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Keep Watch

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## Opening

We are just about to bring in a new year. It is important and spiritually enriching to take time to reflect on all that God has done in the past year. The practice of reflection is not just a moment of nostalgia, but an act of worship—recognizing God’s hand in every season, every circumstance, and every detail of our lives. Today, we pause to recount the faithfulness of our God, who has been with us through both joy and hardship.

As it says in Psalm 139:1-18

Psalm 139:1–18 NRSV

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.

You know when I sit down and when I rise up;

you discern my thoughts from far away.

You search out my path and my lying down,

and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O LORD, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
and lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.  
Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?  
If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.  
If I take the wings of the morning  
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,  
even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.  
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,

and the light around me become night,”

even the darkness is not dark to you;

the night is as bright as the day,

for darkness is as light to you.

For it was you who formed my inward parts;

you knit me together in my mother’s womb.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Wonderful are your works;

that I know very well.

My frame was not hidden from you,

when I was being made in secret,

intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

Your eyes beheld my unformed substance.

In your book were written

all the days that were formed for me,

when none of them as yet existed.

How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God!

How vast is the sum of them!

I try to count them—they are more than the sand;

I come to the end—I am still with you.

This Psalm teaches us that God knows us, he is our Creator, and is always there.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father,

We come before You today with grateful hearts, remembering Your unwavering faithfulness throughout the seasons of our lives. From the moments of joy to the times of trial, You have been constant, unchanging, and always present. We thank You, Lord, for Your steadfast love that never falters, for Your mercy that is new every morning, and for Your grace that has sustained us in all things.

As we gather in Your presence, we pause to reflect on the many ways You have shown Yourself faithful. We remember Your promises, Lord, promises that are yes and amen in Christ Jesus. Your Word has been a lamp to our feet and a light to our path, and we stand in awe of Your goodness.

We confess that at times we have doubted, and yet You

remain faithful. We have wandered, and You have patiently brought us back. You are our refuge, our strength, and our ever-present help in times of trouble.

Today, we lift up our hearts in praise, knowing that You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. May this time together deepen our trust in Your unfailing love and renew our spirits to walk in Your ways. We ask that You fill us with love, peace, hope, and joy as we remember all that You have done—and all that You will continue to do.

In the precious name of Jesus,  
Amen.

- **Sing 2 Christmas Carols**

**\*\*1. Remembering God's Faithfulness in the Past Year\*\***

2 Timothy 2:11–13 “The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.”

The Bible constantly calls us to remember. From the

ancient Israelites erecting stones of remembrance after crossing the Jordan River, to David recounting the mighty acts of God in the Psalms, the act of remembering is vital. In the fast pace of life, we can so easily forget what God has done for us.

Lamentations 3:22–23 “The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

As the prophet Jeremiah writes in Lamentations, God’s love and mercy are steadfast—never ceasing, never failing, always fresh.

Think back on the moments of your past year:

When you faced uncertainty, and God provided clarity.

When you were weak, and His strength carried you.

When you were broken, and His healing restored you.

God's faithfulness is evident in the very breath we take, in the relationships that sustain us, in the opportunities He provides, and in the trials that strengthen us. It’s in the small, quiet moments as well as the big, life-changing events. Whether we were aware of it or not, He has been with us every step of the way.

- Sing 2 Christmas Carols

**\*\*2. Gratitude in the Midst of Trials\*\***

James 1:2–4 “My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing.”

The past year may have been difficult for you. You may have faced health challenges, loss, disappointments, confusions, among many other trials and tribulations. Yet even in these trials, God has shown Himself faithful. The Apostle Paul encourages us in Romans 8:28, saying, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”

It is easy to thank God for the blessings, but it takes a deeper faith to thank Him for the trials. At any time in this life, we can lose everything. I mean everything. There is only one thing we cannot lose- His presence. He has promised that He will never leave us. Ever. (Hebrews 13:5). His name is Immanuel= God with Us. He sticks to us no matter what.

It is often through the furnace of affliction that God refines our character, deepens our dependence on Him, and shapes us into the image of Jesus. As you reflect on the hardships of the past year, do not forget how God used those moments to teach you, to grow you, and to remind you of His sustaining presence.

## PRAYER

- Gracious and Almighty God,  
We come before You today with hearts full of gratitude, as we reflect on the past year and the many ways You have shown Your faithfulness to us. Lord, You have been our rock, our refuge, and our strength in every season. You have walked with us through moments of joy and sorrow, through challenges and triumphs. We have seen Your hand at work in our lives, in our community, in our church, and we are in awe of Your unwavering love and provision.  
For the blessings we have received, both big and small, we give You thanks. For the times You have lifted us up when we were weak, for the times You have guided us when we were lost, for the ways You have comforted us when we were hurting—Lord, we praise You. As we reflect on the year gone by, help us to see the lessons you have taught us. May we carry with us the wisdom gained, the love shared, and the faith strengthened. Help

us to forgive where we need to forgive, to reconcile where there has been division, and to embrace the hope you offer for new beginnings.

- We lift up before you the struggles we've faced—the moments of doubt, fear, and loss. We ask for your healing touch to rest upon those who have been weary, discouraged, or broken-hearted. May your comfort surround them and your peace restore them.

As we look to the year ahead, we do so with hope and confidence, knowing that You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. We trust that Your grace will continue to lead us, Your mercy will continue to renew us, and Your presence will continue to sustain us. No matter what this new year holds, we place our trust in Your unchanging faithfulness.

Lord, as we look ahead to the year to come, we pray for your guidance. Fill our hearts with hope and anticipation for what lies ahead. May we walk into the new year with courage and trust, knowing that your presence goes before us. We ask that you lead us in your ways of justice, mercy, and truth. Help us to live out the love you have shown us in every word, every action, and every relationship. Grant us vision to see the needs around us, and give us the strength to meet those needs with grace and compassion. Let this coming year be one where we grow deeper in our faith, where we love more fully, and

where we make a difference in the world for your glory. We place this new year into your hands, O Lord. May your will be done in and through us, now and always. Your faithfulness has been our constant, and we rejoice in Your goodness.

- May this coming year be one where we grow deeper in faith, stronger in love, and more faithful in our service to You.

We thank You, Lord, for the year that has passed, and we trust You with the year to come. May Your will be done in our lives, and may Your glory be revealed in all things. In the powerful and precious name of Jesus Christ, we pray,  
Amen.

- Sing 2 Christmas Carols

### **\*\*3. A Call to Trust in God's Continued Faithfulness\*\***

Proverbs 3:1–6 “My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you. Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God

and of people. Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.”

Pope Francis once said, “Each saint is a mission; planned by the Father to reflect and embody, at a specific moment in history, a certain aspect of the Gospel.”

For instance, when we are persecuted and bear it graciously we come to a deeper understanding of Christ’s sufferings. In showing mercy to others, or experience their mercy, we learn a bit more about GOD’s mercy toward us. Instead of waiting for heaven, we ought even now to live in such a way that we can say the same.

As we look ahead, we are not just looking to the unknown with trepidation, but with trust. Trust that the God who has been faithful in the past will continue to be faithful in the year to come. The same God who provided for you, healed you, protected you, and guided you through the past year will not change. His mercies are new every morning, and He promises to never leave you nor forsake you.

When young David was fleeing from one terrible danger, he found himself in a place even more dangerous and he feared for his life.

He exclaimed, “When I am afraid, I will trust in God.” (Psalm

56:3)

One antidote to fear is: Remembering.

In the Old Testament, individuals repeatedly found peace in times of fear by **pausing** and **remembering** the provisions of God in times past.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses tells the children of Israel to **remember** that God has always met their needs and would again.

When Joshua first assumed command of the Israelites as they were about to enter the promised land, he urged the people to **remember** how often Moses had told them not to forget God's repeated provision. (Joshua 1:13)

When David set up the Tabernacle as a place of worship, He said,

“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his faith always. **Remember** the wonders he has done, his miracles and the judgments he pronounced.” (1 Chronicles 16:11-12)

In Isaiah 55:8-9, the Lord says, \***“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”\*** We may not understand what the coming year will bring, but we know that God is sovereign, and His plan for us is good.

Our task is to trust Him, lean not on our own understanding, and walk by faith. Remember all that He has done for you in the past and all that He will continue to do for you in the future.

We should turn our attention away from the past (cause) and look to the future (purpose). Accept the current circumstances however difficult they may be and consider what God can do in you and through you in those circumstances. The question need not be “Why me?” but “How can I serve God from here?” Avoid Why? Cling to What for? We may never be able to identify what purposes God has for our trials, but we are called upon to trust his wisdom even when no silver lining can be seen.

Here is an excerpt from Josh Trombley’s book, Hidden Faces. All too often the accomplishments of our past can become a distraction from the destiny that God has ahead of us in our future. It’s not wrong to remember accomplishments, especially when it comes to what God has done in our lives. In fact, we are told to remember. The whole book of Deuteronomy is essentially about Moses reminding the Israelites what God has done for them, what they have been through, and the promises that lie ahead. Our past is important, Accomplishments are important. We just cannot let them be a distraction. I find that we begin to live in the shadow of our past, maintaining the face of our

past reputations, we suddenly find ourselves sacrificing our integrity to keep the perception of ourselves alive. When you have to be the biggest and baddest or live up to whatever reputation you have created for yourself or have had projected upon you, you will begin to continually compromise to maintain that reputation. What happens when we can no longer define ourselves by our accomplishments or attributes from the past? When we choose to wear the face of our past accomplishments we actually lose the power of its blessing. It's not our skills, talents, or abilities that define us, it's Christ. God gives us these blessings so that we may achieve the call that he has placed on our lives. Jesus comes to serve and save, not to be an overlord and exploit. Jesus did as His Father told Him. He lived a life of love and liberty and gave His life so we could have that same life of love and liberty. Jesus came so that our "once was" can be redeemed to "will be's." Our skills, talents, abilities, looks, intellect are all finite. They're all perishable. The constant that always remains - that endures indefinitely, the one thing that will never fail us is Christ. Let's be real and accept our situation, setting our sights ahead and not on better days gone by. Today, let's see that the real glory days lie ahead when we'll be united with God.

- **Sing 2 Christmas Carols**

## **\*\*4. Responding with Worship and Gratitude\*\***

Psalm 100 NRSV

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Worship the LORD with gladness;

come into his presence with singing.

Know that the LORD is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the LORD is good;

his steadfast love endures forever,

and his faithfulness to all generations.

Our response to God’s faithfulness should be one of worship. Worship is not limited to songs we sing in church, but also the way we live our lives, the way we serve, and the way we express our gratitude. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 107:1, \**“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”*\* Gratitude isn’t just a feeling, but a choice—a choice to recognize that every good thing in our lives is a gift from the hand of a loving Father.

So, how do you worship God? Is He the first one you talk to in the morning, the last one you talk to at night, the first go to in the day throughout various circumstances.

God invites you to worship Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.”*

Matthew 22:37–38 *“He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment.”*

This invitation means God desires you to give Him an appropriate and reasonable response to who He is by

ascribing all praise, honor, and glory to Him.

As we just heard in Psalm 100:1–5 “Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing. Know that the Lord is God. It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name. For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.”

Worship is the full expression of how you respond to God – all that He is and all that He has done for you throughout your entire life. That is why true worship requires all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength to appreciate the reality that God desires you to know Him and be with Him forever.

My prayer for you – May you grow to respond to God in spirit, the attitude of your heart, and worship God in truth, through your beliefs and actions, as an expression of true worship of God in all things and for all the days of your life through seeking to know God more and more so you can ascribe to Him all the praise, honor, and glory that is due Him.

In the year ahead, commit to a life of worship. Let your actions, attitude, and words reflect the depth of our gratitude for the faithfulness of God.

Let Us Pray,

Heavenly Father,

We come before You today with hearts full of gratitude and worship. You are the Creator of all things, the giver of every good gift, and the sustainer of our lives. We acknowledge Your greatness, Your holiness, and Your infinite love. There is none like You, O Lord, and we lift our voices in praise and thanksgiving.

We are grateful for the breath in our lungs, the beating of our hearts, and the beauty of Your creation that surrounds us. In every sunrise, in every sunset, in the songs of birds and the rustling of leaves in autumn, the falling snow in winter, the rain that brings new birth in the spring, and the sun beaming down on us in the summer. We see Your handiwork and are reminded of Your goodness. Thank You for the blessings we often take for granted—the food on our tables, the roofs over our heads, and the relationships that bring joy to our lives.

Father, we thank You most of all for the gift of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Help us never to forget this. His life, death, and resurrection have made a way for us to be reconciled to You. We offer our worship, not out of obligation, but out of love and gratitude for what You have done for us. In His name, we find forgiveness, peace, and eternal hope.

Lord, as we gather here today, we pray that our worship

would be a true reflection of our hearts. May it not be mere words or empty rituals, but an offering of our whole selves—our thoughts, our actions, our very lives. We desire to honor You in all that we do, both in the sanctuary and in the world beyond.

We confess that, at times, we have fallen short of Your glory. We have been distracted by the busyness of life, overwhelmed by our struggles, and focused on our own desires. Yet, You are gracious and merciful, always ready to forgive and to restore. Help us to turn our hearts back to You, to seek Your presence above all else, and to live with hearts of gratitude each and every day.

Lord, as we worship You today, may we be reminded of Your faithfulness and love. Fill us with Your Spirit, renew our hearts, and inspire us to live lives that bring glory to Your name. May our gratitude overflow, not just in this moment, but in every moment of our lives, so that we might be a reflection of Your goodness to the world around us.

We offer this prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

Amen.

- **Sing Go Tell It on the Mountain**

Benediction:

So, as we reflect on the past year, let us remember that God's love and mercy have been with us every moment. In the highs and lows, the joys and sorrows, He has been faithful. As we step into the new year, let us do so with hearts full of trust and gratitude, knowing that the same God who was with us in the past, is with us today in the present, and will continue to walk with us into the future.

Let us pray:

“Father, we thank You for Your incredible faithfulness over the past year. Thank You for Your love, mercy, and grace that have sustained us. As we look ahead, we place our trust in You, knowing that You will continue to lead, guide, and provide. We give You all the glory and praise for the year ahead. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

As we walk into the new year, may we do so with a heart full of gratitude, anchored in the faithfulness of the One who never changes.

Amen

Numbers 6:24–26 “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you, and give you peace.”