



ADVENT DEVOTIONALS WEEK THREE

Giving Shalom

Sunday, December 16

Video of Rhonda Styles-Rohde (<https://vimeo.com/297147270/9c8803d92b>)

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6–7 ESV)

When Barry Jones talked about Jesus as a “shalom-maker” at Triennial this past summer, he said the word *shalom* is often translated in our Bibles as peace, though a better translation would be “everything being the way that God intended it to be. Wholeness. Harmony. Flourishing.”

The thing about true shalom is that there is nothing we can do in and of ourselves to achieve it in our own lives or give it to others. Ever since Genesis 3, humanity has been living in a state of broken shalom. All that we can do is heed the word of the Lord through Jeremiah to the Israelite captives in Babylon: “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare” (Jeremiah 29:7). As we follow the way of Jesus, the Prince of Peace—Prince of Shalom—we will find ourselves seeking the welfare, or shalom, of our communities, allowing God to give a measure of shalom through us.

In this week’s video, hear the story of a group that embraced this idea of seeking shalom by partnering with a residential child care facility. After you watch the above video, look for ways today and throughout this season that you can seek the shalom of God in your life and in your city.

Monday, December 17

“And you, my little son,
will be called the prophet of the Most High,
because you will prepare the way for the Lord.
You will tell his people how to find salvation
through forgiveness of their sins.
Because of God’s tender mercy,
the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us,
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
and to guide us to the path of peace.” (Luke 1:76–79 NLT)

Since shalom is a Hebrew word, it only appears in the Old Testament, but the idea behind it—wholeness, harmony, peace—is found throughout scripture. When Zechariah prophesies in his song of praise about the morning light from heaven that will guide the people of Israel to the path of peace, he is referencing this idea of shalom, “everything the way God intended it to be.” In fact, by using this imagery, Zechariah is directly linking the coming Messiah to the reconciliation of all creation back to God. Zechariah is celebrating the work of God that is taking root in their midst.

Decades later, John would preach salvation through the forgiveness of sins and proclaim the coming of the Messiah, serving as a signpost to direct people to the One who would guide us to the path of peace, restoration, and wholeness. How can you serve as a modern-day John, directing people toward Jesus so that they might find peace? What are the works of God taking root in your midst that you can celebrate today?

Tuesday, December 18

All kings will bow before him,
and all nations will serve him.
He will rescue the poor when they cry to him;
he will help the oppressed, who have no one to defend them.
He feels pity for the weak and the needy,
and he will rescue them.
He will redeem them from oppression and violence,
for their lives are precious to him. (Psalm 72:11–14 NLT)

Written by King Solomon, Psalm 72 reads as a description of Israel's ideal king and kingdom, a hope that could only be realized in King Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven. The king described in this psalm is one who is just, righteous, and loving, who cares for his subjects and actively seeks their well-being. This king cares so much for the poor, needy, weak, and oppressed that He chose to live among them—among us. This King, and the kingdom He rules, is dramatically different from King Solomon and the kingdom he led.

We follow King Jesus, who sees our lives as precious and eagerly seeks to grant us shalom—peace, wholeness, and well-being. This alone makes Him remarkable among world leaders, but what sets Him apart from even the most caring of leaders is that all have equal access to Him, regardless of position; everyone is free to approach His throne. Read the entirety of Psalm 72 with a recognition that this hope for a king and kingdom has been realized in Jesus and the Kingdom of Heaven, contrasting this Kingdom with the kingdoms we join or make for ourselves today. Use it as the basis for a song or prayer of praise to the King of kings, who actively works toward the well-being of all of His people.

Wednesday, December 19

Out of the stump of David's family will grow a shoot—
yes, a new Branch bearing fruit from the old root.
And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
He will delight in obeying the LORD.
He will not judge by appearance
nor make a decision based on hearsay.
He will give justice to the poor
and make fair decisions for the exploited.
The earth will shake at the force of his word,
and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked. (Isaiah 11:1–4 NLT)

In his book *Mercy Streets*, author and pastor Taylor Field tells a story of a tree that he and his wife transplanted from some unwanted space into the center of their backyard in New York City. They watched this tree transform from a small weed into a growing plant, until one winter day a utility worker callously broke the tree in two just for a laugh. Field and his wife lamented the death of this tree they had cared for and nurtured since it had been a small and unwanted weed, until the next Easter morning when they looked out the window to spot a small sprig growing where the trunk had been broken. As Field says, "This little tree was becoming strong in the place that seemed like an amputation." That tree continued to thrive as it doubled and then tripled in height.

When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, he was a new Branch from the old root of David's family. Though the Davidic line had not been ended, there had been no kingdom to rule—no throne to sit on—since Judah's exile into Babylon, thus David's family had become a stump, a shadow of its former self during the glory days of a united kingdom. Jesus was a fresh sprig growing out of the stump, a branch that would become a tree even stronger, more far-reaching, and longer-lasting than the original. In a similar fashion, Jesus brings us new life where we were once dead in our sin. Is there some area of your life that would grow anew if you allowed Christ and His way to take root there? What do you need to do to allow this area to thrive under the care of Jesus?

Thursday, December 20

He shows mercy from generation to generation
to all who fear him.
His mighty arm has done tremendous things!
He has scattered the proud and haughty ones.
He has brought down princes from their thrones
and exalted the humble.
He has filled the hungry with good things
and sent the rich away with empty hands.
He has helped his servant Israel
and remembered to be merciful.
For he made this promise to our ancestors,
to Abraham and his children forever.” (Luke 1:52–55 NLT)

It would be easy to trip over some of the phrases in this passage, particularly where it refers to sending the rich away empty handed and bringing down princes. Just as with all of Scripture, it's important not to divorce the text from its context. Not only does Luke's personality shine through, but permeating every word is the culture he wrote in and to. In this case, Mary's prayer of praise is directly related to Israel's history as a captive people and how God "remembered to be merciful" by returning them from Babylon and bringing them the promised Messiah in Jesus.

The incarnation of Jesus is about the restoration of all things: not just at the internal, soul-level, but on the grand scale of history and everything in between. Jesus truly is concerned with the restoration of ALL things. God's shalom is for every corner of creation, and that is cause for celebration. What can you do today to orient your heart to ensure that you can freely and joyfully echo Mary's words: "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!" (Luke 1:46–47)?

Friday, December 21

“Look at my servant, whom I strengthen.

He is my chosen one, who pleases me.

I have put my Spirit upon him.

He will bring justice to the nations.

He will not shout

or raise his voice in public.

He will not crush the weakest reed

or put out a flickering candle.

He will bring justice to all who have been wronged.

He will not falter or lose heart

until justice prevails throughout the earth.

Even distant lands beyond the sea will wait for his instruction.” (Isaiah 42:1–4
NLT)

As Timothy Keller puts it in his book *Generous Justice*, “Most people know that Jesus came to bring forgiveness and grace. Less well known is the biblical teaching that a true experience of the grace of Jesus Christ inevitably motivates a man or woman to seek justice in the world.” The opening verses in Isaiah 42 tell us that God’s heart is to see justice ring out among the nations. If we are to actively follow in the footsteps of the Messiah, we too will seek justice where God has placed us, to follow this God-given drive to plant the seeds of shalom in our lives and in the world around us, but that cannot happen without first experiencing the grace of God in the deepest recesses of our souls.

As they kept an eye out for the coming Messiah, the people of Israel anticipated the day they would experience freedom from their oppressors, the Roman Empire, but they sought justice on their terms, not God’s. They expected a ruler to come in physical power, a king who would rule through strength and the sword, not a King who would spend His years in ministry preaching love and grace, healing the sick, and eating with outcasts and sinners.

The people of Israel were so focused on a king coming in power that many of them failed to see the grander story of grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation that God was unfolding in their midst. Is there an area of your life in which you are attempting to short circuit God at work, looking toward the end result rather than accepting the full journey God has placed in front of you?

Saturday, December 22

“Don’t be afraid, Mary,” the angel told her, “for you have found favor with God! You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be very great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. And he will reign over Israel forever; his Kingdom will never end!” (Luke 1:30–33 NLT)

Names within the Bible, especially those of children, often bear much weight within their meaning. For example, Hannah named her son Samuel, which means “heard by God,” because God heard her plea for a son in the midst of her barrenness. In the case of the incarnate Christ, the angel Gabriel told Mary to name him Jesus because it means “the Lord saves.” We often think of this salvation in terms of conquering sin and death, which it does, but there is much more to it than that.

In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard writes that Jesus “matters because of what he brought and what he still brings to ordinary human beings, living their ordinary lives and coping daily with their surroundings. He promises wholeness for their lives. In sharing our weaknesses he gives us strength and imparts through his companionship a life that has the quality of eternity.” Through living among us, Jesus shared in our weaknesses, and Jesus ultimately saves us by bringing us to a place of wholeness—shalom. It is our divine invitation to share with others what this wholeness can look like. Consider how you might, to paraphrase Jeremiah 29:7, seek the welfare of others over the weekend and beyond.