



SCRIPTURE: *I will meditate on Your precepts, and contemplate Your ways. I will delight myself in Your statutes. I will not forget your word. Psalm 119:15,16*

NOVEMBER 30TH, 2014

THOUGHT: I don't know when you generally decorate, but for me, once Thanksgiving is over, it's time to deck these halls! Here's a wild, freeing thought: whenever we choose to decorate, we don't have to drag out every single Christmas decoration we own and we don't have to buy the latest bauble. If we choose to use less, they may mean more. This year, let's use only those decorations that have true meaning for us and as we place our treasures around our homes, let's think about intentionally valuing God's word in our hearts.

ACTION: Consider donating some of your decorations to a local senior citizen center, hospital, or nursing home.

TWEETABLE: As surely as we get to choose what to collect & value in our homes, we get to choose what we collect & value in our hearts. #HeartWideOpen

DECEMBER 21ST, 2014

SCRIPTURE: *Through the Lord's mercies
we are not consumed, because His
compassions fail not. They are new every
morning; great is Your faithfulness.
Lamentations 3:22-23 (NKJV)*



THOUGHT: If your shopping list is anything like mine you have people on it who do not need a single thing. Oh, sure, some may think they'll die a slow death without this toy of that latest gadget, but they just have their needs confused with their wants. But then, we're all susceptible to that condition, aren't we? Take our "need" for approval. There's one that complicates our Christmases! It's nice when our party efforts are acknowledged and our gifts are appreciated, but it's not the approval of man we need this Christmas. The Advent we're longing for is built by acknowledging God is this moment, and the next, and the one after that.

ACTION: Today, let's think of someone we suspect might be having a hard Christmas season and leave them an anonymous gift with a note that we are praying for them.

TWEETABLE: The misguided quest of every human heart is the need to be acknowledged, but the fullest life is found in acknowledging God. #HeartWideOpen

DECEMBER 22ND, 2014

SCRIPTURE: *If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*
Galatians 5:15 (NIV)



THOUGHT: Just when you thought we weren't going there, it's time for Family Feud! Or, rather, it's not time. We can't talk about living with our hearts open to Jesus this Christmas without touching on what can potentially be the touchiest of Christmas traditions—immediate and extended family get-togethers. Regardless of how well we deal with the outside pressures of Christmas, we'll never realize our goal of honoring Jesus this Advent if we allow the sore spots in our family relationships to fester. Thankfully, our aim is also our antidote! The more we celebrate the unmerited grace we've been given, the more easily we'll be able to extend it to others.

ACTION: Let's practice proactive forgiveness ahead of potentially touchy get-togethers by dwelling on how quickly we want to be forgiven when we're at fault and asking God to help us be just as quick to forgive.

TWEETABLE: Every word or act we can't forgive is a word or act we are bound to relive. #HeartWideOpen

DECEMBER 23RD, 2014

SCRIPTURE: *...But if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. I John 1:7 (NASB)*



THOUGHT: After our family talk yesterday, I thought one last reminder of how the enemy likes to use our very desire to do what is right to create distance between us and Jesus would be timely. Let's say we've already had that family get-together and it was less than pleasant. If so, let's be super quick to confess our part in the whole mess and leave it at the throne of grace. Beware the spiritual quicksand of relying on Christ for salvation and using our evaluation of ourselves as possible merits or demerits preventing or allowing us access to His friendship. Such evaluations frustrate His grace and deny us the sweet balm of Immanuel, God with us.

ACTION: Every time we wash our hands today, let's praise Jesus who ever lives to cleanse us from sin and present us blameless in the company of His Father and ours.

TWEETABLE: Legalism's strength lies in luring us to spend time & energy evaluating me, myself, & I rather than leaning into God's grace.

#HeartWideOpen

DECEMBER 24TH, 2014 CHRISTMAS EVE

SCRIPTURE: *And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Luke 2:7*



THOUGHT: Christmas Eve. It's finally here. I don't know if you'll be reading these words early in the morning before the house erupts, or late at night after those last minute gift-wraps and kitchen details, but the fact that you've even taken the time for this devotional sobers me. I stagger before the goal of wrapping fresh words around the eternal truth of Jesus' birth. God, born as a baby, destined to die that we might live, our Refuge in this world and our Hope for the next. We might exist. We might breathe in and out, but we can never truly live without feeding on this eternal truth.

ACTION: Find a nativity set. With the baby in our hands, and our knees to the floor, let's ask God to keep stirring the good gift that is in us and never let us settle for what we know of Him.

TWEETABLE: If anything short of realizing God's intimate presence for ourselves is enough, that's all we'll ever experience. #HeartWideOpen

DECEMBER 25TH, 2014
CHRISTMAS DAY



SCRIPTURE: *But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.” Luke 2:9-14*

THOUGHT: Merry Christmas! Thank you so much for sharing the miracle of Advent with me. Before we say goodbye, I want to remind us both that the true miracle of Christmas has just begun. We need not be one bit brave to cede ground to the familiar, to settle back into an indistinguishable Christian life, but we'll need courage to relax our hold on everything familiar and ask Him to keep showing up in our lives without setting conditions for what that will look like. We can do it. He is worthy. Let's seek Him together, forever. This God Man isn't meant to be a part of our lives, He is our life.

ACTION: Let's take the seed from a piece of fruit and set it where we'll see it again. May it remind us each time that our birth in Christ is just that, a birth, a seed, a divine starting place without a finish line.

TWEETABLE: God has allotted to each a measure of faith. The question isn't "What's wrong with my measure?" but "What will I do with my measure?!"
#HeartWideOpen