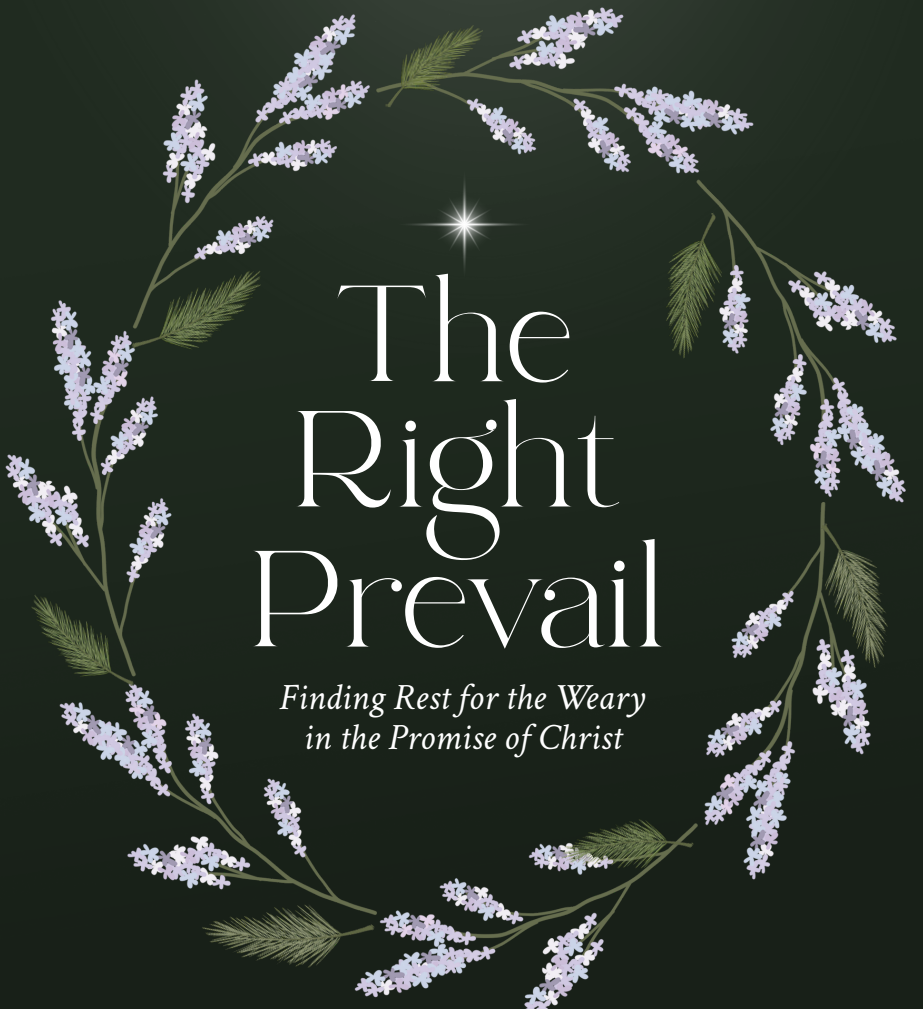


PHYLICIA MASONHEIMER



The Right Prevail

*Finding Rest for the Weary
in the Promise of Christ*

A THEOLOGICAL ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

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The Right Prevail: Finding Rest for the Weary in the Promise of Christ



*The Spirit of Evil is Hurlled into the Abyss After
the Arrival of the Messiah*

by Guillaume-François Colson, nineteenth century



INTRODUCTION

Dear friend,

This Advent devotional originated as a devotional email series in December of 2023. After sharing publicly about wrestling with the problem of evil and suffering—specifically how a good God could allow children to die—I discovered I was not alone with my struggle to understand these things. With Christmas fast approaching and Advent upon me, I wrote a series of twenty-four emails leading up to Christmas Day, each one sharing a piece of my journey to understanding God's heart in light of an evil, suffering world.

The email series was so popular that it broke our email service. Our team was working overtime trying to make sure everyone received the emails, answering questions along the way. Many people wrote to the Every Woman a Theologian team afterward to share their testimonies of encouragement and hard-won joy in the midst of deep suffering. Then came January 2024.

Up to that point, I had experienced suffering in the form of chronic illness. I had struggled with the problem of evil in regard to this, but what triggered my deepest wrestling was postpartum anxiety. After the birth of my son in 2020, I found myself deep in doubt. *Why did my son live, while others died?* This was the epicenter of my theological questioning, but I had only experienced it in theory. I had never lost a child.

After three years of undiagnosed secondary infertility, we discovered we were pregnant in January 2024. Only a few, brief weeks after the good news, we lost Josiah to miscarriage. Six months later, we discovered we were pregnant again—only to lose Asher in an even later miscarriage. This was followed by four failed rounds of letrozole, an ovulation medication we pursued with a local fertility clinic.

In the year between December 2023 and December 2024, the problem of evil went from a theory I had wrestled with in postpartum anxiety to a lived reality I walked out with Christ. This year, 2025, I had the privilege of carrying our sixth child—fourth living—at the same time I was editing the emails written two years before. The Phylicia of 2023 could not have known what was to come, and probably would have avoided the pain if she could; but the Phylicia of 2025 can honestly say that the wrestling I did with the problem of evil led me to a deeper faith, a stronger belief in the goodness of God, and a greater capacity for hope than I ever anticipated.

We have taken the email-based Advent series and turned it into this devotional in hope that it can encourage those who face Christmas not with joy but with sorrow. May my wrestling come alongside yours as we journey together toward the hope, love, joy, and peace Christ promises—even in the midst of loss.

-PM



WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS DEVOTIONAL

These days we celebrate Advent and Christmas to commemorate Christ's First Coming, but when Advent first began, it was to celebrate His *Second* Coming. As we look back to the baby in the manger, we must not forget the victorious King. As beautiful as Bethlehem was, this "weary world rejoices" not just because of that day but also because of the coming restoration.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote, "*God is not dead, nor doth He sleep; The Wrong shall fail, the Right prevail.*"

But how do we understand Advent when it feels like wrong does not fail . . . and that God is sleeping? The answer: *we look to the victorious reality of Christ's everyday presence.* This Advent devotional will encourage you to walk in the power of the Spirit every day, to hope in Christ when a world seems hopeless, and to fix your eyes on the right that prevails.

Advent is a time of expectation. This Church holiday first anticipated the Second Coming of Christ, looking forward to His day of judgment and reconciliation. Over time the focus turned to His First Coming in Bethlehem. Both the First and Second Coming of Christ remind us of important truths: the world needs healing, people need hope, and there is no peace on earth apart from the God who made it.

There are so many Advent resources available that it can be hard to choose just one. This devotional is for the person who wants to think deeply . . . but only for a few minutes! Each chapter contains my own theological reflections on suffering, evil, and how we can have full confidence in Christ when facing both.

*The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
with peace on earth, goodwill to men.*



PART ONE:
A THEOLOGY OF EVIL

THEODICY

*We ask where God is
God is the righteousness of anger
And the sorrow in our suffering,
God is the widow's tears and child's cry;
the Hail Mary whisper at the end of ourselves
God is a gavel,
God is the grief
when it consumes and crushes
the very heart of us, He is the essence
of such grieving.
We forget in the suffering how God -
He suffers too.*

*He suffered once, but not only once.
To bear a Cross for the world is to die
a thousand-thousand times, to feel the pain
of every loss, rise with rage at evil
and take up arms against it. And this He did -
fought evil to His death knowing well
how many would die after Him; what suffering was yet to come.
Did the sky darken for what occurred,
or what was coming?
Did it break God's heart to see the sin He bore:
sins that put a world to pain?*

*We say: "Why don't You do something?"
But He did. And He still does.
He suffers with us,
sorrows with us,
loses with us,
longs with us,
hurts with us,
weeps with us,
and died with us
Each death, cry, wound, longing, loss
wrapped in a grief deep as an ocean canyon,
long as the journey to a star.
We look at death and ask, "Where are You?"
And He cries from the Cross, "I am here,
taking its sting."*

PDM



The Sermon on the Mount
by Carl Bloch, 1877



DAY ONE

The Upside-Down Kingdom

*The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With peace on earth, goodwill to men.*

Our culture longs for goodwill toward men. I see it most in parenting accounts, maybe because that is my life stage:

*Raise good humans.
Be kind.
Change generational patterns.*

But what happens when the good human you raised turns out . . . not so good? How do we reconcile evil decisions, choices with terrible consequences, unkind, selfish words and actions? We want goodwill toward men, but we are incapable of producing anything but a figment of it. We try. We work ever so hard to create good in ourselves or our children. We teach kindness but without an objective measure of what is truly kind, *goodwill* is subject to the feelings of each individual.

If we want people to be kind, we must first understand how far we have fallen from kindness. If we want people to be selfless, we must first understand just how selfish we are when left without instruction.

This is not to say that people are valueless worms, without worth before God apart from Christ. To the contrary, God so loved *the world* that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). He loved us while we were still sinners. And He loves us now, not because Jesus died but because He made us. We are His treasured image-bearers. Jesus died to redeem that which was lost: a world of unmarred fellowship between God and man. Such fellowship is the foundation of goodwill between men and peace on earth. We cannot reach true kindness apart from the God who is kind. We cannot reach true selflessness without a heart transformed by the Savior who died. And we cannot have peace on earth without the Prince of Peace reigning in our hearts.

And this is why it truly is an “upside-down kingdom.” Our culture tries to run things backward:

*Goodwill toward men, and peace on earth.
There is no right, no wrong from birth.*

Their mission is misguided; it is wrong, and it will fail. Christ’s upside-down kingdom starts with the defeat of what is evil, the overcoming victory of what is good, and then (and only then) can peace and goodwill reign.

Daily Scripture:

*“But God proves His own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more then, since we have now been justified by His blood, will we be saved through Him from wrath.”
(Romans 5:8–9)*



The Archangel Michael Defeating Satan
by Guido Reni, c. 1630-1635



DAY TWO

To Destroy Evil You Must Destroy Freedom

The snowflakes fall quietly, spinning and dancing like miniature ballerinas on the westward wind. The candles on our table glow bright and warm as I walk down the middle of our rural road, watching the movements of my family through the window. *All is merry and bright.*

But all is not merry and bright in other homes. I know of them: the woman mourning infertility, no baby in her Christmas card again this year. The parent grieving a wayward child. The writer, called to marriage ministry, whose husband suddenly passed away—on Thanksgiving. In these homes, it is not merry. In these homes, it feels like evil won.

If the incarnation in Bethlehem is a good hope, how do we see evil? What is Jesus doing about it? If God is truly good and powerful, as Scripture teaches, why does evil continue? Why does God not just *end it*?

The answer has to do with how God created the world to function, at least until the Second Advent and judgment. God created a world in which love depends on a free human will. Love cannot be forced; if it is, it is no longer love. And God, in His unquestionable, majestic sovereignty, chose to create humanity with the *capacity* and *freedom* to choose Him back.

But this came with a great risk. It is a risk He foreknew even when He created it. It came with the risk of *choosing wrong*.

For the sake of love, God created them male and female, in His image (Genesis 1:27), including the aspect of His image we do not often talk about . . . freedom of will. He granted them the ability to choose: follow Him, walk with Him, remain in fellowship by obedience to one simple command. Or . . . choose wrong.

God is just that kind.

God is also completely sovereign. He knew what could, and would, happen. But to preserve the possibility of relationship, He made humanity with the ability to reject it. And when they wrecked His very good world, He activated His salvation plan. The God who did not deserve our rejection, the God who gave us the option of it, runs after the ones who walked away and offers reconciliation—not by ending the human story, but by *laying Himself down*.

Bethlehem is a shining star, not just in the Judean sky but also in the redemptive story. Here, the God who made the world, rejected by His own creation, takes the form of the created. He gave His people a gift: the gift of responsiveness. They were evil stewards. Even so, He came to show them the way by true submission, through a will bent to the Father's. And this pure and undefiled will bought us salvation.

If God were simply to destroy all evil with no justice or reconciliation, He would effectively create a humanity of unresponsive robots. You cannot destroy evil without destroying freedom. And if freedom is destroyed, there is no possibility of any moral good (Norman Geisler), because all moral choices are free. If someone else forces us to make a decision, it is not *our* decision; we bear no moral responsibility. True morality depends on freedom, as does true relationship.

God does not destroy evil because He loves us too much to do so. But He will *defeat* evil—once and for all.

*"If a thing is free to be good it's also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having."*¹

- C.S. Lewis

¹ *Mere Christianity*, p. 48.

Daily Scripture:

"I call Heaven and earth as witnesses against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, love the LORD your God, obey Him, and remain faithful to Him. For He is your life, and He will prolong your days as you live in the land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." (Deuteronomy 30:19–20)