

A TIME OF BLESSING

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I think my favourite emotion is relief. More than any other feeling, I seem to love the *reassurance and rest that comes from being released from anxiety or distress* (Oxford Dictionary). I have had many moments of relief in my life, some significant, some silly, but none mean as much as the relief that comes from knowing He is near. Of all blessings, none can fully compare to the assurance of His presence. In His mercy, God has granted such knowledge to me time and again, and this is my ultimate relief – that my God is here.

Please read Ephesians 3:14-21

Paul's prayer is centred on the love of Christ – a love so indescribable, it requires power just to grasp it! Here Paul is praying for our inner-most being to be strengthened, rather than our external circumstance to be changed. Of course, as His children we lift up our lives and circumstances and ask for His hand to move – Jesus Himself asked for his external situation to be changed in the garden of Gethsemane. But as Jesus modeled, *even while asking*, we do not need the external situation to change in order to find strength, courage, and resolve; rather, it can come in a moment when we align ourselves to His purpose. Paul is pleading for our inner world to be strengthened, not because our outer world doesn't matter, but because our inner world matters more. And for the Believer, the power source for our inner world is the love of God.

Can you imagine 4 years without even a glimmer of God's presence? How about your whole lifetime? And your children's? And their children's? The 400 years of silence must have been terrifying for those generations of God's people. I struggle to understand how such separation was survivable – and yet, in God's timing, those who sat in darkness would see a great light...The Light of World. Jesus is the relief of dawn breaking.

We too are in a time waiting, but unlike our spiritual ancestors, we are not wondering Who the Messiah will be. We are waiting for Him to return as our triumphant King. And we long for that, even while we celebrate, with awe, the miracle of Christmas. We wait in the power of the Holy Spirit, with the love of Jesus alive in our hearts.

I found an old Christmas video of Andy and Alice making sugar cookies, chatting away with me. When I asked 3-year-old Alice how God gave us Christmas, she said, "with His imagination". When I asked *what* God gave us at Christmas, she rolled her dough for a moment and thoughtfully replied, "Himself." Yes, Alice, that is exactly right. In an eternal and sudden moment, God gave the world Himself – a time for blessing.

The English word relief comes from the Old French word *relever*, which means to raise up, and from the Latin *relevare*, which means to raise again. The One who rose again raises us! And so today we live by faith, but not in the dark. We too have seen the great light, and for those who know Jesus, we live strengthened, in our inner-most beings, by His love and presence. Immanuel – God is with us!

Father, please connect our hearts to Yours, and grant us the rest and assurance that come from knowing You are near. Draw us into the holy night of Your arrival Jesus, and receive our gift of worship. Thank You Holy Spirit, for Your beauty and presence in each of our lives, please strengthen and encourage our hearts again this Season. We love You God, Amen.