

“*Gifts of Grace* is a beautifully written and biblically rich devotional that will help you to slow down, exhale your troubles, and really savor the miracle we celebrate each Christmas. Jared draws on the songs of the Advent season to frame ancient truths in delightfully fresh ways. Each chapter will lift your eyes above the end-of-year chaos to marvel at the immeasurable riches of God’s grace. Read this book, and let your heart be filled with wonder at the gifts that Christ alone can give.”

ADAM RAMSEY, Lead Pastor, Liberti Church, Gold Coast, Australia; Network Director, Acts 29 Asia Pacific; Author, *Truth on Fire*

“To think that our whole Christian lives—and all of eternity—will be spent discovering and enjoying the riches of God’s grace is almost too good to be true. But it is true. And Jared shows us why in his beautiful new book. *Gifts of Grace* will open to you the wonders of the gospel and offer your heart what it desires most this Christmas.”

KRISTEN WETHERELL, Author, *Humble Moms*; Co-author, *Hope When It Hurts*

“Each day throughout the Christian season, this book will remind you of a different gift that God himself has given us through the first Christmas. Each chapter is a gift presented in a fresh and compelling way to nourish our hearts and calm our fears.”

TIM CHESTER, Crosslands Training; Author, *Enjoying God*

“As you read this day by day during the Advent season, you will encounter God’s grace and see the gospel as our Lord’s greatest gift to us. I look forward to reading through *Gifts of Grace* with my family as our Advent devotional, and know it will strengthen our love for the one who first loved us.”

DEAN INSERRA, Lead Pastor, City Church, Tallahassee; Author, *Getting Over Yourself*

“What a Saviour we have! Each day we unwrap another staggering truth about the Jesus who calls us to follow him.”

RICO TICE, Senior Minister (Evangelism), All Souls Langham Place, London; Author, *Honest Evangelism*

“A treat of a book. Here is a simple way to enjoy a beautiful gospel gift each day of Advent. You will find truth to treasure, hope to inspire, and fuel to prepare you for the coming of Jesus.”

JONTY ALLCOCK, Pastor, Globe Church, London; Author, *Impossible Commands*

“Oftentimes the message of Christmas gets lost in our hurried culture, and we miss the reason for the season. *Gifts of Grace* is like a compass that recalibrates our souls toward Christ.”

DR. DERWIN L. GRAY, Co-founder and Lead Pastor, Transformation Church; Author, *How to Heal Our Racial Divide*

“*Gifts of Grace* is the kind of grounding, perspective-shifting reflection my soul needs each year. It is joyful and grateful and worshipful because it is deep and focuses on who Christ is and what he has done, which is decidedly not seasonal but eternal. In this little book, Jared has reminded the unfestive and tired among us of the most profound reasons to celebrate the birth of Jesus.”

BARNABAS PIPER, Pastor; Author, *Hoping for Happiness* and *Help My Unbelief*

“This Advent, allow Jared Wilson’s words to speak to your soul and stir your imagination. With his typical eloquence and grace, Wilson weaves the lyrics of songs that have so captured our hearts every Christmas season with fresh gospel meditations. Get this book, gather with your family, and rekindle your love for Jesus.”

DANIEL DARLING, Director, Land Center for Cultural Engagement; Columnist, *World*; Author, *The Characters of Christmas*

GIFTS 

OF 25 Advent
Devotions

GRACE

Jared C. Wilson


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Gifts of Grace

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Introduction

*“For from his fullness we have all received,
grace upon grace.”—John 1:16*

Advent is about anticipation. As Christians approach the Christmas holiday, we use the preceding weeks to slow down and profoundly meditate on the staggering reality of the incarnation of the Son of God to deepen our sense of expectation and wonder—a sense undoubtedly felt by those who anticipated the Messiah’s first coming. Participating in the Advent season is how we put ourselves, as it were, in their shoes. It is for this reason that churches observe traditional Advent liturgies, pastors preach Advent sermon series, families use Advent calendars or wreaths, and Christians read Advent devotional books like this one. All of this observance helps us focus more devotedly on—and please forgive the cliché—“the reason for the season.”

But I will admit that when I was a child, though I was raised in a faithful Christ-following, church-going family (who even lit candles in an Advent wreath a few

years in a row), my fleshly little heart was focused more on anticipating the gifts under the tree on Christmas Day than the miracle of the Word putting on flesh. And to be honest, I still struggle with a misdirected focus at Christmastime. I don't think I yearn inordinately for presents like when I was a child, but I still suffer from a childish impatience, an immature inability to be still, go slow, and embrace anticipation.

I think a lot of other people share this struggle too, if our drive-thru, self-serve, express-lane kind of culture is any indication. But impatience and "hurry sickness" and the inability to focus are not new phenomena.

I suppose this is how those nifty Advent calendars came about. Do you know the ones I mean? Sometimes they are made of flimsy paper or cardboard, but sometimes nicer ones are made of wood or some other sturdy material, and they usually feature 24 little doors, one for each day of Advent. And behind each little door is a little treat, a little gift. Sometimes the gift is a chocolate or other candy; sometimes it's a little toy or charm. The idea is that 24 little gifts spread out over the days of Advent can arrest one's attention and even build the sense of expectation for the bigger celebration on Christmas Day. I recently saw one jokester on Twitter say that Advent calendars help children "micro-dose" Christmas!

There's some truth to that, though. The daily gifts of a thoughtful Advent calendar can help us more fully absorb the resonance of this season—besieged as it is with all the festive bells and whistles that never seem

to deliver on their promise of enchantment—and more fully enjoy the central gift of Christmas: Jesus the King, himself.

And this is the purpose of the collection of devotional readings you hold in your hand right now. I want us to think of them like an Advent calendar. Every day, we will open up a little door to rediscover one of the myriad gifts Christians receive through the coming of Christ and belief in his gospel. In John's Gospel, the apostle tells us that from the fullness of Christ flows "grace upon grace" (1:16). Jesus is indeed an unceasing fountain of grace for those united to him by faith. So day by day, we will consider one amazing grace after another.

To be clear, though, unlike the tiny treats or trinkets in an Advent calendar, none of these gifts of grace are even by themselves little! The treasure trove of Christ's gospel is a lot like a Narnian wardrobe. It looks small enough on the outside—perhaps even simple or manageable—but once you walk through it, you discover an entire parallel universe of wonder and glory.

The whole gospel of grace is like that, and each dimension of its glory is like that too. I have heard it said that the gospel is a pool shallow enough for a child to play in and at the same time deep enough to drown an elephant! But the bigness of each daily gift of grace that we examine will be building to something bigger still. And my prayer for you is that examining the diamond of the gospel facet by facet for the next 24 days will find you on Day 25 more awestruck and

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joy-filled about the glory of Christ our Lord. It is only by beholding Christ's glory, in fact, that we can be made like him (2 Corinthians 3:18).

“But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift. Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’” (Ephesians 4:7-8)

1. A Thrill of Hope

Today's Gift: Hope

“Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”—1 Peter 1:13

“**Y**ou can't sing Christmas carols yet!” Thus began an email I once received while serving as a pastor of a small congregation in New England. The sender wasn't angry—just concerned. I puzzled over the directive, as it was the first time I could remember ever encountering such an assertion. The context gave the reasoning: because, I was told, Advent is about anticipating the birth of the Messiah, we shouldn't sing songs celebrating that birth until the Sunday after December 25th.

I confess this was a tall order for me, especially given that I live in a household that decorates for Christmas around the end of October and begins playing Christmas music nonstop before the end of November. “What do you mean, I can't sing Christmas carols yet?”

The concept of “advent,” of course, refers to an arrival or a coming. At this time of the year, Christians redirect their focus to the spirit of anticipation of the

first advent of Christ. We do this to affirm the incarnation more thoroughly and commemorate the beginning of the New Testament gospel story with more joy.

But I sometimes struggle with the way many Advent observances are conducted. The forbidding of songs about Jesus' birth before Christmas Day is one such practice. It just feels a bit too much like playacting to me. I know *why* these things are insisted upon—it allegedly better helps us get “in the spirit” of Advent and is thought to heighten the joys of Christmas Day observance. But I'm telling you, it's hard for me to act as if I'm waiting for the birth of the Messiah when I know he's already come and, indeed, has already been crucified, buried, and raised, and has ascended to where he came from!

I don't know about you, but I can't pretend every year that Jesus hasn't been born, even if doing so might help me muster up some extra-spiritual feelings. But there is one thing I can do that helps get me close to that pre-Christian sense of anticipation: I can think hard about the second coming of Christ—the one still ahead, the *second* advent.

In fact, the feelings most of us have right now about the state of the world and the sin, chaos, and brokenness that seem to reign everywhere we look is very much like the feelings of those who anticipated the first coming of the Messiah. “How long, O Lord?” is a cry that goes up throughout the Old Testament, a lament for the *shalom* of Eden, which was lost at the fall, and an expression of grief over the evil, suffering, and injustice continually pervading the earth. How in

the world could the children of God before the time of Christ remain faithful year after year, decade after decade, century after century as the arrival of their righteous King seemed to be delayed?

And how in the world can we in the 21st century remain faithful as the Lord, in his second coming, appears to tarry? After seeing so much bloodshed on a daily basis and feeling so much heartbreak year after year, knowing that in so many places hostility to Christianity is always increasing, and knowing that for all the technological, medical, and other intellectual advances mankind can make, we are no closer to eradicating injustice in the world, much less death, how do we not give in to despair?

The answer is *hope*.

Before Christ's first coming, God's people hoped in God. And before Christ's second coming, God's people hope in God.

God had birthed this hope in the children of Israel through his past faithfulness and goodness to them, so much so that the psalmist could say, despite his depression, that he knew he would come to a place of praise again (Psalm 42:11); the prophet could say that the God he felt was giving him the silent treatment was nevertheless still his only hope (Isaiah 8:17); and the sufferer could say that *even if God killed him*, he would still hope in him (Job 13:15).

They didn't know how long it would take to get to their deliverance, but they knew in their bones that it was coming. And this is why the people of God in all

times hope differently than the people of the world. When the world hopes, there is the prospect of unfulfillment. The world “hopes” something will happen, but they know it might not. That’s not how God’s people hope. Our hope comes with assurance (Hebrews 11:1), our hope abides (1 Corinthians 13:13), and our hope will “not put us to shame” or disappoint us (Romans 5:5). Why? Because our hope is not in other people or in the times or even in ourselves—these things always change and are all stained by the fall.

No, our hope is in God! In fact, our hope *is* God!

So I can sing Christmas songs on December 1 and still get close to feeling how those who wrapped themselves in messianic expectation felt before that first Christmas Day, because I know what it’s like to feel the weight of the weariness of the world around me but be anchored by the sure and steady hope of the Messiah to come. In 1 Peter 1:13, the apostle Peter instructs us to set our hope *fully* on the grace that will be coming to us at the coming of Jesus. Our hope cannot be half-hearted like the world’s because our King is tried and true. And Peter connects this hoping fully in grace to readiness for action and sobriety of mind. When people hope in things that may or may not be true, they can become lazy and muddled. But when we hope in Jesus, we find the reason and the energy to live and to think in ways that magnify Jesus.

And this is itself a gift from God. As Peter says earlier in the chapter, God “has caused us to be born again to a living hope” (1 Peter 1:3). And in giving us Christ

by grace, God has also given us “the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).

Today, then, as you think about what may feel like a long road of Advent before you, remember that as tired or wounded as this season may find you, the day is coming—and not too far off now—when the blessed hope (Titus 2:13) will appear and you will be able to say, “I knew it all along!” If it helps you hope, you could even sing some Christmas carols today.