



STAFF DEVOTIONS

DEVOTION I: TREASURE JESUS

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

Imagine your young daughter 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? Was your daughter telling the truth those many months ago? Could this child, whose name means “the Lord saves,” really be the promised one?

Those shepherds who came to visit the baby, wanting to see the Savior that had been born to us, Christ the Lord—did they really know what they were talking about? Is it our Savior? . . . This is our Savior!

As you read the passages revealing the events surrounding the birth of Christ for the umpteenth time, 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 share the good news of the Creator who stepped into history as a baby, make sure your children know that this was no ordinary baby. This is Immanuel, God with us.

May we pray as the Puritans did:

O God, take me in spirit to the watchful shepherds, and
enlarge my mind;
Let me hear good tidings of great joy, and hearing,
believe, rejoice, praise, adore,
My conscience bathed in an ocean of repose, my eyes
uplifted to a reconciled Father;
Place me with ox, ass, camel, goat, to look with them
upon my redeemer’s face,
And in him account myself delivered from sin;
Let me with Simeon clasp the new-born child to my
heart, embrace him with undying faith, exulting that
he is mine and I am his.
In him thou hast given me so much that heaven can
give no more.

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 16.



DEVOTION 2: FOLLOW JESUS

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:21

Imagine being a young boy and having a friend whose dad was a carpenter. He helped his dad around his shop and invited you in for a meal after a day of tending your sheep. Indeed, your father had encouraged you to befriend the carpenter's son. Apparently, your dad had been there the night of his birth and had experienced something indescribable.

In your teen years, your eyes couldn't help but roll every time your dad asked you to gather the sheep *again*. But your friend always obeyed his parents right away—all the way—cheerfully without complaining. While you got hangry, he never did. He also calmed you down when you were "righteously angry" at the latest injustices experienced by your people.

This young man seemed to make friends with the animals he fitted for yokes. And his tears flowed when his beloved pet donkey died. He enjoyed a good joke—but never at someone's expense. He seemed to know things that no one else knew. Everyone gravitated toward the serious young man who taught even the teachers.

After you married and began having kids, he celebrated birthdays and anniversaries with you, bringing children presents that he had made in his wood shop. Strangely enough, his own birthday never seemed important to him—he always seemed older than he was anyway.

Later, you watched as a crowd gathered around to listen to your friend teach. His teachings were astounding—to turn the other cheek when the Roman oppressors struck? To give them all you had when they asked? To love them after years of ingrained hatred? Perfection was the standard set by God in order to gain heaven? The kingdom of God was near?

And then you both attended the wedding of a mutual friend, and somehow, he changed the water you'd just sipped into the best wine you'd ever tasted. Surely, no ordinary man could do that!

Could this man, your lifelong friend, really be the one? The Messiah who had been promised for hundreds of years? Has your Deliverer come? . . . Yes, the Deliverer has come!

As you study the passages about Jesus' childhood, scant though they are, meditate on the differences between the children you know and the child he was. Think about what other religions teach and claim. *Superior* doesn't even begin to describe Jesus compared to everyone else. And yet, this Creator-Redeemer has called us to learn from him, to imitate him, and to follow him.

As you share with the children today, try to convey the sense of wonder and awe that he inspires in what he teaches and does, encouraging them to follow after this God-Man, Jesus Christ.

May we pray as the Puritans prayed:

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 Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 11.



DEVOTION 3: WORSHIP JESUS

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 if 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.

Makes you think, doesn't it? Could this man really be who he claimed to be? This is our Savior.

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.

As you study your Bible this week, put aside the genteel storybook notions that cloud the truth about the Messiah. And read the gospel accounts as if for the first time. Marvel at the astounding claims Jesus made like, “before Abraham was, I AM”; the awesome demonstrations of his power over nature, sin, and death; the amazing fact that he rose from the dead; and the astonishing change in the lives of those he touched.

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 following. And the only way we can know the truth about him is through his inspired Word, the Bible.

As you prepare to meet Jesus with your students today, let's meditate on this Puritan prayer about the Rock of Ages.

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 Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 104.



DEVOTION 4: BELIEVE JESUS

He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Matthew 28:6

Imagine following the political career of a most unusual man for several years. He was said to be the one for whom the people had waited. The one who would save the people from the persecution suffered for hundreds of years.

He was certainly different than anyone who had come before. He taught with such authority and knew the holy Scriptures so thoroughly, it was no wonder many were attracted to him. His power was undeniable—he had healed your friend from a bleeding problem that no doctor had been able to help with and had made the evil spirits tormenting you go away.

One of the more significant differences was his lifestyle—he seemed to live a blameless life. Even his mother, a friend of yours, claimed he was an obedient child who cared for others. It was difficult to imagine any man as the personification of perfection, but if there was one, he would be it.

Imagine your grief and despair when he died and especially at 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 you went to honor his memory and the man at the tomb said, "He is not here; for he has 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? He's alive! Imagine seeing the risen Savior.

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 death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is anchored in history. He really died, and he really rose again. And he was seen by hundreds of witnesses after his resurrection. Make sure they know that they can receive the eternal life he offers to those who believe.

May we pray as the Puritans did:

Blessed Lord Jesus,
Before thy cross I kneel and see the heinousness of my
sin, my iniquity that caused thee to be "made a curse,"
the evil that excited the severity of divine wrath.
Show me the enormity of my guilt by the crown of
thorns, the pierced hands and feet, the bruised body,
the dying cries.
Thy blood is the blood of incarnate God, its worth
infinite, its value beyond all thought.
Infinite must be the evil and guilt that demands
such a price.
Yet thy compassions yearn over me, thy heart hastens
to my rescue, thy love endured my curse, thy mercy
bore my deserved stripes.
Let me walk humbly in the lowest depths of humiliation,
bathed in thy blood, triumphing gloriously as an heir
of salvation.

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 41.



DEVOTION 5: SHARE JESUS

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 1:8

Imagine being part of the crowd chanting for the death of the one 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 was 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 man you knew was unable to walk, ran into the place of prayer. What happened to him? Who were these men he was following around?

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 . . . Prince of Life? Who had risen 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 Prince 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!
And he would be coming again some day!

Think about what happened after Jesus rose from the dead and 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.

As you share with your students today, emphasize that it is God who saves us and calls us to be his witnesses. We have a precious treasure—the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus—that we must share with those around us while we wait for his return.

May we pray as the Puritans did:

Father of Jesus,
May my words and works allure others to the highest
walks of faith and love!
May worldlings be won to delight in acquaintance
with thee!
May the timid and irresolute be warned of coming
doom by my zeal for Jesus!
Cause me to be a mirror of thy grace; to show
others the joy of thy service,
Help me to walk as Jesus walked, my only Savior
and perfect model, his mind my inward guest, his
meekness my covering garb.

—Arthur Bennett, *The Valley of Vision*
(The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 136.