

PREPARE HIM ROOM

**A 10-DAY DEVOTIONAL LEADING UP
TO CHRISTMAS**

Written by: Ken Winter

Editor: Carolyn Baney

Front Cover Design: Claire Xu

TABLE OF CONTENTS

December 15th - Clearing the Clutter	3
December 16th - The Waiting Room.....	5
December 17th - Room for the Unexpected.....	8
December 18th - No Room in the Inn	10
December 19th - Room for Humility	12
December 20th - Room at the Table.....	14
December 21st - The Upper Room.....	16
December 22nd - Room for Worship	18
December 23rd - Room for Others.....	20
December 24th - Emmanuel: God with Us	22

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 15TH - CLEARING THE CLUTTER

READ: Isaiah 40:3-5

A voice cries: “In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain. And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

When Tara and I are expecting company, it’s “all hands on deck” at our house. Tara loves making sure everything is tidy and welcoming for our guests, especially clearing out the *ever-present* golden retriever hair. If you’ve ever lived with a golden, you know...the fur never ends. Just when I think I’ve vacuumed up the last bit, another tumbleweed of fluff floats by, like it’s mocking me from some secret stash.

I’ll admit, I often try to volunteer for a different “Tara Task” because no matter how hard I work, I never feel like I get it all. The room never feels *perfectly* ready. And that’s when the Holy Spirit gently reminds me: preparing room isn’t about *perfection*; it’s about *presence*. Tara doesn’t clean because she’s trying to impress anyone. She prepares because she wants to be free to be *present*; to enjoy time with our guests without distraction.

Spiritually speaking, though, I can fall into the trap of waiting until company’s coming so to speak before I deal with the clutter in my heart. I let the “spiritual dog hair”

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pile up: neglecting time with God, skipping church for a few weeks, letting small things crowd out my connection with Him. Before I know it, my heart feels messy and distant.

And now here we are: December. The “most wonderful time of the year,” but often the most *cluttered* too. The most wonderful time of the year can quickly become a season of more clutter and more mess in our lives. We rush, we plan, we spend, we stress. Our hearts get so full of busyness that there’s little space left for the One we’re celebrating. But what if this Christmas looked different? What if, instead of adding more to our lists, we took a few quiet moments each day to clear some spiritual clutter—worry, hurry, bitterness, distraction—and made a little more room for Jesus?

The King is coming. Let’s prepare Him room.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Identify one area of spiritual “clutter” in your life today (busyness, worry, unforgiveness, distraction) and take one concrete step to address it. Maybe that means asking God for clarity, reaching out to a friend for accountability, or simply taking five quiet minutes to pray.

PRAYER: *“Heavenly Father, open my eyes to the areas of my life that have grown cluttered and unattended. Show me what’s keeping me from drawing closer to You. Clear away the distractions and create in me a clean heart this Christmas season. Make my heart a home where You are welcome and present. In Jesus’ name, amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 16TH - THE WAITING ROOM

READ: Luke 2:25-38

THEME: Advent is about *expectant waiting*. Simeon waited his entire life for the Messiah.

In 2010, Tara and I found ourselves sitting in the waiting room at Johns Hopkins Hospital, holding our breath and praying for news about our daughter Anna. It all began unexpectedly during her fifth grade year. We got a call from the school nurse saying Anna's back looked like it was curving. After several doctor visits, we learned she had scoliosis — and not just a mild curve, but her spine was curved and twisted and compromised her internal organs. She was only eleven at the time. As parents, we were heartbroken and desperate to find answers. After countless doctor appointments and even a trip to a specialist in Florida, we still didn't have a clear path forward. Then, a friend mentioned something called *Marfan Syndrome*. We had never heard of it, so we did some research and went to her doctor to discuss this possibility. Anna showed all the signs, and a DNA test confirmed it — a rare genetic condition that affects only one in 10,000 people. Our daughter was the one.

And so, there we were — waiting. Waiting while Anna underwent a seven-hour surgery to have two titanium rods fused to her spine to help straighten it. Waiting for the doctor to tell us that she was okay and the surgery went well. We were waiting for hope.

When the doctor finally came out with good news, we exhaled for what felt like the first time all day. Anna's

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surgery was a success. I'll never forget hugging her afterward and realizing she had grown three inches taller — literally straightened by the work that had been done inside her. It's been more than fourteen years since that day, but I can still feel what it was like to sit in that waiting room — the mix of fear, faith, prayer, and hope.

Advent is a season of that same kind of waiting. *Expectant waiting.* Simeon's story in Luke reminds us of what it means to trust in God's promise, even when the waiting feels long. For years, he held onto the hope that he would see the Messiah — and one day, he did.

But unlike our time in that hospital waiting room, where we didn't know what the outcome would be, Simeon's waiting was anchored in certainty. God's promise was sure. Jesus *was* coming — the plan had always been in place.

And now, you and I live in that same tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” Jesus has come, and He *will* come again. The waiting continues — but not without hope.

As you prepare Him room this Advent season, take a moment to sit quietly with that thought: *What are you waiting for God to do in your life? And how can you trust Him in the waiting?*

DAILY CHALLENGE: Find ten quiet minutes today to simply *be still*. Reflect on what you're waiting for — and ask God to meet you in that place with peace and patience.

PREPARE HIM ROOM

PRAYER: *“Father, help me to wait patiently for your perfect timing. You already know my needs and my heart. Teach me to trust You in the waiting — not with worry, but with hope. Remind me that You are always at work, even when I cannot see it. In Jesus’ name, amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 17TH - ROOM FOR THE UNEXPECTED

READ: Luke 1:26-38

THEME: Mary's "yes" to God

In the fall of 2000, I was working as a traveling ShamWow salesman and traveling all over the country. I was in North Carolina for a sales show when I got an unexpected call from a friend who lived in Wilmington, North Carolina. She was a regular extra on the hit TV show *Dawson's Creek*. (For those who missed the late '90s WB era, think *Outer Banks* before streaming was a thing!) She told me I could come by and watch a day of filming since I'd be in town between weekend sales shows. That alone sounded exciting. But when I arrived on set, one of the casting directors looked at me and asked, "Hey, want to be an extra today?" I couldn't believe it. My immediate, enthusiastic answer was, "Yes!"

Before I knew it, I was playing a 17-year-old high school kid, walking the halls of "Capeside High" alongside a few other extras. I'll never forget standing just a few feet from James Van Der Beek and Katie Holmes — it was surreal! That day turned out to be the start of many other unexpected acting opportunities in my life, all because I said yes in a moment I didn't see coming.

When I think about that, I can't help but imagine how Mary must have felt when the angel Gabriel appeared out of nowhere with an even more unexpected message: "Greetings, O favored one, the Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). Scripture says she was troubled — and who wouldn't be? Then Gabriel reassured her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God."

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The angel's message was stunning — she would give birth to a son, and His name would be *Jesus*. He would be called the Son of the Most High and sit on the throne of David forever. It was a lot to take in. And yet, even in her fear and confusion, Mary's final words are what stand out most: "I am the Lord's servant," Mary answered. "May it be to me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) What a posture of faith. What a beautiful "yes."

I want to live with that same open-hearted trust. When life takes an unexpected turn — when God interrupts my plans with His own — I want to be ready to say, "Yes, Lord. I'm yours." But that kind of readiness doesn't just happen. It comes from making room for God daily — through prayer, stillness, and time in His Word — so we can hear His voice when He calls.

God's plans often look different from ours, but they are always better. Like Mary, may we have the courage and humility to welcome the unexpected and trust that His surprises are good.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Ask God to show you one way He might already be working in your life that you haven't noticed. Be open to the unexpected and say "yes" when He invites you to join Him.

PRAYER: *"Lord, help me to expect the unexpected. Give me eyes to see where You are already at work and a heart willing to join You there. When Your plans interrupt mine, help me to respond with trust and joy. Teach me to make room for the unexpected this Christmas season. In Jesus' name, amen."*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 18TH - NO ROOM IN THE INN

READ: Luke 2:1-7

THEME: The world had no room for Jesus then. Do we make room for Him now?

Have you ever found yourself feeling left out or overlooked? Maybe you weren't picked for a team, invited to an event, or chosen for something you really wanted to be part of. I remember feeling that way back in elementary school during recess. Every day, the fourth-grade boys would head out to the grassy field behind our gym to play our favorite game — some wild version of “tackle the guy with the ball.” I wasn't exactly the biggest or strongest kid at Ponderosa Elementary. I hadn't hit that “milk-a-day growth spurt” yet like some of my classmates. It wouldn't be until my junior year of high school that I really started to fill out. Back then, I was the smaller kid — quick to be overlooked, even if I wasn't picked last. Still, I remember that little sting of not being chosen. Of not being noticed.

I think about that feeling when I read the story of Mary and Joseph in Bethlehem. Scripture tells us that when they arrived, there was *no room* for them at the inn. We don't know all the details — maybe the town was packed because of the census, or every guest room was already full. But whatever the reason, the Savior of the world entered this earth quietly, in a stable, because no one made room for Him.

And it makes me wonder: *Would I have made room?*

It's easy to say yes when we're reading the story from two thousand years later. But in truth, we often do the

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same thing today. We know who Jesus is. We know what He's done for us — that He came, lived, died, and rose again to set us free. And yet, how often do we close the door to His presence in our daily lives?

We fill our calendars, our minds, and our hearts until there's no space left. We say yes to everything else — work, errands, plans, even good things — and unintentionally say “no” to the One who gave us life. Busyness can easily become an idol.

But Advent reminds us to slow down. To open the door. To make room again for Jesus — not as a guest squeezed in when there's time, but as the very center of our lives and homes.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Take a look at your calendar and your commitments this week. What needs to be removed or rearranged to make more room for Jesus? Be intentional — time with Him won't happen by accident.

PRAYER: *“Father, forgive me for the times I've filled my life so full that there's no room left for You. As I prepare for Christmas, help me to slow down, open my heart, and make space to hear Your voice and experience Your presence. Create in me a spirit of stillness and wonder this season. In Jesus' name, amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 19TH - ROOM FOR HUMILITY

READ: Philippians 2:5-11

THEME: Jesus left heaven's glory for a manger. He calls us to humble ourselves.

If we're honest, one of the deepest struggles most of us face is pride. It shows up in so many subtle ways — the need to be noticed, the desire to be right, the quiet comparison to others. Pride doesn't always shout; sometimes it just quietly whispers, "*You've got this on your own*". The truth is, we all wrestle with it. The question isn't *if* pride exists in our lives — it's *where*. Like the tip of an iceberg, we often only see a fraction of what's really below the surface.

As a pastor, I've learned how sneaky pride can be. When a church is growing and thriving, it's easy to start believing the success is because of your own effort or talent — to think too highly of yourself instead of giving glory to God. The praise of others can feel good, but it's a dangerous trap if it turns our focus inward instead of upward.

Pride is like Sméagol in *The Lord of the Rings*, endlessly clutching his "precious" — turned inward, consumed by self. When we fix our gaze on ourselves, we lose sight of the One who deserves all the glory.

But then we look at Jesus.

He left the throne room of heaven — perfect, glorious, eternal — and stepped down into our broken world. He came not as a king in power, but as a baby in a

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manger. The God of the universe allowed Himself to be dependent on others, to learn to walk and talk, to feel hunger and pain. It's almost beyond comprehension. Yet this is the miracle of Christmas — that Jesus humbled Himself, not just in birth but in death. He chose the cross, trading His divine glory for our salvation.

If we want to prepare room for Him this Christmas, we must follow His example. We must make room for humility — setting aside our pride, our self-importance, our need to be in control. True humility isn't thinking less of ourselves; it's thinking of ourselves *less* and fixing our eyes on Jesus more.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Look for one opportunity to serve someone today — quietly, without recognition or thanks. Let humility guide your actions and reflect Christ's heart to those around you.

PRAYER: *“Father, teach me to walk in humility like Jesus. Help me to see the needs of others before my own and to serve without seeking attention or praise. Strip away my pride and fill my heart with Your grace. May my life reflect Your humble love today. In Jesus' name, amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 20TH - ROOM AT THE TABLE

READ: Luke 14:12-14

THEME: Jesus came for the outcast and lonely. Our preparation should include hospitality.

Every time I drive into Springfield from Route 68, I see a homeless man standing near the intersection where I turn onto 41. There used to be another man who stood there too — sometimes with his dog — but I think he has since passed away.

Each time I pull up to that light, an inner battle begins.

Do I give him some money this time?

Should I run to Chick-fil-A and bring him a meal?

Or do I just look straight ahead and hope the light stays green so I don't have to stop?

I know, that sounds terrible to admit — but if you've ever been in that situation, you know the struggle. I don't want to ignore him, but I also wrestle with doubts: *Will he use it for food? Or something else?* And then I remember — Jesus came for the least of these. He came for the poor, the hurting, the forgotten, and the sinner. The ones society often passes by. The truth is, that man on the corner is someone's son. Maybe someone's father. He bears the image of God just as much as I do.

Every time I feel that hesitation, God gently reminds me: generosity isn't about what happens *after* I give. It's about what happens *in me* when I choose to give.

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In Luke 14, Jesus teaches us to invite those who cannot repay us — to offer hospitality, kindness, and generosity with no expectation of getting anything in return. That's what He did for us. Jesus came from the glory of heaven to sit at tables with outcasts, to touch the sick, to love the unlovable, and to bring hope to those who had none.

That's the heart of Christmas. Jesus didn't just make room in the inn; He made room at the table. And now He calls us to do the same — to open our hearts and lives to those who might feel unseen or unwanted this season.

Some people are struggling with poverty, others with sickness, and some with loneliness or doubt. But here's the amazing truth of the gospel: **Jesus came for us all.** He came for you. And He invites you to His table — a place of grace, belonging, and love.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Reach out to someone who might be feeling lonely this season. Invite them into your life or your celebrations. Look for a way to go above and beyond in generosity — maybe through your church, by blessing a family, or by helping someone you don't even know. Give freely, expecting nothing in return.

PRAYER: *“God, open my eyes to see those who feel left out or forgotten. Give me a heart of compassion and a willingness to act. Help me to be generous with my time, my resources, and my love — not for recognition, but because You have been so generous to me. May I make room at my table for others this Christmas, just as You have made room for me. In Jesus' name, amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 21ST - THE UPPER ROOM

READ: John 14:1-3

THEME: While we prepare room for Him, He prepares an eternal room for us.

Since becoming a pastor in 2002, I've officiated far more weddings and baby dedications than funerals. Being in youth ministry for many years and now pastoring a young church means I'm often surrounded by beginnings rather than endings. But whenever I do lead a funeral, I'm reminded that those moments are sacred opportunities — to comfort those who grieve and to point them toward the hope we have in Jesus.

As people sit quietly in their seats, remembering the one they've lost, it's almost certain that they start to think about their own lives, too. *What happens when I die? Where will I go? Is there really a heaven?*

This past year, when I spoke at my wife's grandmother's service, I reflected on how beautifully she lived. She loved people so deeply and devoted her life to helping others know the hope found in Jesus. We were sad that day, but we didn't grieve without hope — because we knew *she* knew Jesus. Or more accurately, that *Jesus knew her*.

When Jesus told His disciples He was leaving, they were heartbroken. They couldn't imagine life without Him. But Jesus comforted them with a promise:

“In my Father's house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you.”

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Just think about that. There's already a room in heaven with your name on it — a place Jesus Himself has prepared for you.

One day, when your faith becomes sight and you stand face to face with Him, I imagine Jesus gently taking your hand and saying, *“Welcome home. Let me show you your room — I made it just for you.”*

As we prepare room for Him this Christmas, let's remember: **He has already prepared room for us.**

DAILY CHALLENGE: Write down any fears or anxieties you're carrying this season. Then reread John 14:1–3 and memorize it. Let these verses remind you that Jesus has secured your place with Him forever.

PRAYER: *“Lord, thank You for the promise of eternal life and the room You've prepared for me. Calm my fears and help me live with peace and hope, knowing that my home is with You. Until that day, help me prepare Your room here on earth. In Jesus' name, amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 22ND - ROOM FOR WORSHIP

READ: Matthew 2:1-12

THEME: The magi traveled far to worship Jesus. They gave their best treasures.

Think for a moment — what's the best gift you've ever received? Maybe it was something expensive, or perhaps something simple but deeply meaningful.

I'll never forget the time I surprised my daughter Anna for her 13th birthday with a trip to Cleveland, Ohio. (I know — not everyone's dream destination!) But that year, the Denver Broncos — her favorite team — were playing the Browns. 2015 was the year the Broncos went on to win Super Bowl 50, and Anna's favorite player, Emmanuel Sanders, had an incredible game that day.

The best part? We stayed at the same hotel as the team, and she actually got to meet Sanders in the lobby! The look on her face said it all. That trip was more than a gift — it was a moment she would never forget.

When the magi traveled hundreds of miles to find the newborn King, they too brought something unforgettable — their very best. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh — precious treasures fit for royalty. Their gifts weren't random or convenient. They were intentional acts of worship.

The magi remind us that true worship is costly. It's about offering our best — our time, our resources, our hearts — not out of obligation, but out of love. This Christmas, part of preparing Him room means resisting the

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pull of busyness and materialism, and instead giving our best to the One who gave everything for us.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Give God your best today — your first moments in prayer, your full attention in worship, or a sacrificial act of generosity. Let your offering be a reflection of love and gratitude.

PRAYER: *“Almighty God, You are worthy of my worship and my best. Help me to give freely, joyfully, and sacrificially this Christmas — not to earn Your love, but to honor the One who first loved me. Amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 23RD - ROOM FOR OTHERS

READ: 1 John 3:16-18

THEME: Preparing room for Jesus means making room in our lives for those He loves.

If there's one thing most of us wish we had more of, it's time. I often sit with Tara at the start of the week, comparing calendars — meetings, counseling sessions, games, small groups — and before long, every square inch of our schedule is covered. Ministry and family life can fill every moment. And while we love the calling God has given us, I've learned that busyness can quietly push out what matters most: relationships.

Making room for Jesus also means making room for *others* — our friends, our families, and the people God places in our path. Sometimes, when relationships grow distant or strained, it's not because of conflict but simply because we've neglected them for too long.

Jesus modeled something better. During His ministry, He constantly made time for people — His disciples, the crowds, the sick, the outcasts. He didn't rush past interruptions; He welcomed them as opportunities. Whether it was the woman at the well or a tax collector up in a tree, Jesus noticed people others ignored.

And He calls us to do the same.

Making room for others may look like a conversation over coffee, an act of kindness, or simply slowing down long enough to listen. When we do, we

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reflect the heart of the Savior who always made room for us.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Perform an act of anonymous kindness today — meet a need, leave a note, give a gift, or serve someone quietly. Let your love be demonstrated, not just discussed.

PRAYER: *“God, slow me down enough to see the people You’ve placed around me. Help me to love others like Jesus — not just in words, but in action. Use me to be a light of Your kindness this Christmas. Amen.”*

PREPARE HIM ROOM

DECEMBER 24TH - EMMANUEL: GOD WITH US

READ: Matthew 1:18-23

THEME: Jesus did not just visit; He stayed. God is with us always.

Christmas morning is tomorrow. Maybe you're up early with a warm cup of coffee, the soft glow of the tree lighting the room. Maybe you're surrounded by laughter and wrapping paper scattered everywhere. Either way, take a deep breath — the waiting is over. *Emmanuel — God with us — has come.*

This is the heart of Christmas: God didn't just *say* He loved us; He *showed* it. He sent His Son into a weary, searching world to bring hope and redemption. Every year, our family gathers around the table with my wife's delicious monkey bread and an open Bible. We read the story we've heard a hundred times before, and somehow it still feels new.

The story never gets old because the truth never fades — God came near. He saw our brokenness and met us right where we are. He didn't turn away. He came to dwell among us.

But the Christmas story doesn't end at the manger. The baby in Bethlehem grew up to be the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world. At the cross, love and justice met — mercy and grace collided. Jesus bore our sin and opened the way for us to live forever with Him.

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That's what "God with us" really means. He didn't just visit for a season. He *stays*. He's with you today — in your joy, your pain, your uncertainty, and your celebration.

Whether this is the 85th Christmas you've celebrated with Jesus or your very first, the invitation is the same: prepare Him room.

DAILY CHALLENGE: Take a moment to reflect on this Advent journey. What is one lasting change you'll carry into the new year to keep room for Jesus in your daily life?

PRAYER: *"Jesus, thank You for being Emmanuel — God with us. Thank You for coming near, for staying near, and for never letting go. Help me to live every day with the same wonder and gratitude I feel on Christmas morning. Make my heart Your home, today and always. Amen."*

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The carol calls us to "prepare Him room" — not just in Bethlehem's stable, but in the dwelling place of our everyday lives. May we continue to make space for the Prince of Peace, not only this Christmas but every day of the year.