

25 DEVOTIONS RECLAIMING THE
BEAUTY AND WONDER OF THE SEASON



CHRISTMAS

FOR
THE

Heart

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*For my grandsons Isaiah, James,
Samuel, and Silas.*

*May you draw ever closer to
Jesus at Christmas and always.*

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PREFACE

CHRISTMAS STIRS ALL KINDS OF longings in our hearts. We long for a joyful and peaceful celebration of the season. We yearn for merry moments with those we love, for nostalgic moments filled with sweet memories, and also for meaningful moments of worship. Simply put, we long for the beauty and wonder of Christmas.

But so much tries to get in the way of that kind of Christmas celebration. Pressure-packed schedules, the desire and drive to do everything Christmas, disillusionment with the commercialism of the season, and discouraging life situations can all hinder our Christmas longings from becoming reality.

I want to help change that for you. With this book, I hope to help you reclaim the beauty and wonder of Christmas. What better gift could I give?

In fact, Christmas has been a time for gifts ever since that momentous, life-changing night in ancient Bethlehem, when God gave the world the gift of a Savior, when baby Jesus took his first breaths and began drawing people to himself. Mary and Joseph were the first to gaze on this greatest gift from God. The shepherds then came, drawn like a magnet to the manger where the baby Jesus—the King of kings and Lord of lords—first shined his light in our world. Later on, in response to this greatest gift from God, the Magi came from the East to worship the Babe and offer him gifts fit for a king. And with that, many say our tradition of gift-giving at Christmas was born.

It has been my great joy and privilege for nearly all my adult life to continue to shine the light of Jesus during the holiday season by including an original poem in my Christmas cards. I consider each one a little gift for the heart to all my family and friends, written with the help of the Author of Christmas himself.

You'll find many of those poems in the following pages, along with reflections, quotes, Scriptures, holiday activities, and guided journaling opportunities. All designed to help you reclaim the beauty and wonder of Christmas. All designed to help you fully celebrate the season, to rejoice in the greatest gift ever given to the world, and to inspire you to give the King of kings the worship he's due.

And so, my friends, I give you *Christmas for the Heart: 25 Devotions Reclaiming the Beauty and Wonder of the Season*. And I give it to you with the love of Christ. May he draw you like a magnet to himself this holiday season!



WELCOME, BEAUTIFUL CHRISTMAS

*“Be merry all, be merry all,
With holly dress the festive hall,
Prepare the song, the feast, the ball,
To welcome merry Christmas.”¹*

WILLIAM SPENCER

THANKSGIVING HAS COME AND GONE, and the early days of a new Christmas season stand at the doorway of our hearts, awaiting an eager welcome. If you listen closely, even now you may imagine hearing a knock at the door, like a happy announcement that it’s time, that the days to prepare for Christmas are here. If you listen with the ears of your spirit and soul, you may even hear a voice—the King of Christmas himself—calling you to begin your celebration. Reminding you to rejoice in him.

Yes, Christmas carries with it an air of excitement, the warmth of home and family, all treasured things touched by tradition, and the joy of Christmas worship. Childhood memories bubble to the surface, bringing out the kid in all of us as we recall the thrill of holiday activities on magical December nights. Or we remember the love and laughter of our family gathered in the living room while watching favorite Christmas movies. And we mustn’t forget the

years of playing the role of a bleating sheep or an angel with a crooked halo in the Christmas pageant at church.

Warm memories like these from our early days help us welcome the season each year. Charles Dickens said, “It is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself.”² Just like children, the anticipation of Christmas can also make our grown-up hearts smile. That’s especially true when we’re trying to create similar heartwarming memories for our own children or grandchildren.

Sometimes, though, if we’re honest, a feeling of panic or some other negative emotion may try to intrude on the merry moods our hearts yearn to feel or pass on to others. Too much to do, too little time, expectations, normal daily demands, and unexpected interruptions or disappointments of life try to steal our joy. It’s happened to me time and again over the years.

Let’s not let any Christmas-spirit thieves worm their way into our hearts this year. Instead, let’s take a few simple steps to alleviate the pressures where possible.

We can postpone appointments or tasks that aren’t absolutely necessary, plan for super simple meals, cut back or simplify gift-giving in some way, and forgo activities or traditions that drain us rather than give us joy. Let’s each take the steps needed in our own lives to reduce our stress and then determine to celebrate and enjoy the season with joyful abandon.

Join me, won’t you? The magic and merry, the holly and holy await. Let’s reclaim and welcome a beautiful Christmas!



Beautiful Christmas

Beautiful Christmas, I welcome you,
Come in and dwell with me,
Deck my home with joy and laughter
String love lights on the Christmas tree.

Beautiful Christmas, please go with me
Give cheer to those I greet,
Warm hearts with simple acts of kindness
Look closely for the unseen need.

Beautiful Christmas, shine everywhere
Touch all with peace and goodwill,
Bring light to even the darkest corners
Grant hope, speak "Peace, be still."

Beautiful Christmas, I know you now
The Bethlehem Babe you are,
I welcome you, come dwell with me,
Lead me by the light of your star.

*"On that day the Branch of the LORD
will be beautiful and glorious."*

Isaiah 4:2

Christmas **WISDOM**

Determine to celebrate and enjoy the season with joyful abandon, making the adjustments needed to do just that.

Christmas **PRAYER**

Jesus, I long to fully welcome this season of celebrating your birth. Please help me

Christmas **PAST**

One of my favorite ways of welcoming Christmas when I was growing up was

Christmas **PRESENT**

I am welcoming Christmas this year by

Christmas **MERRYMAKING**

Hold your own little Christmas welcoming ceremony. String lights around your front door or light a Christmas candle—or any number of other symbolic holiday activities—and sing “Joy to the World” or “O Come, All Ye Faithful.” As you create a Christmas ambiance in your home, you’ll set the stage for Christmas worship in your heart.





THE LIGHT OF CHRISTMAS

*O Father, may that Holy star
Grow every year more bright,
And send its glorious beams afar
To fill the world with light.”³*

WILLIAM CULLEN BRYANT

AS DECEMBER’S EARLIEST HOURS PEEK over the holiday horizon with a faint glow of the days to come, our yearning for the Christmas season to be filled with magic and light is birthed once again. At the same time, the unspoken hope that the season itself will brighten our lives, whatever our current circumstances, makes its annual debut as well. We long to set aside our cares and enjoy a fairy-tale Christmas, one that offers every heartwarming touch possible. But if we look just beneath that surface longing, we’ll see a deeper longing for abiding joy and everlasting light for our souls.

Often we manage to manufacture or stumble upon some of that surface holiday magic and light—scenes from a fairy-tale Christmas. But even then, the merry feelings are often short-lived. Real life intrudes like clockwork, like the monthly bills that arrive without fail. Like the last day of summer vacation.

Yes, kids who whoop and holler with glee over their gifts and play in noisy harmony will soon commence quarreling, ending up in tears while still clutching their new toys. The harmony has now evaporated. A couple returns home one evening, still shining with the glow from a lovely holiday outing, and steps into a growing puddle as the kitchen floor floods from a leaking pipe under the sink. Their contented smiles drop like those of two kids finding coal in their Christmas stockings. And even more common, many of us—after experiencing a splendid Christmas—find our holiday joy melting away after everyone goes home and we return to everyday life with its everyday challenges. Our temporarily forgotten struggles have surfaced again. We come face-to-face once more with our real need, our need for true light and life.

I'm reminded of the passage in God's Word known as the love chapter. "If I speak human or angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so that I can move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give away all my possessions, and if I give over my body in order to boast but do not have love, I gain nothing" (1 Cor. 13:1–3).

The same kind of discerning insight can be applied where our deepest Christmas longing is concerned. If we have a home filled with twinkling lights, gaily wrapped gifts, the merry strains of holiday classics, and our loved ones laughing nearby but do not have in our hearts the adoration and worship of Jesus, the true light of Christmas, we have nothing lasting. Nothing that will satisfy our soul's deepest longing. Nothing that will never fail us.

Today and during each holiday season, may we renew our focus on that perfect and everlasting Light who burst upon the world scene centuries ago and has been shining an unparalleled light for us ever since. In the New Testament, Matthew 4:16 quotes from the prophet Isaiah and says, “The people who live in darkness have seen a great light, and for those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned.” Oh, how I thank God for that great Light!

So remember with me, won't you, that no magic, no joys, no light the world can offer will fill the deepest yearning of our hearts. Only Jesus, the true Light of Christmas. Only Jesus, the Savior of the world. May we let the wonder we seek be found in him. May we let him satisfy our longing hearts.



The Light of Christmas

What's that on the horizon,
The light of Christmas drawing near?
Possibly the promise of a miracle,
Maybe the drying of a tear?

Near and far people look
For the light of Christmas to be theirs,
Yearning for the hope it holds
Longing to cast aside their cares.

Some seek the light in merrymaking
Others in the warmth of home,
Some think that things can offer comfort
Some choose the world to roam.

But the light of Christmas that satisfies,
The hope that will never let us down,
Is the miracle found in a manger—
The Christ Child born in Bethlehem town.

"I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows me will never walk in the darkness but will have the light of life."

John 8:12

Christmas **WISDOM**

*For lasting joy and eternal light, fix your eyes on the Christ child,
the Light of the world, this Christmas.*

Christmas **PRAYER**

Jesus, be my light this Christmas and beyond as I

Christmas **PAST**

*My favorite memories of holiday lights and the joy they bring
include*

Christmas **PRESENT**

This Christmas I will try to point others to the true Light of Christmas by

Christmas **MERRYMAKING**

Grab some friends or family members and enjoy a new Christmas light experience this season. Find a light display you've never seen, go on a candlelight tour you've not yet experienced, or attend a tree-lighting ceremony or candlelight church service you've not attended before. Enjoy some new-to-you Christmas lights with loved ones this year!





CHRISTMAS stirs countless longings in our hearts. Longings for a joyful, peaceful season. For merry moments with loved ones. For nostalgic moments and sweet memories. For meaningful moments of worship.

Simply put, we long for the beauty and wonder of Christmas. But so much interferes with that desire. Packed schedules, the urge to do everything Christmas, seasonal commercialism, and life situations all hinder these longings from becoming reality.

Cheryl Barker wants to help you change that with her new Advent devotional *Christmas for the Heart*. The quotes, reflections, original poetry, Scriptures, and special features in each chapter help you reclaim the beauty and wonder of the season. Her heartfelt words lead you to rejoice in the greatest gift ever given and inspire you to give the King of Kings the worship he's due. The guided journaling makes this beautiful devotional book a perfect keepsake gift.



CHERYL BARKER has led readers in reflection and encouraged them for years through the written word. She is the author of *Mother of the Bride: Refreshment and Wisdom for the Mother of the Bride* and has written for various outlets, including Blue Mountain Arts greeting cards and gift books. Cheryl lives in Kansas and loves to spend time with family and friends, take photos, and indulge in daily doses of chocolate.

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