# `SACRED QUESTIONS

**365 DAYS** of responding to God

{KELLYE FABIAN}

A Transformative Journey model

# SACRED QUESTIONS CHRISTMAS

by Kellye Fabian

**15-DAY ADVENT READING PLAN** 

God designed Scripture to speak to us, to speak to you and to me, to speak to each of us—daily and deeply. We often don't hear from God daily or deeply because we are afraid to listen to the sacred questions God's Word provokes in us as we read. Instead of listening to those sacred questions, we too easily skirt and suppress and slide away from the deep questions the Bible provokes. But Kellye Fabian designs this book with pastoral sensitivity and theological depth to permit those questions, then to listen to those questions, and finally to seek answers by listening to what God is saying in his ever-new-and-fresh Word. *Sacred Questions* is designed to promote sacred faith seeking sacred understanding.

SCOT MCKNIGHT, Julius R. Mantey Chair of New Testament, Northern Seminary

Kellye has been a friend for years, and I've had the privilege of being guided by both her questions and her prayers many times in those years. Kellye's intelligence and depth and creativity shine through every page, and I'm so delighted that her gentle and wise questions and prayers have now been captured in a format that will allow so many people to experience their transformative power.

SHAUNA NIEQUIST, author of five books, including Present over Perfect and Savor

A significant crisis in contemporary Christianity is our difficulty relating Scripture to life. What we lack isn't information but integration. Kellye Fabian knows the power of good questions. They invite honesty, wonder, and a loving response to what is most real. If you have the courage to ask the questions in this book, it will change your life.

MARK SCANDRETTE, director of ReIMAGINE: A Center for Integral Christian Practice; author of *Free*, *Practicing the Way of Jesus*, and *Belonging and Becoming* 

Kellye's love of the Bible and spiritual disciplines shines bright everywhere she goes—including here!

MARGARET FEINBERG, author of Taste and See

Each morning for the past four years, Kellye Fabian's devotions have been feeding my soul, reminding me how to slow down, guiding me into prayer with the Father, and helping me walk deeply with Jesus and receive all that the Holy Spirit has for me. When you dive into *Sacred Questions*, come expecting to be

pastored and empowered, guided and equipped through the use of Scripture, story, prayer, and reflection on how to live your one and only life in response to our great God.

STEVE CARTER, speaker, author of This Invitational Life

When a smart woman chases after the Lord, a book like this is born. Kellye ushers us right into the throne room, with grace and humble confidence. This book is a lifetime companion.

TRICIA LOTT WILLIFORD, author of You Can Do This

*Sacred Questions* is unique in the "devotional" space. Where many devotionals leave you pondering the words of the author, *Sacred Questions* leaves you pondering God's Word—and God himself. Kellye Fabian is a masterful guide who takes you into God's presence, then gracefully removes herself and leaves you alone with your Father.

KEITH FERRIN, author, speaker, biblical storyteller

I've always been drawn to reflective people who ask probing questions, which is why I fell in love with *Sacred Questions* immediately. Kellye Fabian is a seasoned and trusted guide for anyone who wants to enter a holy dialogue with God that will transform them from the inside out.

STEVE WIENS, pastor, author of Beginnings and Whole

The questions we ask define our future. Like large doors swinging on small hinges, the questions we ask unlock new journeys, holy conviction, and unexpected destiny. Kellye Fabian has a unique gift with the most perceptive and illuminating questions. In her book *Sacred Questions*, Kellye will gently guide you on a journey that will inevitably lead you to new doors of discovery.

DARREN WHITEHEAD, DMin, senior pastor of Church of the City and author of *Holy Roar* (coauthored with Chris Tomlin)

TO SISTER FLORENCE, you saw my gift for writing.

TO MY SWEET JAMIE, you're the Rory to my Lorelai.

> TO STEVE, your love heals me.



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# Introduction

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart. RAINER MARIA RILKE

God's Word has not done its complete work until it evokes an answer from us. EUGENE PETERSON

**MY SPIRITUAL JOURNEY** began with a question: "Why don't I have faith?"

I wrote those words in my brand-new Bible in 2005, right in the middle of what I now call "the dark years." "Why don't I have faith?" was not an intellectual question; it was a cry for help.

Of course, from an outsider's perspective, my life probably looked fine. I was a successful trial lawyer at a firm in Chicago. I owned a house and car. I flew first class all over the country. I drank the best wine. I had all the things that defined a "successful life." But on the inside—in my heart and mind—I was a mess. Just a couple of years earlier, I had gotten divorced. My heart was broken—not because of anything my husband had done, but because I just didn't know who I was or what my life was supposed to be about. I had a beautiful daughter, and I loved her more than I thought possible. But those years were filled with loneliness and emptiness. I was on a desperate (and often destructive) search to discover who I was and if I was worthy of being loved.

Perhaps because I had spent years asking questions as a lawyer, my first thought about faith was a question. I couldn't shake that thought after reading Romans 12:3: "By the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you" (NIV). If the Bible was true (and at that point I didn't know if it was) and God had given each person some amount of faith, why hadn't I received any?

Without knowing it, my question began what would become the most transformative spiritual practice of my life: asking questions as I read the Bible and sitting with those questions in God's presence, not as a way to receive answers but as a way to be changed. In other words, in that first question, I wasn't really seeking an answer to why I didn't have faith. I was seeking to know God, to believe him, and to trust him—to *have* faith.

As I reflect back, I can see that God has used this practice of asking questions to show me who he is, allow me to see myself more clearly, break patterns of sin, grow in forgiveness and love, and join his work in the world. Most days, I'm walking around with a question in my heart and mind that arose during my time reading Scripture that morning. For example, *Why did that verse cause such anxiety in me? What's getting in the way of my forgiving that person? Why did those words stand out so much when I read them? What people and practices in my life help me live with more joy and patience?* 

I want to invite you into this daily practice of asking sacred questions. It has been transformative and life giving for me, and I think it can be for you, too. Asking sacred questions opens a holy dialogue with the loving, ever-present God who is at once holding all things together and dwelling within us. Instead of doing all the talking, we learn how to listen for what God is saying. We all long for space to hear him, to allow ourselves to receive his love, and yet we often either fail to make the time or are unsure how to do it (and maybe a little of both). Jesus calls us to come to him in our weariness, with our burned-out selves and broken hearts. He calls to us in our greatest triumphs and most devastating mistakes. Yet in our busyness, our brokenness, our pain, or even in just the fullness of life, we resist this invitation. We forget that he desires us to remain in him, and we forget to turn to him. We forget we are in a relationship. We forget that it is in God that we live and move and have our being.

My prayer is that this book will help you respond to Jesus' invitation over the next year—that you can enter into a holy space in which you become attuned to his voice as he encourages, loves, trains, comforts, heals, challenges, and transforms you. And I pray that responding to his invitation allows you to draw closer to him and live every day with your heart and eyes lifted to him, and your hands outstretched to the world.

### HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

The book is divided into twelve primary sections (and one each for Christmas and Easter), each covering a topic that shapes our relationships with God, ourselves, and others. In the broadest sense, the book will lead you on an intentional journey of transformation from the inside out.

The first four topics—responding to Jesus' invitations, opening to God's love, knowing the one you follow, and finding your identity in Christ—are meant to ground your heart, mind, and soul in the truth that in Christ, you are unendingly loved and unshakably secure. The next two topics—abiding in God in a world of distractions and being formed by what's true—begin the outward movement, as you will confront the things that try to dislodge you from the truth that you are loved and secure. These sections help you learn to rest in God even as the world tosses you around.

The next five topics—loving like Jesus, opening your eyes to the Kingdom of God, aligning with the Holy Spirit, lamenting your pain and the pain of the world, and worshiping God for the beauty of creation—turn your eyes, ears, and heart outward to join in the redemptive work God is doing in the world.

Finally, in the last primary section—for the sake of others—you will allow your life to speak and reflect your relationship with Jesus, doing good in the world with the Holy Spirit's help and inviting others into the life Jesus has granted you.

The sections vary in length, each including seven to fifty-six days of daily practices. My recommendation is to start at the beginning and take this formative one-year journey. But if a particular topic resonates deeply with your current season, you can engage the sections in whatever order you choose.

### THE DAILY PRACTICE

Reading the Scripture is vital for transformation as you walk through this book. The words of God are not study material but food for your soul. Read slowly, savoring the words as if they were coming from the mouth of a close friend or spouse. You may be tempted from time to time to skip the Scripture and go straight to the questions. Of course, any engagement with God matters, so be gracious to yourself. But no human words carry the transformative power of God's words. Although the questions in each section are provocative and compelling, they are transformative only if the power of the Holy Spirit carries them into your heart. So if you are short on time or attention on a particular day, just read the Scripture and trust that even if you are distracted or uninterested, God will continue to work in you.

The Scripture each day is taken from the New Living Translation, but you can use whatever version of the Bible you are most comfortable with and in whatever form best suits you. Maybe you need a physical Bible on your lap, or perhaps you prefer to use an app or website such as YouVersion or BibleGateway. In most sections, the Scripture reading is followed by a short paragraph designed to increase understanding of the context of the verses or to highlight a particular aspect of the passage.

Asking sacred questions each day is meant to help you reflect on what God revealed as you read. Examine your thoughts, attitudes, and actions in his presence and with his guidance. The questions are meant not to merely increase your biblical knowledge but to reveal the state of your soul, allowing you to partner with God as he shapes, heals, and transforms you.

Finally, prayer is a vital component of each daily practice. Spend time opening yourself to God's guidance, thanking him, asking him to transform you in the ways you need and to send you out into the world as an embodiment of his love and grace.

### A WAY TO BEGIN

Perhaps you have been walking with God for a long time and know exactly how to bring your body, mind, and heart into awareness of his loving presence. Wonderful! In that case, let your holy conversation begin! If you're not sure how to dive in or you're looking for a new approach, here's a guide.

### Place

Find one place where you can sit every day and seek to hear from God. Maybe it's your favorite chair or spot on the couch. Maybe it's the train on your way to work. Or maybe it's a plastic chair at a coffee shop. What matters is that, as much as possible, you go to the same location each day. You will find that this consistency will allow you to be more open and less distracted. You will spend less energy adjusting to the environment and have more brain space to engage with God. In Luke 22:39, we learn that it was usual for Jesus to go to the Mount of Olives to pray. Jesus practiced going to a particular place to meet with God.

### Posture

Approach your daily practice with an open heart and open hands. So often we read the Bible with an agenda. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but this should not be the only way we read the Bible. When we do this, we are seeking to impose our plans or are looking for specific information.

A slight shift in your posture and approach can lead to much more than answers and information. As you sit down to reflect on the Scriptures each day, open your hands. Showing with our bodies an openness to God's agenda and his desire for us, we are more likely to experience transformation.

### Plan

Before you begin this book, decide how you will read through it. Will you begin with the first section and read straight through, or will you start with a segment that feels relevant to a particular struggle you're navigating? Each daily practice should take about twenty minutes. You can always spend more time on a certain daily practice depending on how deeply you allow yourself to engage the sacred questions. Of course, you don't need to be overly rigid if you feel God leading you elsewhere, but it's good to have a plan so you're spending more time reading and reflecting and less time deciding what to read.

### Presence

Our lives are filled with distractions, and some of us find it a challenge to be fully present with another person. Our smartphones have become appendages, so we are constantly tempted to be somewhere other than where we are. If you can, allow yourself to be fully attentive to God and expectant about encountering his presence. This may end up being the most challenging aspect of engaging in this daily practice. How do you stay present, and what do you do when you get distracted? Here are four helpful tips:

- 1. Harness your phone. If you'll be tempted to check Facebook, your email, the weather, or your calendar, put your phone in another room and silence your ringer.
- 2. Set a timer to ring when your allotted daily practice session is almost up. This allows you to be fully present in your daily practice without having to keep checking the clock.
- 3. Download distracting thoughts. Keep a note card next to you, and when tasks and to-dos flood your mind, write them down so you can return to them later.
- 4. Re-center yourself. If you notice that your mind has run away and you're no longer present, simply re-center yourself by speaking the opening prayer for the day or another short prayer that helps return your attention to God.

### Pen and Paper

When we seek to focus our minds, hearts, and bodies, remembering we are in God's loving presence, God will speak love and grace and truth into our hearts. He will remind us who he is; he will remind us who we are in Christ. He will illuminate in our hearts and lives the things that do not reflect Christlikeness. He will begin to soften us toward others, friends and enemies alike. He will transform our desires to match his. He will heal us, guide us, and invite us into his restorative work in the world.

But this is a slow process. You can go days without feeling a particular revelation or change in the moment. For this reason, I highly recommend keeping a pen and paper nearby so you can write down and reflect on whatever insights and thoughts you have as you journey through this book. Often we don't notice the slight, slow shifts in our souls and ways of thinking except in retrospect. So write in your Bible, in this book, in your journal-whatever works best for you and allows you to return to your notes later and see how God has worked. Try to stay in touch with how you're feeling as you read and reflect and pray.

### A BLESSING

Now, as you begin, may you know the presence of the Holy Spirit in your every breath, the lavish love your heavenly Father has for you as you are, and the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the one for whom all things were created and in whom all things hold together.



Waiting for the Coming Christ

**EVERY CHRISTMAS FOR** at least the past fifteen years, my friend Becky has been organizing an event on the south side of Chicago for kids who live in a shelter that houses battered and abused women and their children. Most of the children are younger than ten years old and have already suffered enough for a lifetime. But on this day, Becky, along with a group of volunteers of which I have been a part for nearly all of those fifteen years, brings hearty home-cooked food and a gift for every one of the fifty to sixty kids there. Because of the coordination Becky does in advance, each present is handpicked for the particular child, and the gifts include both a toy or fun item and a winter coat or other practical item.

From the outside, this event may look like any other event that occurs around Christmastime, with no tie to Jesus himself or the meaning of Christmas. It might appear to be locked into the cultural imagination of Christmas as a consumeristic extravaganza. But if you could be present at the events, you would detect something utterly different going on under the surface. You see, after we eat (the volunteers serve the women and children), each child is called up by name near the Christmas tree. For years Marcus, a volunteer, would call out, "Tyler! Come on up! Merry Christmas. Let's all give a clap for Tyler!" All those gathered in the shelter would clap and cheer, as if to say, "We see you, Tyler! We love and value you!" Child after child would be called up to receive a gift and a cheer. Each one would turn back to his or her mom with joy and delight.

Christmas is God's "I see you! I love and value you!" to humanity. Historically, Christmas was the beginning—from our perspective—of the revelation that "all of God's promises have been fulfilled in Christ with a resounding 'Yes!" (2 Corinthians 1:20). Now Christmas is the day we celebrate the actual historical event in which the eternal Word of God came to earth in a human body to be with his creation and experience what it means to live in a vulnerable, aging, limited body. In other words, he didn't seek to help us from afar; he came close. God became flesh and "moved into the neighborhood," as Eugene Peterson would say (John 1:14, MSG), in order to show us how to live, to suffer alongside us by going through all that we experience in a body, and then to redeem and restore us. This was God's promise and purpose all along. Now we are waiting for Christ to return and finally and fully bring God's Kingdom on earth.

But we are not simply idle during this time, waiting out our hours on earth so we can make it somewhere else. We actually get to participate in what God is doing to redeem and restore the world. We get to say to Tyler and all the little boys and girls like him, "I see you! I love and value you!" because we have been given the Holy Spirit to guide and empower us to be like Jesus in the world. Each time I think of this, it astounds me. Of course, we get to say way more than even just "I see you! I love and value you!" We get to say that the Creator of all things loves and sees each individual person around us, so much so that he acted in a spectacular way—through Jesus Christ—to bring them into new life to be with him, living in light and power and love. We wait for Christ to return, and as we do, we get to join in God's work: "Through Christ, our 'Amen' (which means 'Yes') ascends to God for his glory" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

This fifteen-day section will focus on the truth that God came to be with us—to say yes to us—in a body. This body started as a helpless baby and then grew into a toddler, then a young prepubescent boy, then a teenager, and finally a man. The invitation in this section is to open ourselves to discovering what it means for us that God was embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, especially in a season marked so deeply by consumerism and non-Christian tradition.

### DAY 1

### A SON IN A MOTHER'S WOMB

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

#### a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ LUKE 1:26-38 .

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a village in Galilee, to a virgin named Mary. She was engaged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of King David. Gabriel appeared to her and said, "Greetings, favored woman! The Lord is with you!"

Confused and disturbed, Mary tried to think what

the angel could mean. "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!" Mary asked the angel, "But how can this happen? I am a virgin."

The angel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the baby to be born will be holy, and he will be called the Son of God. What's more, your relative Elizabeth has become pregnant in her old age! People used to say she was barren, but she has conceived a son and is now in her sixth month. For the word of God will never fail."

Mary responded, "I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true." And then the angel left her.

### REFLECT\_

One of the hardest realities for us to grasp is that God made himself nothing and took on the form of a human. And he didn't start as a strong young man in his twenties. He started where we all start: helpless in his mother's womb. The story of Christmas begins with the story of a baby in a womb.

- What words and images come to mind when you think of a human baby growing within a woman's womb?
- Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us by being grown and nourished in a woman's womb, just as all human babies are. What does this truth reveal to you about his love?
- How does the fact that Jesus was formed in Mary's womb reveal the sacredness God sees and the value he places on the human body?

#### RESPOND

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my being you became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any pow-

ers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

DAY 2

### JESUS, WHOSE MOTHER WAS MARY

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

Christmas •

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ MATTHEW 1:1-17\_

### REFLECT

In this genealogy, Matthew makes clear that Jesus was born into a line of human beings—some we can read about in Scripture and some who are never mentioned. Jesus had a mother, and Jesus' mother's husband (Joseph) was in the line of David. Jesus' father is, of course, Father God, the Creator. But what we rarely think about is whether Jesus looked like Mary, his mother. What attributes of hers did he have? What mannerisms? Might they have had the same laugh, the same hands?

- What attributes and mannerisms do you share with your mother? If you are a parent, what attributes and mannerisms of yours do you see in your children? How do you feel when you consider the fact that you carry attributes of your mother and that your children carry attributes of yours?
- Reflect on the reality that Jesus has a body like yours—with eyes, a nose, ears, a mouth, smile lines, hands, and feet. What does this reveal to you about God's love?

• What does the truth that Jesus has a body like yours reveal to you about the care we are to give our bodies and the respect which we are to extend to others' bodies?

#### RESPOND

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my being you became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### DAY 3

### A BABY LYING IN THE MANGER

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

### a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

#### READ LUKE 2:1-21 \_

At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. . . . All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea. . . . He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.

And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.

That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord's glory surrounded them. They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. "Don't be afraid!" he said. "I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger."

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a vast host of others—the armies of heaven—praising God and saying,

"Glory to God in highest heaven,

and peace on earth to those with whom God is pleased."

When the angels had returned to heaven, the shepherds said to each other, "Let's go to Bethlehem! Let's see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

They hurried to the village and found Mary and Joseph. And there was the baby, lying in the manger. After seeing him, the shepherds told everyone what had happened. . . . All who heard the shepherds' story were astonished, but Mary kept all these things in her heart and thought about them often. The shepherds went back to their flocks, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen. It was just as the angel had told them. Eight days later, when the baby was circumcised, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel even before he was conceived.

### REFLECT \_\_

Mary gave birth to Jesus—to God with us. We have no reason to believe that the birthing process was unique or less painful than any other birth. And as was required under the Jewish law, Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day of his life, as any other male baby would have been circumcised. How rare it is for us to think of Jesus this way: as a little baby, with little baby parts, treated like any other Jewish boy of his time.

- What words and images come to mind when you think of a human baby having just been born?
- Why do you think it was important for Jesus to have come to us this way instead of simply having appeared as an adult?
- Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us through the normal human birthing process, was vulnerable and crying, and was born with a penis, as every other human boy has been born. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?

#### RESPOND\_

Jesus Christ— Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my being you became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any pow-

ers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### DAY 4

### THE CHILD GREW AND BECAME STRONG

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

SACRED QUESTIONS

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### **READ LUKE 2:25-40**

At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby lesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, saying,

"Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace,

as you have promised.

I have seen your salvation, which you have prepared for all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!"

lesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

Anna, a prophet, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, and she was very old. Her husband died when they had been married only seven years. Then she lived as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about the child to everyone who had been waiting expectantly for God to rescue Jerusalem.

When Jesus' parents had fulfilled all the requirements of the law of the Lord, they returned home to Nazareth in Galilee. There the child grew up healthy and strong. He was filled with wisdom, and God's favor was on him.

### REFLECT

Jesus was so small that he was held in the arms of his parents and relatives and elders in the Temple. Jesus teethed; his body grew; his muscles got strong. How often do we think about the fact that Jesus did not instantly go from a baby to a man?

- · What words, images, and attributes come to mind when you think of a young boy? What do you see? What is his bodily experience?
- Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us first through the body and mind of a little boy who had parents and siblings and friends. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?
- Reflect on the children in your family and community. How does knowing that Jesus went through similar experiences as those children in growing up shape your love toward them?

#### RESPOND

#### Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace;

the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and

the one in whom I live and move and have my being—

you became flesh and made your dwelling among us.

And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

#### DAY 5

### HE BECAME VERY HUNGRY

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ MATTHEW 3:13-4:11\_

Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?"

But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him.

After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry.

During that time the devil came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread."

But Jesus told him, "No! The Scriptures say,

'People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, "If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say,

'He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won't even hurt your foot on a stone.'''

Jesus responded, "The Scriptures also say, 'You must not test the LORD your God.'"

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. "I will give it all to you," he said, "if you will kneel down and worship me."

"Get out of here, Satan," Jesus told him. "For the Scriptures say,

"You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him."

Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.

In Jesus' baptism, we see one of the most stunning moments of all time: the Father's acknowledgment of Jesus as his Son, his beloved, and the affirmation of this truth by his voice and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Immediately afterward, Jesus' body and mind are tested. He is hungry and thirsty and presumably very tired from not having eaten in forty days. He is alone. He is outside in the wilderness. The one who created all things and holds all things together is humbled by a limited human body.

- What do you think Jesus was feeling in his body during his time in the wilderness? Consider his hunger, the temperature, his aloneness, and where and how he slept.
- Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us in a body that would hunger and hurt and be uncomfortable and tired. What does this truth reveal to you about his love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?
- Reflect on the times you have been hurt, uncomfortable, or exhausted. How might your experience help you identify with and serve someone you know who is going through something similar?

### RESPOND

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my being you became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

DAY 6

### JESUS WAS SLEEPING

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply. Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ MATTHEW 8:23-27\_

Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with his disciples. Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke him up, shouting, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" Jesus responded, "Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!" Then he got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm.

The disciples were amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked. "Even the winds and waves obey him!"

### REFLECT

Many of us have read this passage a number of times. Our focus, rightly, has likely always been on Jesus' power to calm the wind and waves. What we often miss in this miraculous scene is that Jesus was sleeping just moments before—through a pretty bad storm. How exhausted must he have been to have curled up on a wooden boat and fallen asleep?

- What do you think Jesus was feeling in his body when he climbed into the boat with his disciples? As best you can, picture him—his body—finding a place to curl up and fall asleep. What do you see?
- Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us in a body that needed sleep and at times grew exhausted. What does this truth reveal to you about his love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?
- Reflect on the times you have been exhausted and desperately in need of sleep. How might your experience help you identify with and serve someone you know who is sleep deprived?

### RESPOND

Jesus Christ— Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my being you became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### JESUS WEPT

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

### a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ JOHN 11:17-35

When Jesus arrived at Bethany, he was told that Lazarus had already been in his grave for four days. Bethany was only a few miles down the road from Jerusalem, and many of the people had come to console Martha and Mary in their loss. When Martha got word that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask."

Jesus told her, "Your brother will rise again."

"Yes," Martha said, "he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day."

Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?"

"Yes, Lord," she told him. "I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God." Then she returned to Mary. She called Mary aside from the mourners and told her, "The Teacher is here and wants to see you." So Mary immediately went to him.

Jesus had stayed outside the village, at the place where Martha met him. When the people who were at the house consoling Mary saw her leave so hastily, they assumed she was going to Lazarus's grave to weep. So they followed her there. When Mary arrived and saw Jesus, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died."

When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. "Where have you put him?" he asked them.

They told him, "Lord, come and see." Then Jesus wept.

#### REFLECT\_

Jesus wept. John does not say that Jesus got choked up or looked sad; he wept with the grief and sorrow that death brings.

- What comes to mind when you think of someone weeping? What does it look like? Sound like? What is the body doing as it weeps?
- Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us in a body that wept with grief in the face of death. What does this truth reveal to you about his love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?
- Reflect on a time you have experienced deep grief. How might your experience help you identify with and serve someone you know who is grieving?

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### RESPOND

### Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace;

the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and

the one in whom I live and move and have my being—

you became flesh and made your dwelling among us.

And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### DAY 8

### JESUS ATE

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ MARK 2:13-17 \_

Then Jesus went out to the lakeshore again and taught the crowds that were coming to him. As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me and be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Levi got up and followed him.

Later, Levi invited Jesus and his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors and other disreputable sinners. (There were many people of this kind among Jesus' followers.) But when the teachers of religious law who were Pharisees saw him eating with tax collectors and other sinners, they asked his disciples, "Why does he eat with such scum?"

When Jesus heard this, he told them, "Healthy people don't need a doctor—sick people do. I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners."

### REFLECT

Of great controversy during Jesus' life were the kinds of people with whom he ate. Consider, though, that he ate. He drank wine, shared conversation over fresh fish and vegetables. Maybe food got stuck in his teeth, he burped, and his stomach squealed as it digested his food.

- What comes to mind as you think about the fact that Jesus ate and drank and his body processed foods just as ours do?
- · Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us in a body and took in food

and digested it in a typical human way. What does this truth reveal to you about his love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?

• How might your view of your body—and all its weird sounds and responses to food or lack of it—be influenced as you consider that Jesus' body worked just the same way?

#### RESPOND

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and

the one in whom I live and move and have my being—

you became flesh and made your dwelling among us.

And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### DAY 9

### JESUS SWEAT

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

*a prayer to open* Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

#### READ LUKE 22:39-46

Then, accompanied by the disciples, Jesus left the upstairs room and went as usual to the Mount of Olives. There he told them, "Pray that you will not give in to temptation."

He walked away, about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine." Then an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened him. He prayed more fervently, and he was in such agony of spirit that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood.

At last he stood up again and returned to the disciples, only to find them asleep, exhausted from grief. "Why are you sleeping?" he asked them. "Get up and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation."

### REFLECT\_

Jesus' anxiety and anguish about his upcoming gruesome death was so severe that his sweat fell to the ground like great drops of blood. His body ached and fought, so desperate was his human will to escape what he had been called to do on earth for us.

- Close your eyes and reflect on Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane just hours before he would be put to death by crucifixion. How must his body have been responding? What other sensations besides what we are told can you imagine him experiencing in his body?
- Reflect on the reality that God came to be with us in a body that hurt and responded as our bodies do to pain and anguish. What does this truth reveal to you about his love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?
- Reflect on the times you have been in physical pain. How might your experience help you identify with and serve someone you know who is currently suffering physical pain?

### RESPOND

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my being you became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, lesus Christ my Lord.

### **DAY 10**

### THEY NAILED HIM TO THE CROSS

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

### a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

#### READ MATTHEW 27:32-50\_

Along the way, they came across a man named Simon, who was from Cyrene, and the soldiers forced him to carry Jesus' cross. And they went out to a place called Golgotha (which means "Place of the Skull"). The soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with bitter gall, but when he had tasted it, he refused to drink it.

After they had nailed him to the cross, the soldiers

gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. Then they sat around and kept guard as he hung there. A sign was fastened above Jesus' head, announcing the charge against him. It read: "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." Two revolutionaries were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left.

The people passing by shouted abuse, shaking their heads in mockery. "Look at you now!" they

yelled at him. "You said you were going to destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days. Well then, if you are the Son of God, save yourself and come down from the cross!"

The leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders also mocked Jesus. "He saved others," they scoffed, "but he can't save himself! So he is the King of Israel, is he? Let him come down from the cross right now, and we will believe in him! He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him! For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him ridiculed him in the same way. At noon, darkness fell across the whole land until three o'clock. At about three o'clock, Jesus called out with a loud voice, "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*?" which means "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

Some of the bystanders misunderstood and thought he was calling for the prophet Elijah. One of them ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, holding it up to him on a reed stick so he could drink. But the rest said, "Wait! Let's see whether Elijah comes to save him."

Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit.

### REFLECT \_\_\_\_

Jesus' body was brutalized by the Roman soldiers. How did he endure such suffering?

- Close your eyes and reflect on Jesus as he walked to the cross and then was beaten, spit upon, stripped, and then crucified. How must his body have been responding? What other sensations besides what we are told can you imagine him experiencing in his body?
- What is the most painful experience your body has endured? As you think of that experience, what comes to mind? What do you remember? How did you endure?
- Reflect on the reality that Jesus submitted his body—his real, human, feeling body—to be beaten, spit upon, nailed through, and hung for your sake and the sake of the world. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?

### RESPOND

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace;

the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and

the one in whom I live and move and have my being—

you became flesh and made your dwelling among us.

And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### PUT YOUR HAND INTO THE WOUND IN MY SIDE

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

a prayer to open	Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body.
	Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ JOHN 20:24-29\_

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas . . . , was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he replied, "I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side."

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"

"My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him, "You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me."

### REFLECT \_\_

When Jesus rose from the dead, he rose in his body, glorious and new though it was. He could touch, eat, speak, and see, and he carried the wounds of the crucifixion still. He was no ghost or spirit. He remained and remains embodied.

- Why do you think Jesus wanted Thomas to touch his wounds? Why does it matter that when Jesus rose, he remained—and remains—embodied?
- In what ways have you unintentionally disembodied Jesus—thought of him as only a spirit—in your faith journey? How has that affected you?
- Reflect on the reality that Jesus rose from the dead and still has his body. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?

### RESPOND\_

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my being you became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### **DAY 12**

### HE UNDERSTANDS OUR WEAKNESSES

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

a prayer to open	Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body.
	Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### READ HEBREWS 4:15-16.

we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly when we need it most.

This High Priest of ours understands our to the throne of our gracious God. There we will weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us

### REFLECT

Having followed Jesus' life and identified some of his bodily experiences, we can't help but more fully grasp what the author of Hebrews says in this passage. It is not the case that Jesus understands because he knows all things or can imagine how we feel. He knows from personal experience: He has known vulnerability, pain, suffering, temptation, exhaustion, hunger, grief. He knows the weakness it is to be in a body as a human being.

- Consider the weaknesses of your body. What does it mean to you as you pray and persevere that Jesus knows your weaknesses?
- · Reflect on the reality that one who mediates and stands before God on your behalf knows the weaknesses of being human from firsthand, actual experience. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?
- · How might coming to terms with the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of your body help you understand and serve those you tend to view as weak or less capable?

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#### RESPOND

#### Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace;

the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and

the one in whom I live and move and have my being—

you became flesh and made your dwelling among us.

And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### DAY 13

### BODIES THAT WILL NEVER DIE

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

### a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

#### READ 1 CORINTHIANS 15:35-54

But someone may ask, "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" What a foolish question! When you put a seed into the ground, it doesn't grow into a plant unless it dies first. And what you put in the ground is not the plant that will grow, but only a bare seed of wheat or whatever you are planting. Then God gives it the new body he wants it to have. A different plant grows from each kind of seed. Similarly there are different kinds of flesh—one kind for humans, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish.

There are also bodies in the heavens and bodies on the earth. The glory of the heavenly bodies is different from the glory of the earthly bodies. The sun has one kind of glory, while the moon and stars each have another kind. And even the stars differ from each other in their glory.

It is the same way with the resurrection of the dead. Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies. For just as there are natural bodies, there are also spiritual bodies.

The Scriptures tell us, "The first man, Adam, became a living person." But the last Adam—that is, Christ—is a life-giving Spirit. What comes first is the natural body, then the spiritual body comes later. Adam, the first man, was made from the dust of the earth, while Christ, the second man, came from heaven. Earthly people are like the earthly man, and heavenly people are like the heavenly man. Just as we are now like the earthly man, we will someday be like the heavenly man.

What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.

But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

Then, when our dying bodies have been

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

### REFLECT

The fact that Jesus conquered death in his body and rose again in his body means that we too will rise after death. We will live again, but not as spirits or disembodied souls: We will have glorious new bodies that will never die.

- What confusion, emotions, or concerns arise in you when you read today's passage?
- In what parts of your body are you longing for healing and restoration? What would full restoration look like for that part of your body?
- Reflect on the reality that because Jesus rose from the dead, conquering death, we who are in Christ will also rise from the dead and receive new, eternal bodies. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?

### RESPOND\_

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace;

the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and

the one in whom I live and move and have my being—

you became flesh and made your dwelling among us.

And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### DAY 14

### I AM MAKING EVERYTHING NEW!

Begin by taking a few breaths and paying attention to the air moving in and out of your lungs and mouth. Notice where you feel tension or discomfort in your body. To the extent you are able, try to relax, let the chair you are sitting in fully support your body, and release the tension as you breathe deeply.

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### **READ REVELATION 21:1-7**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."

And the one sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making everything new!" And then he said to me, "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true." And he also said, "It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children."

#### REFLECT.

The most poignant reality about being embodied is the suffering and pain our bodies must endure, whether in the bumps and bruises of growing up or in our vulnerability to external dangers, sickness and disease, aging, and death. God's promise is to relieve those sufferings. He is making all things new, including our bodies, and there is a day coming when there will be no more pain or suffering or death.

- · Imagine getting to live in your body without ever feeling pain because you are no longer at risk for being hurt. What do you imagine that being like?
- · Reflect on God's promise that your body will be healed and whole. What would it look like to live in that truth? How might your courage be affected?
- · Reflect on the reality that in and through Jesus, the embodied one, God is making all things new and will remove all possibility of pain and suffering and death. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?

### RESPOND

lesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace; the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and the one in whom I live and move and have my beingyou became flesh and made your dwelling among us. And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.

### **DAY 15**

#### BECAME WORD FLESH

#### a prayer to open

Here I am, Lord, in my tired, aging, hurting, wondrous body. Open my heart to you now. You are my High Priest who knows.

### **READ |OHN 1:1-14**

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it.

God sent a man, John the Baptist, to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.

He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God.

So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

### REFLECT

The eternal Son of God, in communion with the Father and the Spirit forever, lowered himself, humbled himself, and embodied himself in order to save us. Oh that we could remember this truth when we relate to, call on, live in, and share Jesus. If we could somehow prevent ourselves from thinking of him as a disembodied spirit who is far from us and unable to know all the pain and joy we experience in our bodies, how might our images of our own bodies change? How might we better care for ourselves? How might we grow in respect for the bodies of others, seeing them as sacred and specially made by God instead of things to be used or abused, as is so often the case? May we always remember that God came in the flesh, in a body, and to this very moment Jesus has a body.

- Having spent the past fifteen days focusing on the truth of God's coming in the flesh to be with us, what happens in you when you read this rich, wellknown announcement about Jesus Christ?
- · How have these fifteen days influenced your view and understanding of your own body?
- Reflect on the reality that the Word-the eternal Son of God-became flesh and made his dwelling among us. What does this truth reveal to you about God's love? What does it reveal about Jesus' ability to identify with you?

Christmas

### RESPOND

Jesus Christ—

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace;

the one through whom and for whom all things were made; and

the one in whom I live and move and have my being—

you became flesh and made your dwelling among us.

And nothing—neither death nor life, angels nor demons, the present nor the future; not any powers, height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation—can separate me from the love of our God, which is in you, Jesus Christ my Lord.