

## Steps of Faith

**When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife (Matthew 1:24).**

**Scripture:** Matthew 1:18-25

**Song:** “Joseph’s Song”

A 24-year-old woman felt like she had a scarlet letter on her forehead. Coming out of a world of abuse, she couldn’t imagine anyone wanting to be with her. Then it happened. A Christian man set his eyes on her and refused to let her past dictate his perspective. He married her and showed her how God’s love could help heal the pain of the past.

Mary was likely even younger than that woman when Mary learned she was to be a pregnant bride. Did she wonder whether Joseph would refuse to marry her? After all, marrying her was a risk. People would talk. However, Joseph was a man who honored God, and in doing so, he honored Mary, the one who would give birth to God’s Son.

When we begin to do something for God’s kingdom that feels risky, we might fear what could happen. But Proverbs 3:5 instructs us to trust in the Lord wholeheartedly. We can give Him the sacrifice of our obedience today as we step out in faith and see what He will do.

**Father**, thank You for the gift of Your presence and Your guidance in my life. Grant me courage to risk greatly for Your kingdom. In Jesus’ name, amen.

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December 25–31. **Jennifer Turner** lives in the Charlotte, North Carolina, area with her husband and three children. She enjoys speaking and writing about the goodness of God, His abundant grace, and His redemptive love.

## Hunger for Him

**[Mary said,] “He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:53).**

**Scripture:** Luke 1:46-55

**Song:** “We Hunger and Thirst”

“It’s a miracle!” I exclaimed one afternoon. I was 5 years old, and that morning my family and I had prayed a bold prayer of faith. With bare cabinets and an empty refrigerator, we had nothing to eat for lunch or dinner that day. So we prayed for what we needed, went to church, and came home to bags of groceries on our doorstep.

This story of God’s provision easily comes to mind when I read Mary’s words of praise about God filling the hungry with good things. The part that might be hard to understand, though, is that God sends the rich away empty. But Mary isn’t just talking about wealthy people; she’s identifying those who are prideful—those who put money, themselves, or other idols above the Lord. By contrast, those who are humble—hungry for God’s grace and goodness—He satisfies.

It’s easy for me to believe God will supply in times of need. It’s when I’m flourishing that I don’t always remember to acknowledge that God is the one who provides all things. But even when we are thriving we can learn to walk with a God-honoring attitude. Whether rich or poor, it’s when our hearts are humble that we see God most clearly and experience His grace.

**Father,** show me where my pride is in the way of Your grace. I want to walk in the peace and joy of a humble heart today. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Adjust Your Gaze

**When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there** (Deuteronomy 18:9).

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 18:9-14

**Song:** “Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus”

Sitting in a room that had just gone from light to dark, my husband turned on a light, and our eyes took a moment to adjust. It was amazing how quickly our eyes had adjusted to the dark. In the darkness, the iris opens the pupil as wide as possible. This allows us to see more in the dark.

It's like what can happen to our perspective when it comes to the things of this world. If the people of Israel were not careful to keep their eyes on the instructions God had given them, they would quickly become accustomed to and accepting of the culture around them. The land was full of idol worship and wicked practices. Israel needed to stay focused, or they'd quickly entertain evil. It's the same for us as Christians. If we take our eyes off Jesus and His narrow way, our spiritual eyes can quickly grow accustomed to an array of sinful thinking and behavior that we previously would not have accepted.

The ways of the world do not please the Lord. Let's not compromise our morals or values by “playing” with the world. By keeping our gaze fixed on Christ, we'll retain our integrity as we seek to honor our Savior in all that we do.

**Father**, today as I refocus on You, please wash me clean of any worldly influences. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Don't Doubt

**When they saw [Jesus], they worshiped him; but some doubted** (Matthew 28:17).

**Scripture:** Matthew 28:16-20

**Song:** “No Doubt About It”

When we had our puppy spayed, she had a couple of days when she just wasn't feeling well and wasn't her hyper self. Our three children were worried and asked multiple times, “Will she be like this forever?” Each time, their dad and I assured them that she would be fine in a few days, but they were skeptical because what we were promising was so different from what they were seeing in the moment.

The disciples saw Jesus perform great miracles, so shouldn't it have been easy for them to believe He was the Messiah and that one day He would die and rise again, just as He said He would? Of course, they didn't have the New Testament Scriptures to tell them what would happen next. They were just going by what they saw happening in the moment, and it didn't line up with how they thought things should be. So for some of Jesus' followers, doubt crept in.

It's easy for us to say we believe the Bible is the Word of God. But do we believe it's true in *our* lives? What about when we receive a tough diagnosis? Or another large bill arrives? Or we see a loved one go astray? Do we allow doubt to creep in and tell us things just aren't supposed to be this way? God's Word promises that He is working all things together for our good (Romans 8:28). Will we believe Him?

**Father**, I will trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Known by God

**Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the LORD called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name** (Isaiah 49:1).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 49:1-6

**Song:** "All My Ways Are Known to You"

"Don't call me 'Baby.' My name is Gideon!" my 7-year-old shouted. One thing he despises is for anyone to call him anything other than his name. He has one exception: me. I can call him "Gid-Gid" or "Buddy" or any other endearing name. Perhaps it's because he knows that I truly know him (as well as a mom can know a child). He knows that he doesn't have to explain that he is Gideon to me.

In today's verse we read Isaiah's prophecy regarding the Messiah's calling and identity and that both were established long before His birth. Actually, this verse may remind us of other passages about God's knowing a person's identity before they were born: Jeremiah 1:5, Psalm 139:16, and Galatians 1:15 all speak in these terms. It's comforting to know that those who belong to God are known and called and seen by Him.

God has known us from eternity past. He sees each one of us, and He calls us by name. We are His children and joint heirs with Christ in His kingdom to come. In Christ we are redeemed and set apart. Let's celebrate today knowing that we are known by Him and called to serve in His kingdom forever!

**Father**, thank You that You call me Your child. Thank You that my identity is found in You. I'll rest in this tremendous truth today. In Jesus' name, amen.

## Light of the World

**“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you”** (Isaiah 60:1).

**Scripture:** Isaiah 60:1-6

**Song:** “Shine, Jesus, Shine”

“Rise and shine and give God the glory, glory” were some of my favorite song lyrics as a child. I didn’t understand the impact of the words at the time, but I enjoyed singing such a catchy tune. However, it’s probably one of the reasons Psalm 34:5—“Those who look to him are radiant”—is one of my go-to Bible verses today. I love anything that reminds me that, as a Christian, I am to let my light shine.

Isaiah 59 paints a dark picture of coming wrath and much suffering. But to those who believe in the Lord, Isaiah 60:2 gives great hope. “See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the LORD rises upon you and his glory appears over you.”

Because of Christ, the light of salvation has come into this dark world, and one day the darkness of sin and death will come to an end! As believers, we are to radiate God’s love in this sullen world, proclaiming the light of the gospel wherever we go. We know that the darkness of this world won’t last forever. So let’s keep our eyes on the one who helps us spread His hope.

**Father,** thank You for Your light that is a beacon and lamp for me in this evil world. Help me to share the light of Your truth so that others might draw near to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

## Rerouting Us Again

**Having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route** (Matthew 2:12).

**Scripture:** Matthew 2:1-12

**Song:** “Leaning on the Everlasting Arms”

“She’s rerouting us again, Mom?” my daughter questioned with a slight grin. She knows all too well that her mama is directionally challenged. Google Maps will tell me to go right, and I automatically turn left. It will tell me to turn left, and I take a right. It happens way too often for my liking. The good news? Whether I miss one turn or ten, the result is always the same: we reach our destination. (It may just take longer than we anticipated.)

I imagine the magi may have felt a little discouraged when they had to return to their country by another route. I’m sure they had chosen the quickest or perhaps easiest way when following the star. Their return may have been tedious and exhausting. The route may have been unsafe. However, they did it for the result: avoiding King Herod and obeying God.

Maybe this year’s journey took you on a route you didn’t expect, and you’re leery of what’s ahead. Maybe you’re weary of the twists and turns, and maybe you’re skeptical of what’s to come. Rest in Jesus, knowing that He orders our steps (Psalm 37:23). You will arrive at the destination He has for you.

**Father,** thank You for directing my path, even when the route seems scary. Help me to trust in You every step of the way. In Jesus’ name, amen.