does this change your understanding of what prayer is?

FOCUS:

You have been practicing the presence of God through prayer throughout your day. Have you noticed yourself praying more (perhaps while waiting in line or in traffic, while walking to a meeting, etc.)?

PRAY:

Choose one or two breath prayers from the following examples or write out your own prayers to embrace as you practice the presence of God today. A breath prayer is a rhythmic, meditative practice of connecting with God.

Examples: "Lord Jesus Christ (inhale), have mercy on me, a sinner (exhale)," "The Lord is my shepherd (inhale), I shall not want (exhale)," "Speak Lord (inhale), your servant is listening (exhale)," or "You are my strength (inhale), my soul trusts in you (exhale)."

WEDNESDAY

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Scripture in the Presence of God

READ: Revelation 21:3–4

Meditate on this passage by reading it in silence once and out loud a second time. Then write out key phrases in the space below. What stands out to you from this passage?

Watch the BibleProject video

FOCUS:

Watch the short BibleProject video discussing the Holy Spirit. As the video closes, it describes the end of the story. How do you see God's presence at work in the end of our story and how does this give you hope as you live in God's presence now?

PRAY:

Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures and to meditate upon them day and night. We beg you to give us real understanding of what we need, that we in turn may put its precepts into practice. Yet we know that understanding and good intentions are worthless unless rooted in your graceful love. So we ask that the words of Scriptures may also be not just signs on a page, but channels of grace into our hearts.

Origen of Alexandria

THURSDAY _/_/_

Work in the Presence of God

READ: Isaiah 65:21–23

Isaiah presents a picture of what our work will look like in the New Creation. In what areas does your current work feel like it contrasts with this new creation picture?

How does this hope for the future of your work help you to navigate those challenges, frustrations, etc., in your current work?

FOCUS:

Consider your awareness of God's presence in your paid or unpaid work. Write down one way you currently experience God's presence. This can be similar or different from Week 1. Reflect on an area that you might grow in awareness of his daily presence.

PRAY:

Spend time praising God for his presence with you whether or not you are aware of it in the moment. Ask him to help you truly look for ways to recognize he is always with you.

FRIDAY

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Acceptance in the Presence of God

"Transformation is actually carried out in our real life, where we dwell with God and our neighbors...we must accept the circumstances we constantly find ourselves in as the place of God's kingdom and blessing. God has yet to bless anyone except where they actually are."

Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

READ: Psalm 43

How does the psalmist demonstrate that we can accept our circumstances and trust God while at the same time still question God or wrestle with him?

The psalmist expresses a deep desire to be in God's presence, to "come to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy" (43:4). How can focusing on God's presence as your "exceeding joy" help you endure and accept seasons of difficult circumstances?

FOCUS:

We need to accept our real circumstances to experience God's presence in them. Write down areas of "less than ideal" circumstances in your life. These can be similar or different from previous weeks. On top of each area you name, write "God, you are present with me here."

PRAY:

Read Psalm 139:13–24.

SATURDAY

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Attention in the Presence of God

"Attention is the beginning of devotion." Mary Oliver, *Upstream: Selected Essays*

READ: Psalm 23

The psalm ends with the proclamation that "goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." How does intentionally paying attention to the ways God has been good and merciful in the past help you to trust him for the future?

Recall one specific act of God's goodness or mercy and give thanks for it, helping you remain attentive to his goodness.

Read or listen to this poem to help practice the discipline of attention this Advent season.

FOCUS:

Reading poetry can cultivate our ability to pay attention as we slow down and savor the cadence, beauty, and detail reflected in the poet's work.

PRAY:

Use your five senses as cues to turn your attention toward God. Pick out one thing for each sense that you see, smell, taste, touch, and hear in this moment, and pray a prayer of praise and thanksgiving for them.

SUNDAY _/_/_

Emmanuel Forever

READ: Revelation 7:9–17

FOCUS:

Practice acknowledging the presence of God in the corporate gathering of his people in the worship services today.

PRAY:

Pray that you might be a means for someone else to be reminded of God's presence as you interact with others today.

SERMON NOTES:

The Meaning of the Manger

SCAN TO ACCESS

Don't forget to check out *theFormed.life* online.

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400 W 67th Street, Kansas City, MO

DOWNTOWN
208 W 19th Street, Kansas City, MO

LEAWOOD
14200 Kenneth Road, Leawood, KS

OLATHE
20600 W 119th Street, Olathe, KS

SHAWNEE
13330 W 62nd Terrace, Shawnee, KS

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10901 Lowell Avenue, Suite 290, Overland Park, KS

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ChristCommunity
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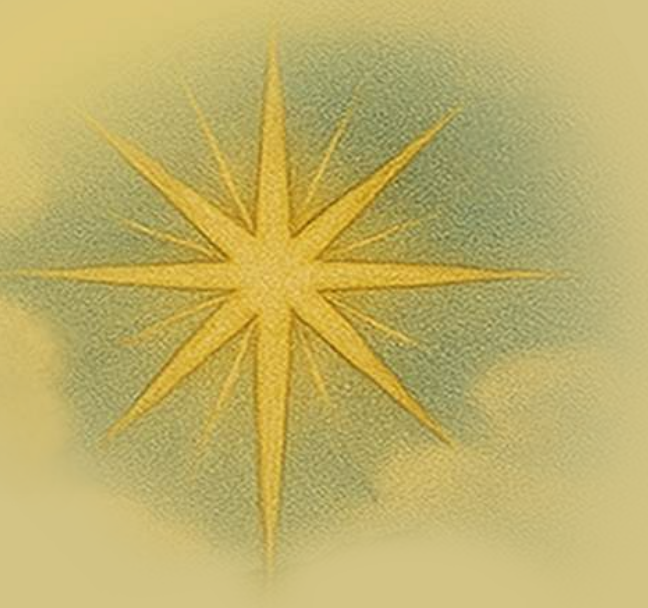

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