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ADVENT *and*
CHRISTMAS
WISDOM
— *from* —
G. K. CHESTERTON

Daily Scripture and Prayers Together
With G. K. Chesterton's Own Words

The Center for the Study
of C. S. Lewis and Friends

*Compilation, Prayers, and Actions by
Thom Satterlee and Robert Moore-Jumonville*



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DAY 1

The Gift of Hope

It is currently said that hope goes with youth, and lends to youth its wings of a butterfly; but I fancy that hope is the last gift given to man, and the only gift not given to youth. Youth is pre-eminently the period in which a man can be lyric, fanatical, poetic; but youth is the period in which a man can be hopeless. The end of every episode is the end of the world. But the power of hoping through everything, the knowledge that the soul survives its adventures, that great inspiration comes to the middle-aged; God has kept that good wine until now. It is from the backs of the elderly gentlemen that the wings of the butterfly should burst.

CHARLES DICKENS: LAST OF THE GREAT MEN

HOPE IN THE GOSPEL

In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.

COLOSSIANS 1:3–6

PRAYER

God of hope, Giver of hope, help us in our hopeless moments. Turn our hearts and minds to the promise of the gospel, to your dear Son, Jesus Christ. Strengthen our faith in what we have heard. Especially in our troubles, remind us of our true home with you in heaven. Help us to hope for eternal life with you.

ADVENT ACTION

Make a list of the things you are currently hoping for. This may include advancement in your career, the success of an important relationship, the completion of a project, or any number of things. When you have finished the list, look over it. Circle one item and say a brief prayer for God's help in bringing this about. If praying feels uncomfortable, consider whether the item you have chosen is something you should hope for. Ask God for clarity. Resolve to hope for those things that bring you closest to God.





DAY 2

Delightful Bulbous Heads

The fascination of children lies in this: that with each of them all things are remade, and the universe is put again upon its trial. As we walk the streets and see below us those delightful bulbous heads, three times too big for the body...we ought always primarily to remember that within every one of these heads there is a new universe, as new as it was on the seventh day of creation. In each of those orbs there is a new system of stars, new grass, new cities, a new sea.

THE DEFENDANT

LITTLE CHILDREN

Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.” And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.

MATTHEW 19:14–15

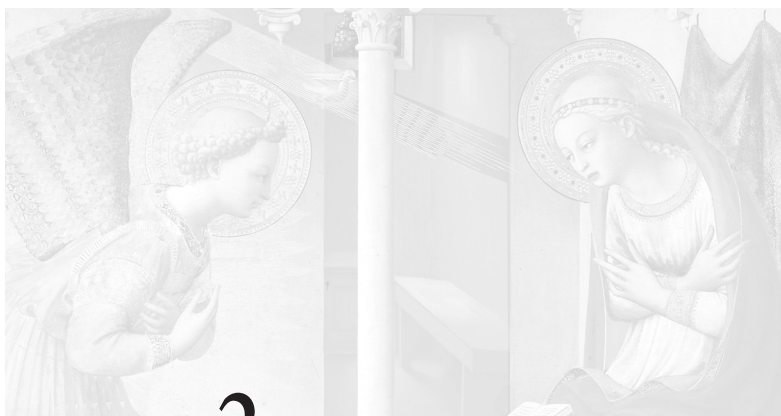
PRAYER

Jesus, you loved children and welcomed them to you. Help us to find their qualities in ourselves—the wonder, the openness, the delight in living—and we will offer you thanks for the love you fill us with. May we, too, walk in the kingdom of heaven.

ADVENT ACTION

If you are around children today, observe their behavior. Consider why Christ said that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. As Christ laid his hands on the children, look for a way that you can show gentleness to a child. What word of encouragement might you speak? What obligation can you give up to spend time with a child?





DAY 3

Soaking in Solitude

I can recall in my childhood the continuous excitement of long days in which nothing happened; and an indescribable sense of fullness in large and empty rooms. And with whatever I retain of childishness (and whether it be a weakness or otherwise, I think I retain more than most) I still feel a very strong and positive pleasure in being stranded in queer and quiet places in neglected corners where nothing happens and anything may happen; in unfashionable hotels, in empty waiting-rooms, or in watering-places out of the season. It seems as if we needed such places, and sufficient solitude in them, to let certain nameless suggestions soak into us and make a richer soil for the subconsciousness.

ON "THE THRILLS OF BOREDOM," *ALL IS GRIST*

QUIET MY SOUL

*O LORD, my heart is not lifted up,
my eyes are not raised too high;
I do not occupy myself with things
too great and too marvelous for me.
But I have calmed and quieted my soul,
like a weaned child with its mother;
my soul is like the weaned child that is with me.*

*O Israel, hope in the LORD
from this time on and forevermore.*

PSALM 131

PRAYER

Lord, I am weak. I am distracted. I am restless. Unless you intervene, Lord, I shall always be this way. Give me, Lord, greater thirst for you—that I might love you in all things and above all things; that I might still my soul in your presence; that I might stay quiet long enough for you to whisper to me. Give me your peace, Lord, your peace that the world cannot comprehend.

ADVENT ACTION

Try some form of contemplative prayer this week. One way is to choose a word that reflects what you feel you need from God right now (one syllable is best): *peace*, *love*, *strength*. Get comfortable in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. When thoughts come crashing in, repeat the word silently to yourself as a symbol of your intention to sit adoringly in God's presence. The point is not to "get" something out of this time of silence, though



you may find yourself more relaxed afterward. One of the main functions of contemplative prayer is spiritual detoxification: letting go of the junk that clogs our souls. Try the one word (centering prayer) method for a few days. Another option is to focus on a mental image (or icon). A third option is to repeat slowly and lovingly the Jesus Prayer (either silently or aloud): “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”





DAY 4

Fundamental Fact of Being

There is at the back of all our lives an abyss of light, more blinding and unfathomable than any abyss of darkness; and it is the abyss of actuality, of existence, of the fact that things truly are, and that we ourselves are incredibly and sometimes almost incredulously real. It is the fundamental fact of being, as against not being; it is unthinkable, yet we cannot unthink it, though we may sometimes be unthinking about it; unthinking and especially unthanking. For he who has realized this reality knows that it does outweigh, literally to infinity, all lesser regrets or arguments for negation, and that under all our grumblings there is a subconscious substance of gratitude.

CHAUCE

IN THE BEGINNING

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

JOHN 1:1–5

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you are the light that shines in the darkness. Remind us to turn to you, to call out to you, when we feel we're being swallowed by darkness, by doubts, by troubles and frustrations. Thank you for the very fact of our being.

ADVENT ACTION

Chesterton tells us that “under all our grumblings there is a subconscious substance of gratitude.” Pay attention to the remarks you make to family, friends, and coworkers today. Try to turn one would-be grumble into an occasion for thanks.



DAY 5

Appreciation

The aim of life is appreciation; there is no sense in not appreciating things; and there is no sense in having more of them if you have less appreciation of them.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

LEARNING CONTENTMENT

I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

PHILIPPIANS 4:11b–13

PRAYER

Lord, may we learn what it means to appreciate what we do have instead of constantly stewing over what we do not have. Teach us this secret of contentment that Chesterton and the Apostle Paul knew so well.

ADVENT ACTION

Find an ordinary object that you already own and truly value. The object may be as commonplace as a handbag or pair of boots, as homey as a basket or bowl, as symbolic as a book or soccer ball. Place this object as the centerpiece on your table or in a prominent place where you will notice it frequently. Each time it comes to your attention, consider a new way of appreciating it, thanking God for its qualities and the joy it brings you.

