

Filling the God- Shaped Void

A Book of
DAILY MEDITATIONS

PENNY MARY HAUSER, MSN

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First Edition

Dedication

To Linda, a spiritual hero,
who lives in the promises of Christ

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Acknowledgments

As is often said in these meditations, the Holy Spirit nudges, teaches, inspires, grounds us, and provides all good things in our lives. The Spirit comes into our lives through amazing circumstances and amazing people. My deepest thanks go to Ivy for the gentle nudges; to Joe for the teaching and grounding in my daily journey of faith; to Karen for the edits and “messing around” with the words. This book never would have happened without each of you. Blessings.

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Introduction

*"There is a God-shaped void in the heart of every man
which cannot be filled by any created thing but only by God,
the Creator, made known through Jesus Christ."*

—BLAISE PASCAL 1623–1662

Thanks for picking up this book. What you'll soon realize is that this is not a book filled with answers. This is a book that considers ideas, conversations, and questions that strive to reassure and challenge us about the everyday anxieties of our lives. The readings attempt to share thoughtful perspectives on our day-to-day challenges as spouses, parents, employees—ordinary people searching for a closer relationship with Christ.

The readings are structured in fifty-two weeks. These weeks loosely follow the various parts of the Church year. But because Easter, for example, is a movable feast and Christmas falls on different days of the week, there is no absolute calendar to follow here. Rather, you'll find certain themes and challenges central to strengthening our relationship with God throughout the entire year. The themes touch on such topics as transforming our lives, empowerment through the Holy Spirit, and God's promises. Because of my personal journey and my work in the field of addiction, I also emphasize the challenges of recovery. Since we all have addictions, attachments, and priorities that interfere with our journey toward Christ, please translate *addiction* to any of your own challenges.

You can pick any week to begin your reading. Each week starts with a brief Scripture quote that focuses the week. The Scripture quote is followed by a Sunday devotion. These Sunday

devotions come from the many discussions I've had over the years at church, in Bible studies, from my readings and personal reflections. The Monday-through-Saturday meditations consider how the Scripture readings and Sunday devotions pertain to and intersect with our lives. How do we move into a meaningful life centered through Jesus Christ in a relationship with God—a relationship in which we trust his promise to always be with us; and how do we respond to his promise of forgiveness and peace?

My prayer for you as you consider these readings is that the Spirit of God will enliven your faith, strengthen your trust, and increase your love for God. May the empowerment of the Holy Spirit also increase your love for all the people who intersect with your life as you journey toward filling the God-shaped void and experiencing the abundant life God promises.

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Week 1:

Epiphany: A Different Way Home

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."—MATTHEW 2:1–2

Sunday • Shortly after the beginning of the New Year comes Epiphany, which has to do with revelation, with manifestation. But manifestation of what? As one of the hymns points out, "God in man made manifest." God comes in human form.

The Wise Men followed the star and visited the Christ Child. In doing this, they encountered God in this infant named Jesus. They knelt and were face-to-face with God.

One of the things I find really interesting about this incident is how the Wise Men returned by a different way, by another route. The point of application to our lives is obvious. We have just celebrated Christmas—the remarkable story of God in a manger; but if we go back the same way, if it left us unchanged in direction and goals and behavior and speech, then why did we bother coming in the first place? Why did we celebrate Christmas? Was it to find a different way home to God?

If we wise men and wise women come to Jesus' manger with open hearts and willingness to give ourselves to Christ, we will find peace. No matter what we bring with us—sin and guilt, worries and anxieties, all our weaknesses and defeats—we will receive an epiphany, a revelation. We will know we are forgiven. We will not go away empty-handed!

Monday • The feast of Epiphany falls on the first Sunday after January 1. I celebrated Epiphany one year with a friend who had recently dealt with the illness and death of her husband. The Christmas tree and the manger were still up in the church, and the figures of the Wise Men were placed close to the manger but not quite there yet. For this friend, the whole season of Christmas felt like it had not occurred, and she was confused as to why the celebration was still going on.

That happens for a lot of us. Once Christmas day is over, the tree comes down and we begin preparing for New Year's parties, football, skiing, and fun. We forget the Greatest Birthday Party ever celebrated and what it might mean in our lives.

On this first week of the New Year, let's spend some time looking at what Christ's birth might mean in our lives. Does it make any difference?

Tuesday • At this Epiphany service with my friend, the priest invited the children to the altar to move the Wise Men up to the manger. Before allowing them to move the figures, he asked the children, "Who is in the stable?" The usual answers of "Mary and Joseph and the angels and the shepherds" were given. And then one little girl said, "I was there." Isn't that one of the most remarkable responses you've ever heard? A parent or grandparent or teacher had presented such a clear picture of the miracle of Christ's birth that this little girl actually saw herself in that scene. She, like all young children, knew the importance of her own birthday, so naturally Christ's birthday would have been the Greatest Birthday Party ever! And she just knew she had been there.

Were you at the Birthday Party? Was it real for you?

Wednesday • In this first week of the New Year, many of us make a couple of resolutions going forward. Maybe we wrote them down. Maybe we just said them to ourselves in secret. Sharing resolutions is hard because it makes them more real. And if they're real, that means we have to make an effort to keep them. Many of my resolutions are around living more healthfully, losing weight, exercising more, eating better. All of these are reasonable and certainly pertain to using the gifts of our body and health in a way God intends for us to use them.

Some of our resolutions are more spiritually based. At some level we know we want God more present in our lives. We have just witnessed and celebrated Christmas. God became manifest in our lives! A "manifest" for a ship or for an airplane is a document bearing all the names of the passengers who are present on that craft. God being "manifest" in our lives means our names are on Christ's document that says, "I am born into your life, not just at Christmas, but every day of your life."

As you think about resolutions, can you consider ones that would help you know the presence and power of God in your life? Will that knowledge make a difference in your daily decisions?

Thursday • The Wise Men arrived at the stable with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Expensive gifts. What do we have that could possibly measure up? As we talked about in the Sunday devotion, what Christ amazingly wants as gifts is our shame, our guilt, our anxieties, our weaknesses, and our defeats. He wants us to turn those burdens over to him. He will change them into forgiveness, peace, and strength. He promises to take the sadness and weariness we are carrying and exchange them for his joy and energy. That is what is celebrated in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Christ. He forgives us and gives us a life of grace...a life free to know we are beloved. If we are open to the Spirit, if we listen deeply to the whisper of

what is being revealed to us daily, then we will know that God is manifest—present—in our lives.

What gift do you have to give to the Christ Child? What sadness, what burden? Is it your anger, your lying, your addictions? Can you pray for openness to God's promise of a new life in this new year?

Friday • The Wise Men had traveled a long way, watching the night skies, until they found their way to the King of the Jews. They were changed by what occurred at the stable as they presented their gifts and worshiped the Christ Child. They were warned in a dream to return to their country by another route, so they changed their direction. Maybe it was for their own safety. Maybe it was to confound the jealous Herod and protect the Child. Their dreams warned them.

Have you ever had a revelation? Mine seem to come very slowly. It seems to take me a long time to recognize a whisper or a warning to change direction. But ultimately when I listen, when my heart is open, when I am more willing to give myself over to Christ, he gives me a new direction; he shows me a different way home to him. But I am the one who has to leave all my unnecessary baggage behind and take that trip.

What differences do you really want in your life? What new routes do you wish to travel? What has to happen for you to set out in the new direction? How will you do that? How will you pray to know God is with you?

Saturday • Taking a different way means we have to get a new map or set our GPS for another destination. And we might think, as Alice did when she searched for Wonderland, “How will I get there if I don’t know where I’m going?” It takes creativity and determination.

Taking a different way requires planning. On a new trip, do

we even know where we are going? We have to consider new data and be willing to change our plans. We might have to contact other people along the way, figure out new places to stay, different places to eat, and where to get gas. We think about who to contact for support along the way. On our different way home to God, we will need to be fed and filled spiritually. We might need friendly folks to give us directions. And it's very important to stop along the way to evaluate the progress we are making. We might miss so much if we skip steps or drive too fast.

Our relationship and our connection with God are what make this trip possible. He gives us the strength to continue on this new route. We don't do it ourselves. We don't have to. He promises to be with us...the whole way.

Where are you going? What specific plans do you have to make on your new way home to God? What trusted people can you go to for support? How will your prayer life keep you connected with God?

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