

A Quiet Hope

WITH STEPHANIE CLARK
CEO, AMIRAH, INC.



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Introduction

Depending on where you are, snow might be gently falling to the ground covering the green in a blanket of white softness. There are many out there who experience a season of depression in the winter, but I am not one of them. In fact, I am probably the exact opposite – loving the cold and everything it brings. Things tend to slow down as from our windows we watch the calming flakes that make winter wonderlands in our backyards.

The season of Advent has always felt to me as a time to slow down. We pause and reflect; we begin to fill up with anticipation and expectancy as Christmas day draws closer; we are reminded of peace and the Prince of Peace who came to save the world. The world begins to bustle, but my heart somehow always begins to calm.

The beginning of 2021, I felt a certain anticipation akin to the time of Advent. I was hopeful and waiting for things to change. Yet, it was another tough sail. The hope and anticipation that rang in the New Year was met by continued hardships and devastations from the global pandemic. Even when we have had moments of "normal" they were marked by the taxing toll the pandemic has taken on our lives – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. I have laid my head to rest at the end of a long day asking, **"Will this ever end?"** more times than I care to admit at this point.

I know I cannot be the only one who is feeling this way, so this year as we wind our way through the days of Advent, I would like to spend some time reflecting on the soul and have a meditative spirit with a few Psalms. This is not your typical Advent devotional, so if you are looking for shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night, I apologize- I could not shake this feeling that this was what was needed.

Each day there is an accompanying Christmas song or hymn as a suggestion for your listening ears. Thank you for trying something different this Advent season and indulging me in a little soul care.

With Hope –
Stephanie Clark, CEO
Amirah, Inc



December 1st, 2021

Have you ever given much thought to your **soul**? Yes, I know at some point in your life, you probably were asked some semblance of the question, "Do you know what would happen to your **soul** if you were to die tonight?" but that is not exactly the thought I am asking here.

It is a funny sounding word if you say it enough: soul, **soul**, **SOUL**. Even as I write this devotional, I have caught myself multiple times looking at the word and wondering if that really is how it is spelled.

S-O-U-L

Could that really be correct? But it is, and with a forewarning for what you are heading into for this Advent season, if you stick with this devotional, you will see this word a lot. I'm inviting you into an exploration of the **soul** this Advent season. Think of it as a time of **soul** care. A time for rest, refreshment, longing, waiting, deep thirst. A time to ponder anew as we ask the Lord, how long?

*"How long must I take counsel in my **soul** and have sorrow in my heart all the day?" – Psalm 13:2, ESV.*

If you spend a moment in Psalm 13, you will see this question asked at least four times depending on the version you are reading from.

Today, can we sit with that question for a bit. How long, O Lord? How long?

The psalms have always given me great comfort because of the raw honesty and evident cries of faith and frustration throughout them. It is a bit scary at times to read such strong words hurled at God.

Is that ok to ask Him? Is it ok to be that mad?

But then, this is God's Word – something He knew was being written down, and depending on what theology you hold to, something that He was writing through the guidance of the Spirit in the psalmist. He is ok with the questions and the pain – in fact, He wants it to come out, rather than to sit and fester.

As we start this Advent **soul** care journey, I thought it only right to be honest with God in the way He is asking us to be.

How long? How long, O Lord?

What does your **soul** need to ask God today? Spend a moment and tend to this time.



**Suggested Christmas Song:
The First Noel by Choir of Royal Holloway**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 2nd, 2021

*"My **soul** is in deep anguish. How long, LORD, how long?" Psalm 6:3 NIV.*

There was a time in my life when I fell into an inconsolable grief. I had experienced two tragedies simultaneously in the same night – the loss of my unborn child through a miscarriage and my mother at the age of 53 passing away in her sleep. I have found that when I share this part of my life with others, the shock of grief is overwhelming to hear about. In an instant, their world is shattered with the weight of imagining the depth of sorrow at these unthinkable losses. Many times, I find myself having to say in the next breath, "Oh, but I am ok. I am ok," as some sort of assurance that somehow all things have worked together for my good, because that is the promise we all want to hold to no matter how hard things get.

And while that statement is true – I am ok – it did not come about at a whim. It happened because of this psalm. Here is that first line again from a few different versions.

My soul is in deep anguish.

My whole being is shaken with terror.

My soul is greatly troubled.

I am sick at heart.

Nothing but raw honesty here with God. In fact, if you look down a few lines to verse 6, you will see the result of this deep pain: "All night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears."

I know what you are thinking – how is this an Advent devotional? Where are the stories of the Magi bringing gifts from afar? Where is the "Do not be afraid..." and the beautiful words of the Magnificat?

But this is the very reason for the advent season – our **souls** are troubled and in deep anguish. There are times in our lives that we weep so much our pillows are soaked with our tears. The very core of our **soul** is shaken. In the brokenness of grief, the longing for something new grows firm and strong.

After experiencing these unthinkable tragedies, my **soul** was a wreck. It was day after day of shaky ground and numb faith – but these words somehow became a balm for my soul.

God, my **soul** is in deep anguish. I'm crying myself to sleep every night. How long, God? How long?

Is it time to stop stuffing down the pain of a tragedy you have experienced? What would it look like to spend a moment of honesty with God today?



Suggested Christmas Song:
Lully, Lulla, Lullay by Philip Stopford, Caroline Halls, and Owen Rees

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 3rd, 2021

I found that I was able to shut down the news more easily in 2021 than in previous years. However, even without the constant barrage of all that is terrible in the world, the damage was already done to my **soul**. My pessimism and sarcasm and plain distrust of humankind were at an all-time high. Most days it became difficult to engage in this relationship that has sustained me for most my life. This season has come before, and the answer has always been that He is here, waiting for me. The question for my **soul** is am I waiting for Him?

*“Our **soul** waits for the LORD; He is our help and our shield.” – Psalm 33:20, ESV.*

When my **soul** is most distressed, I have to remind myself what I know about the God I believe in. He is the One who saved my life. He is the One who brought me through pain and trouble. He is the One who has wiped away my tears and melted the rage that had a death-grip on my heart.

Just like the psalmist is reminding the people here – Our **soul** waits for the LORD... why? Because we know He is our help; He is our shield. We have seen Him show miracles before; we will see this again, so we wait for the LORD.

A waiting **soul** is one that lets the pessimism go. It lays down the offenses that have been stored up, and puts its trust solely in the LORD, because the LORD will not fail. The imagery of help and shield show that God has protected His people before. The Great Protector is not bothered by the problems of this world, He is still protecting.

So, wait on Him. Wait for His timing, wait for His goodness to come.

I can hear my kids in the back of my head with a whining tone responding, “But I don’t wanna wait!!!!” The issue is that we equate waiting with long car rides from our childhoods before podcasts and portable video screens existed. When all that was available was the monotonous drones of talk radio. Yeah, I get it, waiting is not fun.

But when we wait on God this is the deep work of the **soul** that ponders over and over what the Almighty can do. This is not some long car ride that feels endless, this is the long walk together with a Friend who knows you intimately and who holds everything in His hands. We want this walk to be endless because there is safety, security, and belonging in this wait.

What are you waiting for today? And if you are honest, how is that wait going? What do you need to remind yourself of while you wait?



Suggested Christmas Song:
**O Magnum Mysterium by Morten Lauridsen & the
 Chamber Choir of Europe**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 4th, 2021

The word refuge has special meaning to us at Amirah. It is part of our mission statement – we exist to provide a **refuge**.

When I think of this word images of shelters from storms come to mind. A place of respite from a long journey, a place of safety.

*“In the LORD I take refuge; how can you say to my **soul**, flee like a bird to your mountain,” Psalm 11:1, ESV.*

*“Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my **soul** takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by,” Psalm 57:1, ESV.*

For our **soul**, refuge is not a place, but a who. God is our refuge. He is where our **soul** can truly find rest, comfort, and safety. There is a sense of surety from the psalmist about this in the first verse of chapter eleven. Why on earth would I flee like a bird – God is my refuge! It must have been a good day. I have found it is always easy to pump up my **soul** when things are well.

If you turn to Psalm 57, the psalmist does not seem quite as assured. There is still the idea of protection and refuge, but it comes with a plea because the reality around him is destructive. We need refuge the most when things are not safe, when the world has turned upside down and our **soul** is endangered.

God provides the imagery of his wings spreading far enough that the shadow of them will be our refuge. Nothing can come into this space to harm or bring destruction. They will provide safety until the storm passes.

The idea of the shadow of His wings reminds me of the imagery in the New Testament that we see in a mirror dimly now, but one day how we will see clearly face to face, being known in full. God's refuge now is enough for our souls, but His eternal refuge – what a day that will be!

Take a moment to pause and reflect on this refuge that God has given. Rest in His promise and safety.



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Carol of the Bells by Stephan Moccio**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 5th, 2021

Gladden the **soul** of your servant, for to you, O Lord, do I lift up my **soul**. – Psalm 86:4, ESV.

As we start this new week in our Advent season, I thought it fitting to look at a bold ask to God concerning the **soul**. In this version the ask is to “gladden.” In other versions the statement is a bit fuller...

“Give me happiness...”

“Bring joy to your servant...”

I have spent many years in the church both as an unbeliever and a follower of Jesus, and in my experience, it has been rare to hear a message that God can give you happiness. Most Sundays, I was reminded how persecution is a part of the deal. That there are hard times, and God will be with you and see you through these. These aren't incorrect statements. Even as we dive into **soul** care through the psalms, there is a lot of persecution, hardships, and just plain **soul** in turmoil language all around.

So, it is slightly jarring to hear this request – *Hey, Lord, make my **soul** happy. I'm offering it up to you... so, happiness, please.*

But as we look ahead to verse 5 it becomes abundantly clear why happiness is not a silly request to God.

“**For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you,**” – Psalm 86:5, ESV.

Goodness

Forgiveness

Abounding steadfast love

If that doesn't spring your **soul** into a place a sheer joy, I don't know what will. Of course, the Creator who is all-good and ready to forgive, showing His amazing love that is never-failing, never-ending, and never-changing delights in hearing this request to gladden your **soul**. He will make it glad, and not with a fleeting laugh from a well-timed joke, but with His very nature, everything that He is. He is ready for a permanent state of joy. Are you?

When you offer up your **soul** to Him, His response is to fill it with happiness.

As you reflect on the state of your **soul** today, are you bold enough to ask God for happiness?



Suggested Christmas Song:
Nativity Carol by John Rutter & The Cambridge Singers

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 6th, 2021

*“On the day I called, you answered me; my strength of **soul** you increased.” – Psalm 138:3, ESV.*

There is something that happens when I worship in praise. I don't know if you have this same experience, but there are times I feel this sense throughout my whole physical body of pure joy. There have even been a few moments when a deep connection with God happens like a bolt of lightning. You know that moment in Exodus when Moses is so close to God he boldly asks, **“Show me your glory!”** It is like that.

When we are in moments of praise to God, without any distraction around externally or internally, that closeness with Him is everything. I would be perfectly content for it to last forever and am elated when the praise inside me increases and grows.

Yes, this is a lot of talk of feelings here, but praise and worship is more than just an emotion. My mind is focused, my heart is full – I am completely present with Him.

How I wish these moments happened more often, but I am grateful for the times they do.

Now, you may be wondering why on earth I am talking about praise when this verse is all about the strength of **soul** being increased (what a phrase, right?).

If you take a moment to read through Psalm 138, the psalmist is filled with praise for God. It encompasses his whole being. There is a direct correlation between praise and the **soul**. When you are filled with praise, the strength of your **soul** is increasing.

Strength here is not about how much you can bench, but about the connection with the Almighty.

If ever there was a time when we had to learn how to praise without all the bells and whistles that can come from being in person in a live church service, this is the time. As you think of **soul** care, when was the last time you felt your **soul** being strengthened because of worship? It might have been a while because of the global pandemic, but praise and worship does not just have to exist within the walls of a church building.

Today, as you continue to live life in this global pandemic, plug the lights in for your Christmas tree, put on some music and join in the praise that is already happening with the angels.



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Noel by Chris Tomlin & Lauren Daigle**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 7th, 2021

*"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my **soul** knows it very well." – Psalm 139:14, ESV.*

What does it mean to be known? I have believed for a long time that the greatest need that any human being has is the desire to be seen and known for who they truly are.

Psalm 139 is the epitome of capturing this innate sense and desire that each of us have – to be known. But then a fear or dread can creep in – what happens when I am known?

According to the psalmist, God has searched you, He knows you. When you sit down, He knows it. When you stand up, He knows that. When you lay your head down, He is right there. When you begin to think all the thoughts, every single thought, He knows them all. Before you speak a word, He knows what will come out of your mouth.

You wanted intimacy? Well, this is it. The psalmist is describing intimacy on a level that is almost terrifying. Because if I really sit back and think about all my thoughts, all the words I have said, I know that I am not the greatest person in the world, or the kindest, or the most loving.

But this does not terrify the psalmist. Instead, he states with such surety that he is fearfully and wonderfully made – this is what his **soul** knows all too well.

You see, being known by God, ugly warts and all, does not have to be terrifying, because God does not run away from you. He is right here, listening and seeing you. You are truly known by your Creator; there is no need to be disgusted at yourself.

God knows you. He knows your darkest day, and He is not running away. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. You are a wonderful work of God. No matter how dark your days have been, God is here ready to shine light into them. You are wonderful; you are known; there is nothing to fear.

Does your **soul** know this truth very well?



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Winter Snow by Audrey Assad**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 8th, 2021

*“O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my **soul** thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.” – Psalm 62:1-4, ESV.*

As in a dry and weary land where there is no water...

Can you read that again?

As in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

This is the thirst of the **soul** for God. Its desire for God is so strong that the thirst of it is like being in a barren land without water to quench the thirst.

There have been quite a few things that have seen me through this pandemic time. Like millions of others, I began to bake (hello, sourdough). I started to run and hit new miles in distance I had never done before. I binged **everything** on Netflix. I painted my entire house, and then when we purchased a new home and moved, I painted that one as well.

But my **soul** lost its thirst for God in the pandemic. I'm not sure if it was the constant barrage of terrible things or the nonstop arguing of different views without any grace and kindness. Whatever it was, my **soul** became numb.

Sorry for the frank honesty here, but this is as much a **soul** care time for you as it is for this dear writer.

I have always appreciated that the psalms consistently lay out the issues and solutions side-by-side. And indeed, this is a chicken and an egg situation I am going to propose here.

If your **soul** is thirsty for God, then seek Him in the sanctuary. Fill your lips with praise because you are reminded of His glory, power, and steadfast love. If your **soul** is numb and you want to be thirsty for God – go to the sanctuary. Catch a glimpse of His power and you will want more. Suddenly, it is like a wet land for your parched **soul**.

Either way, the solution for your thirsty **soul** or **soul** that wants that thirst again is time with God in His sanctuary. Can you spend a moment today to find His sanctuary wherever you are? Maybe it is a walk in the snow, or moments of prayer? Maybe it is opening to Psalm 62 and meditating on this psalm. He is waiting for you today, ready to quench your thirsty **soul**.



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Candlelight Carol by The Cambridge Singers**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 9th, 2021

*"If the LORD had not been my help, my **soul** would soon have lived in the land of silence."* – Psalm 94:17
ESV

Psalm 94 is one of those psalms that takes you aback by the language in it. It begins with a shout for vengeance and ends with a declaration that God will wipe them out because of their wickedness.

Not exactly an all-inclusive love fest here.

But I think that the reason I cringe is because I have seen far too many followers of Christ use this language for everyone that has ever done them wrong. You cut them off on the road? Vengeance, God! You treated them poorly at work – wipe them out because of their wickedness, God!

And while sin is sin, yes; there is still no sin that God will not be willing to forgive.

So, why is the psalmist ready for God to deal with the wickedness and wipe them out? Because when you have been hurt so badly (not being cut off on the freeway or given a side-eye as you sit on a zoom call), but deeply wounded by another because of their downright wickedness, you are ready for some justice.

That is the word that is often missing when we are ready for the wicked to be scorched from the face of the earth – justice.

I have seen women sit in this land of silence because of the utter wicked injustice done against them. They were so ashamed and afraid to speak up that their mouths remained silent for years, sometimes decades. If it were not for the Lord working in their lives and bringing about justice against those who harmed them, their lives would have been lived in the land of silence.

*"...and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace.**"*
– Isaiah 9:6, ESV.

Imagine if the land of silence could be replaced by the Prince of Peace. Shame is given way to peace, shalom, wholeness.

The same Lord that was the help of the psalmist is your help today. He is the Prince of Peace that has come for you, to restore your life, to bring justice to the wickedness of the world, and to make you whole.



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Unto Us by Hillsong Worship**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 10th, 2021

*“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD of hosts! My **soul** longs, yes, faints for the courts of the LORD; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.” – Psalm 84:1-2, ESV*

The longing **soul**.

Is there any greater time in the year than Advent where your **soul** simply longs for God? So much anticipation day by day, week to week as we lead up to the moment when we gladly shout out with praise:

“Joy to the world, THE LORD HAS COME!!”

But we are yet again in another year of things not being quite like they always were. Our **souls** have been through a lot. So how much longing and anticipation is happening when the days have turned into years, and everything is a haze of zoom meetings, bread baking, and heart palpitations every time you see “breaking news” pop up on your screen?

How lovely is your dwelling place...

Today, I want to encourage you to spend some time doing some **soul** resuscitation. Find a moment of peace and let your imagination run with this dwelling place.

What do you know of it already?

Can you see it?

Can you picture it?

What colors are there?

What fragrances fill your senses?

Describe the sensations you feel.

Now, is there a spark of longing?



**Suggested Christmas Song:
I Wonder as I Wander by Audrey Assad**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 11th, 2021

*“Why are you cast down, O my **soul**, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” – Psalm 43:5, ESV.*

The ending of Psalm 43 feels like a call to all the wrecked souls of 2021.

Why are you cast down, **soul**? **Remember – hope in God!**

He is your salvation. He is your God.

You will praise Him again.

I have lived the better part of my life with that ever-calling, ever-longing word, HOPE. Hope is the place of the determination in the unseen knowable. It is jarring to those who don't have it and refuse to grasp onto it. It is confusing to those who demand to see it but can't understand it.

But for those who have lived with it – it is a warm hearth of comfort on a cold day.

What makes you have hope today? We are approaching our halfway point in this **soul** care devotional. Maybe you still need some tending to your **soul**, or maybe you have turned a corner and are ready to buck up your cast down **soul** and find praise yet again in the eternal hope you have. Wherever your **soul** is, it is time to do an inventory.

As you ponder the gift of this season, the salvation that came to this earth for you, can you take a moment to let your **soul** fill up with hope for the day? Even if just for a moment, let's grasp the wonder of this season and remind ourselves that we can hope once again.



Suggested Christmas Song:
The Shepherd's Carol by Bob Chilcott, Choir of
King's College, Cambridge

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 12th, 2021

*"I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my **soul** from the depths of Sheol." – Psalm 86:12-13, ESV*

*"For you have delivered my **soul** from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling; I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living." – Ps 116:8, ESV*

I've been asked a few times in my life what this whole relationship with God thing has done for me. Essentially, what do I get out of it? When this happens, my **soul** perks up and wants to shout out, **"What haven't I gotten???"**

There has been joy in the midst of mourning. There has been forgiveness and healing. There has been peace when everything was in chaos. There has been the gift of my husband, my kids, my miniature schnauzer (Luna is the cutest dog alive), and our little place in this world.

But the reality is that even if none of these things had happened, my **soul** would still perk up and scream out – I've been delivered from death! **I walk in the land of the living!!**

Oh, my **soul**, what has God done for you?

For today, grab a pen and paper and spend some time jotting down the path you have journeyed with Him.

*"For you have delivered my **soul** from death,
my eyes from tears,
my feet from stumbling;
I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living." – Ps 116:8, ESV*



**Suggested Christmas Song:
A Christmas Alleluia by Chris Tomlin**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 13th, 2021

*“The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the **soul**; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple...” – Psalm 19:7, ESV*

I've always been amazed at the love from the psalmist for the law of God. Leviticus, they love Leviticus. I wish I could understand it, but honestly, I simply do not.

How grateful I am that Christ did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it! No longer are we killing lambs in sacrifice and spreading blood on our doorposts. No longer am I, a woman, sitting over a hole in the ground every 28 days. I don't have to continue to measure myself up against a law that I will hopelessly fail over and over again.

Instead, I rest in the grace of God and the perfect Son that fulfilled the perfect law. He revives my **soul**. He was and is perfect – and in that my **soul** is revived.

There is a beat again when all was flatlined.

There is rhythm, and a dance begins to take hold.

There is a revived spirit, and a sense of joy takes over.

Your striving for perfection was already met in the Savior. He accomplished it all – He fulfilled it all – He is here now, Emmanuel has come! God is with us!

Can you feel it? Sit back for a moment and listen for it... what is your **soul** saying to you? As you think about your Savior, the Redeemer of the world, the One who came to bring life – what is happening to your **soul**? Could you put a name on it or words to it? Is life reviving in it once again?

Can I encourage you to grab a piece of paper and start jotting down your thoughts? Speak up and share them to God. He wants to hear what is happening to your **soul** today!



Suggested Christmas Song:
O Come, O Come Emmanuel by David Crowder

Band

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 14th, 2021

*"For He satisfies the longing **soul**, and the hungry **soul** he fills with good things," – Psalm 107:9, ESV.*

What was the best meal you ever had in your life?

I've had some pretty special meals in some amazing places with views of the Eiffel Tower, endless ocean horizons, and even the City of David atop a hill.

But when I think about the best meal I ever had in my life I think of my mom's broccoli, rice, and cheese casserole. Yes, it sounds as midwestern as it is – filled with Velveeta-processed goodness.

This was the one meal that I wanted every time I came home from break on college. After I was married, my mom would make it every time Dave and I visited. She knew it filled me up, satisfying my hunger - but it also reminded me of the good things from a childhood that didn't have too many good memories. It satisfied the longing in me of belonging. It satisfied my tastebuds, filled me with warmth, and left me content and happy. She has since passed away, so now when I make this dish, my **soul** is filled up from the empty void her absence on this earth has left.

Our **souls** are in longing during Advent. They desire to be filled and satisfied. We long for change in our lives. We long for something different in this world. We long for justice and mercy; we long for grace and overwhelming love. We long for goodness – sheer goodness and kindness. We long for slowness to anger. We long for the Prince of Peace who can satisfy every longing of our **soul** because He knows our **souls** intimately, more closely than we could ever imagine.

Today, this might take a bit of planning and work – but could you prepare a meal that deeply satisfies you? And as you take a bite, practice enjoyment and satisfaction in what you have been given. Slow down, put your fork down after each bite, chew and enjoy – feel satisfied. As you do, remember that this hunger that is being satisfied by earthly food is a beautiful image of what our Savior has done for your **soul** already.

And in case you are a Midwesterner like me, this recipe might hit the spot for you.

Kim's Broccoli Rice and Cheese Casserole

3 cups cooked white rice (I like to use Jasmine)
 1 block of Velveeta cheese
 1 stick of butter
 1 can cream of chicken soup
 1 can cream of mushroom soup
 1 frozen package of broccoli florets
 Salt and pepper

Cook your rice and then put everything in your crockpot. Stir it up well, put on low for 6 hours, and then enjoy to your soul's content.



Suggested Christmas Song:
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring by JJ Heller

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 15th, 2021

*"I will also praise you with the harp for your faithfulness, O my God; I will sing praises to you with the lyre, O Holy One of Israel. My lips will shout for joy, when I sing praises to you; my **soul** also, which you have redeemed." – Psalm 71:22-23, ESV*

When was the last time that your **soul** rejoiced? I mean, really rejoiced: full-out praise that erupted because it simply had to come out?

The pandemic has done a number on the rejoicing my **soul** used to be a part of. First, it was the online worship and my inability to sing well or in tune, so shying away from that in front of my family. Then once we were back in person, it was simply the tired state of everything. I was tired of the continued day-in, day-out pandemic living. The constant unknown of which way things were going to turn. The plans for fun that were dashed because of exposure. The ideas for work that wouldn't be possible because variants came raging in full force.

As you read through the psalms, you might notice a similar feeling waning. Things are up and down, unknown, and scary, those who do the worst things in the world seem to make it ahead and seek to harm those who are trying to do right and follow God. The psalmist is often in physical danger wondering if they will live through the day. They cry out in pain, in grief, in anger, in essentially #allthefeels.

Yet, they never stop rejoicing. It is almost as if they know their **soul** needs to praise God, not just as some sort of balm for it, but because this was what the **soul** was meant to do. When you rejoice to God, I have found that there is no greater time than this that **my soul feels at home**. This is exactly what it was created for. It is where it finds peace and fulfillment.

Why though?

I think this psalm tells us with one amazing word... my **soul** also, which you have redeemed.

Our souls leap to rejoice and praise because they have been redeemed. There might be unknown in the world, but our **souls** are KNOWN. They are seen and brought into the amazing grace of God. They are bought and purchased and will never be sold.

I could ask you today to rejoice and praise, but I recognize that this time is for **soul** care and you simply might not be there. Instead, can I ask you to focus in on that word redeemed. Meditate on this word this morning and see where it takes your **soul**.



Suggested Christmas Song:
My Soul Magnifies the Lord by Chris Tomlin

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 16th, 2021

*“My **soul** is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts...” – Psalm 57:4a, ESV*

If there is one thing that my **soul** learned all too well in this global pandemic, it is that death is all around. We watched the numbers climb world-wide from this virus that takes people as it wills. Those who had been treated for other illnesses let care lapse because of caution, not wanting to go to a hospital, and the numbers of those passing away because of cancer and heart disease and other illnesses, viruses, and diseases began to climb as well.

In my own life, over half of my extended family and my entire immediate family has had Covid-19, and thankfully, lived through it. But I watched one of my best friends pass away from cancer; my brother-in-law from liver disease; my next-door neighbor from cardiac arrest. Death is all around us. It is inescapable. It is like lying down in a den of lions waiting to devour you.

The problem of death lies in the fear of it. Your eyes close and then what next? Will a fiery hell be waiting for you? Will oblivion and an endless void stare back at you when your eyes open next? Will you reawaken as a beetle or dog or cow in some other country ready to start this whole thing over again?

The **soul** feels the weight of this, the worry and fear can set in, but there is also HOPE that can be found.

Indulge me for a bit with this interpretation from the Message:

*“Who got the last word, oh, Death?
Oh, Death, who's afraid of you now?”*

*It was sin that made death so frightening and law-code guilt that gave sin its leverage, its destructive power. **But now in a single victorious stroke of Life, all three—sin, guilt, death—are gone, the gift of our Master, Jesus Christ. Thank God!***

– 1 Corinthians 15:55-57, the Message

The answer to the **soul's** journey through danger and death lies in the Incarnation – the Savior who came to be with us, to destroy fear, to conquer death, to wipe every tear away, to walk through suffering for us because He wants to know us and wants us to know Him.

What has your **soul** been through in this pandemic? Is it time to take it to the Savior who is here for you and lay it at His feet? One single, glorious, victorious stroke of Life is waiting for you and your embattled **soul**.

Suggested Christmas Song:

In the Bleak Midwinter by Gustav Holst, Sheku Kanneh-Mason, Isata Kanneh-Mason



Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 17th, 2021

“...for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I will sing for joy. My **soul** clings to you; your right hand upholds me.” – Psalm 63:7-8, ESV.

When I was a child and had a chance to fly on an airplane, I remember staring out the window thinking that if the plane was full, they might sell tickets for people to hang on the side of the wing and get to their destination.

Yes, I was very young and had a full imagination, but I couldn't let go of this vision of people clinging and grasping onto the wing as they flew through the friendly skies.

Our **souls** cling to God. They grasp hold of Him and refuse to let go, for He has been our help, our refuge, our shield, our salvation. He covers us with the protection of His wings and holds us up with His right hand. Where else would our **souls** turn to?

We are inching each day closer to Christmas, when we celebrate the birth of our Savior, the One who came to us to be with us to bring salvation for us.

There are so many things in this season that make me feel wrapped in safety and security. I find myself clinging to memories and traditions that make my heart warm:

- Placing the ornaments that my mom made me carefully on our tree.
- Making hot chocolate for my girls because I see the red chill on their noses after playing the afternoon in the snow.
- Singing my favorite Christmas hymns.
- Watching blankets of snow gently cover the ground as my hands cling to a cup of tea for warmth.

I begin to feel this sense of slowing down. I want to slow down and cling to each moment, every memory made.

As your **soul** clings to God, take a moment here to pause and slow down. I know that your day might already be in full sprint pace, but can you intentionally slow down and cling to the moments God has given you today? At the end of the day, jot down these moments and reflect on them. Take some time to hold onto them and cling to what God has done in your day.



Suggested Christmas Song:
A Christmas Fantasy by Franz Xaver Gruber

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 18th, 2021

*“Your testimonies are wonderful;
therefore my **soul** keeps them.” – Psalm 119:129, ESV*

*“My **soul** keeps your testimonies;
I love them exceedingly.” – Psalm 119:167, ESV*

I love Psalm 119. Between the depth and richness of each line in this massive poem and the amazing complexities of how the poem was thought through in all its creative brilliance – it is one truly epic ode to the Word of God.

The two words used most often in this poem are some form of testimonies, law, Word and then some form of **soul**. If you spend a few moments reading through all 176 verses in Psalm 119, there is no doubt of the connection that the **soul** has with God's Word. It receives it, loves it, and most of all keeps it.

The **soul** keeps the Word of God, and the Word of God keeps the **soul**.

That word, keep, brings with it the idea of doing something. There is a sense of obedience, but it is not an obedience of convenience, but one rooted in love and adoration.

The Word of God is so loved and revered by the **soul** that it will keep it, not to check a box off the goody-two-shoe list, but because the **soul** knows there is nothing better in this world that it could do.

But, to keep the Word, the **soul** must know it. To love the Word, it must be so intimately acquainted with it that it harkens the **soul** and leads it to the One that is the first love.

In this time of **soul** care, how kept is your **soul** in the Word of God? Is it time to dust off the Bible off the top shelf and crack its pages open once again? Maybe the Word has been cracked open but reading it has been a chore. Can we give your **soul** some freedom here? Throw the “read the Bible in a year” plan away for a moment. Let's be honest, there is just under two weeks left in this year anyway, so if you haven't been up-to-speed on the reading, that would be a pretty big feat to conquer.

Open to what you want to read – where is your **soul** most satisfied? It might be the story of Advent and Luke 2 is right for you. It might be reading through Psalm 119 today; maybe it is reading the book of Ruth again for the hundredth time. Wherever it is, go there today and read to enjoy it. Read to be pointed once again to the One that has captured your **soul** and remind yourself once again that He is the Living Word, He is the One who breathed life into you with His very Word. Let your **soul** be kept in that truth today.



Suggested Christmas Song:
Go, Tell It on the Mountain by David Crowder Band

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 19th, 2021

When you think of the word turmoil, what comes to your mind?

I heard a poet once describe turmoil as a widening gyre – essentially this swirling chaos that gets bigger and bigger as it engulfs your life. I appreciate the image and am also terrified by the accuracy of the picture.

*“Why are you cast down, O my **soul**, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.” – Psalm 42:5, ESV.*

There are times when our **souls** are not just cast down, but they are in turmoil. The chaotic circle of the cyclone expands greater and greater inside us until there is nothing left but the turmoil. Left unchecked, it expands and leaves nothing but a sea of devastation in its wake.

The answer to the chaotic swirl of turmoil is the simplicity of hope.

Hope is foundational to the turmoil of the **soul**. It centers and plants itself firmly in letting the chaos move past while remaining fixed and firm in the One that will never change.

That is the antidote to turmoil – hope in the Unmoved Mover.

A good exercise when you in the midst of chaos is to practice moments of deep breathing and recollective meditation. Essentially the practice is to sit calmly and comfortably. Take a deep breath in, full into your belly, and as you exhale let out a small statement of why you have hope in God. What is something He has done for you already that gives your **soul** hope today?

Breathe in...

and out...

God was with me when my mom died.

Breathe in...

and out...

Jesus loved me even when I was the worst of sinners.

Breathe in...

and out...

I have no anger about my past anymore because of God's love for me.

Now, these are my statements, but they might help you as you try out this practice today. Allow the chaos to melt away as you fix solely on the hope you have in Him.



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Silent Night by for KING & COUNTRY**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 20th, 2021

*“He restores my **soul**. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” – Psalm 23:3, ESV.*

We are in the last few days of Advent. I'm sure by now you are in either one of two camps:

- All the Christmas decorations are up and fully being enjoyed; cookies are baking; gifts are purchased and wrapped, placed carefully under the tree; hot cocoa is being enjoyed by all.
- There might be some decorations up, but you are still inundated with work and finishing out things for school with the kids; the last thing you baked was a sourdough loaf in April of 2020; the snow is piling up outside, but the forecast says it will be 40 in two days, so you are hoping it will melt before you absolutely must shovel; Presents? It's not Christmas Eve, so you haven't even given it a thought.

Well, maybe not either of those... a more accurate picture is probably somewhere in the middle.

I hope that the picture of your **soul** is now in a place that when reading Psalm 23, the word **restores** is completely accurate and you find it deeply meaningful. You are twenty days into this time of soul care. I can tell you that in writing this devotional, I have felt a shift in my **soul**. Where I was once exhausted and completely downtrodden, I am now resonating with being restored.

Psalm 23 is known well. Today, as a project for your **soul**, I invite you to spend some time reading through it and then journaling a reflection about this psalm.

What do these words mean to you?

What are the ways that God has led you to calm, still waters?

How does it feel to walk in the paths of righteousness?

When God says that He is your shepherd and you will not want, how have you seen this in your life?

What do the green pastures feel like under your head as you lie in them?

When you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, why is it that you have no fear?

Can you see the table that God has prepared for you? What are the smells and tastes?

Last questions – how does your **soul** feel? Are you ready to dwell in the house of the Lord forever?



Suggested Christmas Song:
Perfect Light by Chris Tomlin & David Crowder Band

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 21st, 2021

*“Bless the LORD, O my **soul**, and all that is within me, bless his holy name!
Bless the LORD, O my **soul**, and forget not all his benefits,
who forgives all your iniquity,
 who heals all your diseases,
 who redeems your life from the pit,
 who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
 who satisfies you with good
 so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.”*
– Psalm 103:1-5, ESV

Today, for your **soul** care, I would love to do a practice of gratitude. While the word **bles**s does not mean gratitude, but instead to invoke praise and worship has at the heart of it a deep gratefulness for the One who it is blessing.

When we say that we bless the Lord, it is really that our **soul** blesses God. Our **soul** is doing this out of a state of gratitude.

Going line by line with this psalm is an exercise of gratitude. Take a moment with each line, pause, and ponder the words, and begin to recount how these things have been true in your life.

As you do, stay attentive to what is happening in your **soul**. Is it beginning to bless God? Is your **soul** crying out in praise and worship? Can you contain it, or do you need to move?

Today, as your care for your **soul**, I invite you to continue this practice of gratitude throughout the day. Take time to pause and give thanks, letting that thanksgiving flow into praise and blessing to the one who is restoring you, renewing you like the soaring eagle.



Suggested Christmas Song:
Joy to the World (Joyful, Joyful) by Phil Wickham

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 22nd, 2021

*“Oh, guard my **soul**, and deliver me! Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.” – Psalm 25:20, ESV*

What would **soul** care be without a deep dive into how you speak to God in prayer?

I've always shied away from that question that is often asked in accountability settings: How is your prayer life going?

I grew up in a very liturgical setting that moved to a more Pentecostal setting in my adult life, so I have seen the gambit of what prayer lives can look like. From contemplative silent prayers, to prostrate prayers on your face, to climbing up the side of a mountain to pray the entire night (yes, I will still remember that one and the fear I had in my eyes that I was going to somehow stay up all night). I have seen and experienced a lot.

How I wish I could tell you that I had amazing experiences with all these things! The unfortunate truth is that for years I often felt shame whenever the subject of prayer came up. I felt like I wasn't going to say the right thing, so I didn't want to pray in front of others. I heard stories of those who prayed for hours, and then felt deep shame when I couldn't last longer than five minutes.

It wasn't until my **soul** went through shattering grief that the shame surrounding prayer was released. It was in my pain that I realized the remarkable truth that God just wants to hear me. He is waiting to hear my pleas, my cries, my words no matter how ineloquent they might be. He wants you to speak with Him without shame because He cares for you. He cares for the wellbeing of your **soul**.

In just a few days, we will celebrate this amazing truth – that Christ came to the world to save sinners, to release shame, and to deliver our **souls**. As your heart begins to anticipate the joy of His coming, I hope you will take this invitation to open your **soul** to God in prayer. In whatever way you find the deepest connection, without a timer on, talk to God. Share with Him the cares of your soul. Go to Him, He is waiting for you today at His throne of grace.



Suggested Christmas Song:
O Come All Ye Faithful by Elevation Worship

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 23rd, 2021

*“But I call to God, and the LORD will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice. He redeems my **soul** in safety from the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me.” – Psalm 55:16-18, ESV.*

Isn't it amazing to know that no matter what your situation is, no matter how hard life on this globe becomes, God will always be there for you! Your **soul** will be redeemed. That will never change.

So, is your **soul** in a space that it knows this all too well?

In my life, this is the time that things tend to slow down. Most of the staff at Amirah have started up their vacations and the women we support are heading out for their Christmas holiday plans. I've done all that I can do to tend the relationships of those who support us, and I've put all the big asks there that I can. Now is really when things slow down and the hecticness begins to pause.

Today for **soul** care, I will be challenging myself to put to heart God's Word, so that I am reminded when the hecticness returns that I am redeemed. I am reminded that my **soul** is in safety no matter the circumstance. If you have ever read the story of a woman named Esther Ahn Kim, you will understand with me that when life is calm, this is the time to prepare for when it is not.

She spent years of her young life preparing to spend it imprisoned, knowing the climate of Korea at the time of the Japanese invasion – when those who professed faith in Christ were being rounded up and imprisoned for their faith. For years, she prepared for this moment, putting Scripture to memory, and storing it in her heart. When the day came and she was imprisoned, she was ready. Hymns and Scripture poured out of her each waking moment and prison was not a sentence, but a time that her **soul** was restored.

Now, life is hopefully not akin to a prison camp. But her story has always struck me that in the moments when calm was present, she readied herself for the time it would not be.

Today, I will begin to put to memory Isaiah 9:2-7. When my life becomes chaotic, I know that my **soul** will need to know of Him who has come to redeem it. What will you choose to add to your memory today?



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Come Thou Long Expected Jesus by Kings (MHM)**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 24th, 2021

“O LORD, my heart is not lifted up; my eyes are not raised too high;

I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous for me.

*But I have calmed and quieted my **soul**,*

*like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child is my **soul** within me.”*

– Psalm 131:1-2, ESV

*“For God alone, O my **soul**, wait in silence, for my hope is from him.*

He only is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

On God rests my salvation and my glory; my mighty rock, my refuge is God.”

– Psalm 62:5-7, ESV

I think of the shepherds in the field watching their flocks, tending, and caring and keeping an eye open for danger. They watched in silence to hear anything coming that might bring harm to the sheep in their charge.

They lived their nights in silence and watchful wait.

When Elijah had fled from Jezebel, he found lodging and safety in a cave and then began to ask God essentially,

“Hey, where are you? I just did this whole thing showing everyone you exist and then I am fleeing for my life? What’s that about?”*

God decided to respond by passing by Him. A strong wind that tore through the mountain came by, but He wasn't in the wind. An earthquake came, but He wasn't in the earthquake. And then a raging fire, but He wasn't in the fire.

The next verse says that a sound of sheer silence came. Elijah's response was to immediately wrap his face because this silence, this was exactly where God was.

I can think of no better day or night (depending on when you are reading this), then this night to practice silence as you wait for God. Your **soul** knows all too well who is coming. Emmanuel, God with us, the Wonderful Counselor is coming. Can you quiet your **soul** as you anticipate His coming? Listen for Him and seek His voice in the quietness of these moments with Him.

* so many liberties were taken with that translation into the SCV – Stephanie Clark Version



**Suggested Christmas Song:
O Holy Night by David Crowder Band**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!



December 25th, 2021

*"Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my **soul!***

I will praise the LORD as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God while I have my being." – Psalm 146:1-2, ESV

Merry Christmas!

I love greeting the day with this shout! Merry Christmas!! Christ has come! He is here for me, for you, for all!

You have taken this season of Advent to tend and care for your **soul**. I hope and pray that this has been a time that has been restorative for you, where when you read Psalm 146, your heart and **soul** leap up with praise because you are ready for this day; you are ready to worship the King of Kings who has come!

There is not much more I can offer you today than to invite you to praise Him. Raise your voice, your hands, your heart, your **soul**, and praise Him. Today is the day. He has come, He is here now offering you restoration, redemption, peace, forgiveness, grace, mercy, and unending loving kindness.

Join in with the angels today and let your **soul** praise Him!



**Suggested Christmas Song:
Born a King by Stephen McWhirter**

Select the speaker button to listen while you read!





Merry Christmas



Amirah
HOPE LIVES HERE

STEPHANIE CLARK
CEO, AMIRAH, INC.