

Staff Devotions

Devotion 1

Destination: Creation

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1:1

Imagine meeting a man who claimed to be God. What would you think? Crazy nut?

Now imagine this man claimed to be the fulfillment of statements written hundreds of years before. Sure, sure, weirdo.

Now imagine the little boy down the street who had died was running around again. The man who claimed to be God had raised him from the dead. It was no trick—you had seen the boy after he died, and he was now playing with your kids.

The more you hear him teach, the more you realize this *man* is claiming to be the I Am—the eternally existent one. The man standing before you made the trees in the beginning? He made the dinosaurs and . . . you?

Makes you think, doesn't it? Could this man really be who he claimed to be?

This is Jesus.

Even though today we would (and should) scoff at someone staking a claim to deity, Jesus Christ was the real deal. He was the Creator incarnate, the God-Man, the one who came to save his people from their sins, fulfilling the promises God had made since the beginning of time. In fact, he is the creator of time itself and exists outside of time from all eternity. He didn't begin as a babe in a manger—he has existed from all eternity, calling the worlds into being, fashioning the planets and stars, speaking life to a lump of dust, and planning his entrance into time and his subsequent death from the very beginning.

For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things

unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. Colossians 1:16–20

As you study your Bible, focus your attention on Genesis 1 and John 1. Of all the people who have ever lived, ever led a religion, ever claimed to be a deity, only Jesus has the credentials to deserve our worship and devotion. And the only way we can know the truth about him is through his inspired Word, the Bible.

As you prepare to meet Jesus the Creator with your students today, let's meditate on this Puritan prayer about our eternal God and Savior Jesus Christ.

O Lord God, who inhabits eternity
The heavens declare thy glory,
The earth thy riches,
The universe is thy temple;
Thy presence fills immensity,
Yet thou hast of thy pleasure created life,
and communicated happiness;
Thou hast made me what I am,
and given me
what I have;
In thee I live and move and have my being;
Thy providence has set the bounds of my habitation,
and wisely administers all my affairs.
I thank thee for thy riches to me in Jesus,
for the unclouded revelation of him in thy Word,
where I behold his Person, character, grace, glory,
humiliation, sufferings, death, and resurrection;
Impress me deeply with a sense
of thine
omnipresence, that thou art about my path,
my ways, my lying down, my end.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), "God the Source of
All Good."

Devotion 2

Destination: Old Testament Locations

Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. John 8:58

Imagine being a young boy named Abraham sitting at your father's feet, learning and reciting your heritage—a heritage that goes back to the beginning of time and the very first man, formed from dust by the Creator.

I am the son of Thara, the son of Nachor, the son of Saruch, the son of Ragau, the son of Phalec, the son of Heber, the son of Sala, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Sem, the son of Noe, the son of Lamech, the son of Mathusala, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Maleleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:34–38).

Imagine the longing to carry on this esteemed lineage as you grow and marry and age. And age some more. Without producing a rightful heir.

Then imagine meeting that same God face-to-face just outside your own home and receiving his loving promise of a son, even in your old age. And then imagine looking *ahead* about 1,900 years and seeing that very same Jesus, the one whom you'd shared a meal with, born to a descendant of Isaac, your promised son. Fulfilling the promise about himself that he himself had made.

And so the recitations and lineage continue, adding Abraham's son Isaac, then Isaac's offspring, and on and on, until the Promised One finally appears:

"Jesus . . . being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Janna, which was the son of Joseph, Which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Amos, which was the son of Naum, which was the son of Esli, which was the son of Nagge, which was the son of Maath, which was the son of Mattathias, which was the son of Semei, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joanna, which was the son of Rhesa, which was the son of Zorobabel, which was the son of Salathiel, which was the son of Neri, which was the son of Melchi, which was the son of Addi, which was the son of Cosam, which was the son of Elmodam, which was the son of Er, which was the son of Jose, which was the son of Eliezer, which was the son of Jorim, which was the son of Matthat, which was the son of Levi, Which was the son of Simeon, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Joseph, which was the son of Jonan, which was the son of Eliakim, which was the son of Melea, which was the son of Menan, which was the son of Mattatha,

which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David, which was the son of Jesse, which was the son of Obed, which was the son of Booz, which was the son of Salmon, which was the son of Naasson, which was the son of Aminadab, which was the son of Aram, which was the son of Esrom, which was the son of Phares, which was the son of Juda, which was the son of Jacob, which was the son of Isaac, which was the son of Abraham, which was the son of Thara, which was the son of Nachor, which was the son of Saruch, which was the son of Ragau, which was the son of Phalec, which was the son of Heber, which was the son of Sala, which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Arphaxad, which was the son of Sem, which was the son of Noe, which was the son of Lamech, which was the son of Mathusala, which was the son of Enoch, which was the son of Jared, which was the son of Maleleel, which was the son of Cainan, which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God." (Luke 3:23–38)

As Jesus recited those generations with his father, did he think back to the time he met with Father Abraham? When Jesus referenced, "Before Abraham was, I am," did he reflect on the meal he shared with his great, great, great . . . grandfather?

The eternity of our Savior boggles the mind, and it will stretch the minds of our kids, too. As you engage them today, encourage them to talk about it, ask questions, agree that it's difficult to understand, but always point them to the eternal Word of God for answers, ensuring they have an anchor for their soul. May we pray with the Puritans:

Thou Great I AM,
Fill my mind with elevation and grandeur at the
thought of a Being
With whom one day is as a thousand years, and a
thousand years as one day.
A mighty God who, amidst the lapse of the worlds,
and the revolutions of empires,
Feels no variableness but is glorious in immortality.
May I rejoice that, while men die, the Lord lives;
That, while all creatures are broken reeds, empty
cisterns, fading flowers, withering grass,
He is the Rock of Ages, the fountain of Living
Waters.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision* (The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), p. 104.

Devotion 3

Destination: Visitation

Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14

Imagine your young daughter Mary comes to you one day after finishing her chores and making the daily bread. She says, “Dear parents, as you know, our people have been promised a savior for hundreds of years. Even from the beginning, Yahweh has promised that he would send one to save his people from their sins. Today, an angel told me I would bear the Promised One! Mom, Dad—our savior is coming! And it’s true what our prophet Isaiah said over 700 years ago—I have known no man, yet I am with child.”

Would you think she was crazy? Would you call to mind all the promises from the Law and the Prophets you’ve been taught since your childhood, mulling over each one, waiting to see if more than this one spoken by Isaiah would come to pass through your daughter and her child? Would you tick each one off your mental checklist?

- He was the child of a woman (Genesis 3:15). Check.
- Micah said he would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). Check.
- Solomon said kings would worship him (Psalm 72:10–11). Check.
- Hosea said he would be called out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). Check.

Is it really possible that one child could fulfill all these promises?

As you watch him grow, you realize he is certainly different from anyone who had come before. He teaches with such authority and knows the holy Scriptures so thoroughly, it is no wonder many are attracted to him. His power is undeniable—he healed a woman from a bleeding problem that no doctor had been able to help with and made the evil spirits tormenting another go away.

One of the more significant differences is his lifestyle—he seems to live a blameless life. Even his mother, your daughter, claims he is an obedient child who cared for others. It is difficult to imagine any man as the personification of perfection, but if there were one, he would be it.

Imagine the grief and despair of his mother when he died and especially the way in which he died—a horrible death reserved for the worst of criminals. Indeed, he was hung on a tree between two thieves. The strange thing about this man was that he had seemed to hint that his death was near. But why? Why would the one God sent need to die? Didn’t he come to bring life and freedom?

Now imagine that heart-stopping moment when his disciples went to honor his memory and were greeted at his tomb by an angel saying, “He is not here; for he is risen, as he said.” Imagine the momentary panic at the missing body. Rise again . . . did he say he would rise from the dead? His body isn’t there . . . is it possible he’s really alive? Imagine seeing the risen Savior.

As you read the passages revealing the events surrounding the birth of Christ, meditate on the events that set his birth apart from all others—the fulfillment of prophecy, the worship of shepherds and kings, the lowly manger cradling the King of kings. As you study the chapters pertaining to Christ’s death and resurrection, meditate on the gravity of what our sin brought about—the death of the Creator of the universe. And rejoice in his resurrection that secured eternal life for you! As you share with the children today, make sure they know that the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ are anchored in history. Make sure they know that they can receive the eternal life he offers to those who believe.

O source of all good

What shall I render to thee for the gift of gifts,
thine own dear Son, begotten, not created,
my Redeemer, proxy, surety, substitute,
his self-emptying incomprehensible,
his infinity of love beyond the heart’s grasp.

Herein is wonder of wonders:

he came below to raise me above,
was born like me that I might become like him.

Herein is love;

when I cannot rise to him he draws near on wings
of grace, to raise me to himself.

Herein is power;

when Deity and humanity were infinitely apart
he united them in indissoluble unity,
the uncreated and the created.

Herein is wisdom;

when I was undone, with no will to return to him,
and no intellect to devise recovery,
he came, God-incarnate, to save me to
the uttermost, as man to die my death,
to shed satisfying blood on my behalf,
to work out a perfect righteousness for me.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision* (The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), “The Gift of Gifts.”

Devotion 4

Destination: Preparation

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Acts 1:8

Imagine being part of the crowd chanting for the death of the man standing before the governor. You weren't sure what he had done wrong, but the religious leaders were calling for his death, so he must have been deserving of it. You followed the crowd as they surged toward the place of the skull, where the crucifixions took place, taunting the man all the way.

Imagine watching as the man was lifted up and drew his last breath. If he were who he claimed to be, surely he could have saved himself.

Imagine, months later, carrying your friend, lame from birth, to the temple gates as you had hundreds of times before and entering into the temple to pray. Imagine your disbelief as, moments later, the friend you knew was unable to walk *ran* into the place of prayer.

What happened to him? Who were these men he was following? Wait—was that the fisherman who was a student of the man they crucified several months ago? One of the ones who had deserted the Teacher at his arrest? Hadn't the Teacher's followers gone into hiding after his death?

Imagine your shock as the fisherman boldly accused you of murdering the . . . Author of life? Who had raised from the dead? And been seen by the fisherman? That man was alive and, in his name, your friend was healed?

Imagine the hope as the fisherman called the entire crowd to repent of their sins and receive the sacrifice the Author of life had made on behalf of sinners. Surely, the one who had given the fisherman the power to preach, who had healed your friend, who had raised himself from the dead—surely, he was the one about whom the prophets had preached and for whom you had waited. The Redeemer had come? The Redeemer had come!

As you study the texts telling what happened after Jesus rose from the dead and his activity now on our behalf,

marvel at the transformation that took place in the lives of those who believed in the Son of God. The amazing power of God to transform sinners into the image of the invisible Christ is evident throughout the rest of the New Testament and should be evident in our lives as children of God. And our hope that he ever lives to intercede on behalf of his children should provide a firm anchor for our souls as we rest in his saving power.

As you share with the students today, emphasize that Jesus' work for us didn't end at the cross. Even today, he is preparing a gloriously beautiful place for us, protecting his body, building his church, interceding for his people, and caring for his children. And we are his representatives on earth.

May we pray as the Puritans did:

I bless thee that thou hast made me capable of
knowing thee, the author of all being,
Of resembling thee, the perfection of all excellency,
Of enjoying thee, the source of all happiness.
Let my religion be more obvious to my conscience,
more perceptible to those around.
While Jesus is representing me in heaven, may I
reflect him on earth,
While he pleads my cause, may I show forth his
praise.
Continue the gentleness of thy goodness towards
me,
And whether I wake or sleep, let thy presence go
with me, thy blessing attend me.
Thou hast led me on and I have found thy promises
true.

Thy vows are ever upon me, and I praise thee, O God.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), p. 11.

Devotion 5

Destination: Celebration

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. Revelation 21:3–4

Imagine your best. day. ever.

Maybe you enjoy working in your garden. You spend time tending your flowers, fruits, or veggies. You check on your grapevines and cherry trees. You clip what needs to be clipped and plant what needs to be planted. You walk among the leaves, enjoying the pleasant scent of the flowers mixed with the earthy scent from the dirt. You watch as worms wiggle their way through ground, producing fertile soil for your plants, and bees hover among the blossoms, benefitting themselves and the flowers. You pick a strawberry to munch on as you continue through your garden. The work, similar to what Adam and Eve did in the garden, is satisfying.

Maybe you enjoy going for a hike in the mountains with your favorite friend, marveling at the beauty of the landscape, and worshiping your Creator together. Or maybe your idea of a perfect day is the solitude of being alone with the Word of God on a rocky outcropping high on the mountains.

Perhaps you enjoy scuba diving, marveling at the gorgeous colors found in the coral, finding yourself floating among turtles while schools of flashing fish twist and turn around you. You could spend all day in this underwater world if your air tank and nitrogen levels would let you.

Perhaps splashing in the creek with your kids, catching and releasing fish and crawdads, brings you peace and joy. You show them the various animal prints beside the water, teaching them which print goes with which animal. You listen to the calls of the birds, identifying which bird goes with which call. You stand amazed at the rapid beat of a woodpecker hammering in a nearby tree.

Maybe feasting is your thing—partaking in a delicious dinner with friends and family gathered around. Fellowshiping together while your taste buds delight in the various delicacies set before you. Eat, drink, and be merry!

God created a world for us to enjoy. But we groan under the weight of the curse of sin placed on it even as we sample the true enjoyment he intended for us in the beginning. How

merciful of our Creator to provide a way for us to enjoy all that he intended in the beginning in the end. In that future place, our enjoyment will be complete—without thorns in gardens, without bee stings, without fear of falling off a cliff or stepping on a venomous snake, without the emotional distress of unhappy relationships or the bodily results of overeating. And with the one who created and redeemed us—we will enjoy these things in his very presence and with him by our side!

If your thoughts of heaven lean toward picturing us sitting around strumming harps on clouds, then think again! Read the Bible! Check out what God really says about the delights that await us in the new heaven and earth. Let's get our kids excited about exploring the new heaven and earth with Jesus, the Alpha and Omega, Beginning and End, Creator and Redeemer!

May we pray as the Puritans did:

May I arrive where means of grace cease and I need
no more to fast, pray, weep, watch, be tempted,
attend preaching and sacrament;
where nothing defiles,
where is no grief, sorrow, sin, death, separation,
tears, pale face, languid body, aching joints, feeble
infancy, decrepit age, peccant humours, pining
sickness, griping fears, consuming cares;
where is personal completeness;
where the more perfect the sight the more
beautiful the object,
the more perfect the appetite the sweeter the
food,
the more musical the ear the more pleasant the
melody,
the more complete the soul the more happy its
joys,
where is full knowledge of thee.

—Arthur Bennet, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust: 2005), "Heaven
Desired."