

## IT'S NOT TOO LATE... TO BE THANKFUL -- Season of Hope (1 of 4)

**Key Scriptures:** *Ephesians 2:1-10, Luke 23:26-43*

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**Main Theme:** True thankfulness is grounded in recognizing God's grace, mercy, and transformative power in our lives. As we reflect on what He has done, we find hope for today and eternity.

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### 1. I'M GRATEFUL TO GOD FOR THE GRACE AND MERCY THAT HE'S SHOWN TO ME

- **Ephesians 2:1-5:** "But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love... made us alive together with Christ—by grace, you have been saved."
    - We were spiritually dead, but God extended unmerited favor and mercy.
    - Grace reminds us we don't earn salvation; it's a gift!
    - **Application:** Reflect on specific moments when you've seen God's grace in your life.
  - **Luke 23:43:** Jesus tells the thief on the cross, "Today, you will be with me in paradise."
    - A reminder that grace is always available, even in our darkest moments.
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### 2. I'M THANKFUL TO GOD FOR THE PLAN HE HAS FOR ME

- **Ephesians 2:10:** "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand."
    - God's plan for us includes redemption, purpose, and hope.
    - Life isn't random; He is working everything for good.
    - **Illustration:** Share a personal or biblical story (e.g., Joseph) where God's plan was revealed over time.
  - **Jeremiah 29:11** (supporting verse): "For I know the plans I have for you..."
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### 3. I'M GRATEFUL FOR THE HOME HE'S PREPARED FOR ME IN HEAVEN

- **John 14:2-3:** "In my Father's house are many rooms..."
    - Jesus' sacrifice ensures a place for us in eternity.
    - **Luke 23:43** (again): The thief on the cross is promised a place in paradise.
    - **Application:** How does the assurance of heaven change how we live today?
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### 4. I'M THANKFUL TO GOD FOR THE CHANGES HE'S MAKING IN ME

- **Ephesians 2:8-10:** "By grace you have been saved... so that no one may boast."
    - Salvation is not just a one-time event; it's an ongoing transformation.
    - God's Spirit is continually at work, making us more like Christ.
    - **Example:** Share a testimony or a biblical character (e.g., Peter) who was transformed by God's grace.
  - **Philippians 1:6** (supporting verse): "He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion."
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#### **Reflecting Thought:**

**Thankfulness grows when we reflect on what God has done, is doing, and will do in our lives. Let this Thanksgiving season remind us that it's never too late to be grateful for His grace, His plans, our eternal home, and His ongoing work in us.**

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**Prayer:** "Lord, thank You for Your grace and mercy that saved me, for the plans You have for my life, for the home You've prepared for me in heaven, and for the transformation You're working in me each day. Help me to live in gratitude and share this hope with others. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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**"Teach me your ways, O Lord, that I may live according to your truth. Grant me purity of heart, so that I may honor you." Psalm 86:11 (NLT)**

**The value of learning, guiding others with clarity, and honoring God through our work beautifully aligns with trusting in the Lord while He teaches and nurtures our understanding in HIM.**

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### **1. Grace and Mercy: God's Undeserved Love**

**Theme:** God's grace and mercy offer us forgiveness and new life, no matter our past.

- **Biblical Character:** *Paul (Saul of Tarsus)*
  - **Scripture:** *1 Timothy 1:15-16* – “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy...”
  - Paul, once a persecutor of Christians, became a champion of the Gospel, exemplifying the transformative power of God's grace.
- **Supporting Scripture:**
  - *Ephesians 2:8-9*: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith."
  - *Luke 23:43*: Jesus' assurance to the thief on the cross, showcasing grace extended at the final moment.

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### **2. God's Sovereign Plan: Purpose in Every Season**

**Theme:** God's plan is good and purposeful, even when it seems unclear.

- **Biblical Character:** *Joseph*
  - **Scripture:** *Genesis 50:20* – “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.”
  - Joseph's journey from betrayal and slavery to leadership and reconciliation demonstrates how God's plan unfolds over time.
- **Supporting Scripture:**
  - *Jeremiah 29:11*: God's promise of plans for a hopeful future.
  - *Romans 8:28*: “We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him...”

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### **3. Eternal Home: Assurance of Heaven**

**Theme:** Heaven is our ultimate destination, secured by Jesus' sacrifice.

- **Biblical Character:** *Abraham*
  - **Scripture:** *Hebrews 11:10* – “For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”
  - Abraham lived with eternal hope, trusting God for promises he wouldn't fully see on earth.
- **Supporting Scripture:**
  - *John 14:2-3*: Jesus' promise of preparing a place for us.
  - *Philippians 3:20*: “But our citizenship is in heaven...”

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### **4. Transformation: God's Ongoing Work in Us**

**Theme:** Salvation is the start of a lifelong journey of transformation.

- **Biblical Character:** *Peter*
  - **Scripture:** *Luke 22:61-62; John 21:15-17* – Peter's denial and subsequent restoration by Jesus illustrate how God refines and redeems us through His grace.
  - Peter went from impulsive denial to becoming the "rock" on which Christ built His church.
- **Supporting Scripture:**
  - *Philippians 1:6*: “He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion.”
  - *2 Corinthians 5:17*: “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come...”

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### **5. Gratitude: A Response to God's Blessings**

**Theme:** Thankfulness is a heart response to recognizing God's goodness in all areas of life.

- **Biblical Character:** *David*
    - **Scripture:** *Psalms 103:1-5* – “Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”
    - David's psalms overflow with gratitude for God's forgiveness, healing, and provision.
  - **Supporting Scripture:**
    - *Colossians 3:17*: “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father...”
    - *1 Thessalonians 5:18*: “Give thanks in all circumstances...”
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## **Title: "It's Not Too Late: A Christmas of Grace, Purpose, and Transformation"**

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The hustle and bustle of the Christmas season had enveloped Claire's life like a snowstorm. Every to-do list screamed for her attention—shopping, decorating, baking. Yet, inside, she felt hollow, as if something essential was missing. The glimmer of the season seemed dulled, overtaken by guilt over past mistakes, worries about the future, and frustration with her present struggles.

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**A Glimpse of Grace:** One snowy morning, Claire sat in a coffee shop, absently stirring her hot cocoa. Across the room, a young father struggled to calm his toddler. The little boy had spilled his juice and burst into tears. Instead of scolding, the father knelt down, wiped away the mess, and softly said, "It's okay, buddy. We'll clean this up together."

Claire's eyes welled up. It was such a small moment, but it mirrored something profound about God's grace. In her heart, she heard the whisper: "*That's what I do for you. No mistake is too messy for My grace.*"

She remembered the thief on the cross—his life of wrong choices and regrets—yet, in his final moment, he turned to Jesus. And Jesus didn't hesitate to extend grace, saying, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise" (*Luke 23:43*).

God's grace, Claire realized, wasn't reserved for those who had it all together. It was for her—right here, right now.

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**A Plan Unfolds:** Later that week, Claire joined her family for a Christmas tree hunt in the countryside. They wandered for hours, struggling to find the "perfect tree." Finally, Claire's daughter spotted a scraggly, crooked tree tucked in a corner. "Really? That one?" Claire asked skeptically.

Her daughter nodded emphatically. "It's perfect! We'll fix it up."

As they drove home, the tree tied awkwardly to the roof, Claire smiled. It reminded her of how God works.

Just like they had plans for the tree, God has a plan for her life—crooked branches and all. She thought of Joseph, who endured betrayal and hardship, only to declare later, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" (*Genesis 50:20*).

God's plans, she realized, often unfold in unexpected ways. What seemed broken could still be made beautiful in His hands.

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**A Home Prepared:** Christmas Eve came, and Claire was in the kitchen, frosting cookies, when her son burst in. "Mom, I built us a gingerbread house!" he announced proudly. He set the lopsided creation on the table, and Claire chuckled at its imperfection. But her son's face radiated joy.

"It's for us to live in!" he exclaimed. Though it was only a child's creation, it stirred something deep in Claire. She thought of Jesus' promise: "In My Father's house are many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you" (*John 14:2-3*). Her son's gingerbread house reminded her of the eternal home awaiting her. It wasn't about perfection here on earth; it was about the promise of perfection with God in heaven.

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**Transformation in the Everyday:** On Christmas morning, Claire watched her family open presents, the room filled with laughter and joy. She felt a quiet nudge: "*You are changing, Claire. My Spirit is at work in you.*"

She thought of Peter, who stumbled so many times but became a cornerstone of the early church. God was changing her, too—not overnight, but steadily, like snow melting to reveal the life underneath.

Philippians 1:6 echoed in her mind: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion."

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**The Message of Christmas: It's Not Too Late:** That afternoon, Claire took a walk through her neighborhood. Christmas lights twinkled against the fading daylight. She marveled at how light pierced through the darkness, just as Jesus did when He entered the world. It wasn't too late for her to experience joy. It wasn't too late to embrace grace, trust in God's plan, look forward to her eternal home, and allow God's transformation to continue. This Christmas, Claire knew she wasn't defined by her past or her struggles. She was defined by God's love, grace, and the hope of what He was doing in her life.

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### Application for Believers

This Christmas, as we juggle the demands of the season, may we pause to reflect:

- **God's Grace:** He wipes away every mess we make and invites us to start anew.
- **God's Plan:** Even when life feels crooked or uncertain, He is weaving a greater story.
- **Our Eternal Home:** Beyond the temporary, we have a forever promise of joy with Him.
- **Transformation:** Each day, God is shaping us to reflect His love and character.

**It's not too late** to let this Christmas season draw you closer to Him.

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**Prayer:** "Lord, thank You for the gift of grace that cleanses us, the plans You have for our lives, the home You've prepared for us, and the changes You are working within us. Help us to see You this Christmas season and trust in Your love and mercy. In Jesus' name, Amen."

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#### "It's Not Too Late"

When the world feels heavy, and hope seems small,  
When shadows linger, and burdens enthrall,  
A whisper breaks through the chaos and weight:  
"Come as you are—for it's not too late."  
Grace reaches deep where the broken reside,  
In every regret, where our failures abide.  
Like the thief who found mercy on the rugged tree,  
God's love declares, "You're forgiven, you're free."  
In the mess and the pain, His plan is revealed,  
Through wounds of the past, His purpose is sealed.  
Like Joseph in trials, like Peter restored,  
He weaves every thread for the glory of the Lord.  
A home is prepared, beyond time and space,  
Lit by the warmth of His radiant grace.  
No fear can linger, no tear will remain,  
For heaven is ours, in His glorious name.  
And yet, even now, He's working within,  
Transforming our hearts, erasing our sin.  
Like snow that melts to reveal what is true,  
His Spirit refines and makes all things new.  
So lift up your eyes to the light in the dark,  
Let His love reignite your weary heart.  
This Christmas, His message is tender, yet great:  
"Come to Me, child—it's not too late."

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"It's Not Too Late." It captures the spirit of God's love and the invitation to experience His presence this Christmas season.

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**An Invitation to Receive the Good News of Jesus:**

At **Hope Church Lutheran, Phoenix, AZ**, we believe that the greatest gift anyone can receive is the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is the message of God's grace, love, and forgiveness, freely offered to all who come to Him in faith.

- Are you seeking peace, purpose, or hope in your life?
- Do you long for a fresh start or a deeper connection with God?

**Jesus offers this to you.** Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus has opened the door to new life—a life of freedom from sin, renewal in spirit, and eternal hope. At Hope Lutheran, we invite you to come and experience this life-transforming message. Whether you've been walking with Jesus for years or are just beginning to explore faith, there's a place for you here.

**Join us in hearing the Good News:**

- **Forgiveness:** In Christ, our sins are washed away.
- **Love:** God's love is unconditional and never-ending.
- **Hope:** No matter what you're facing, there's always hope in Him.

You are warmly welcomed to worship with us, grow in faith, and be part of a community that lives out this Good News daily. **Come and receive the love of Jesus, the hope of salvation, and the joy of a life transformed.** We look forward to meeting you and sharing this journey of faith together!

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**Hope Lutheran Church, Phoenix, AZ** [church@hopephx.com](mailto:church@hopephx.com)

**3030 E. Thunderbird Rd.** Phoenix, AZ 85032

**Traditional Service 8:00 am**

**Contemporary Services 9:30 & 11:00 am**

**YouTube channel -- Hope Lutheran Church, Phoenix, AZ**

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### **7-Day Devotional: “It’s Not Too Late: A Christmas of Grace, Purpose, and Transformation”**

This devotional invites you to reflect on God’s grace, purpose, and work in your life this Christmas season.

Each day includes a theme, Scripture, reflection, prayer, and a challenge.

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#### **Day 1: God’s Grace and Mercy**

**Scripture:** *Ephesians 2:8-9* – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

**Reflection:** Christmas reminds us of the greatest gift: God’s grace through Jesus Christ. Like the thief on the cross, we don’t earn or deserve God’s love, yet He freely gives it to us. Grace wipes away our mistakes and makes us new. Are there areas where you’re holding onto guilt or shame? Let God’s grace meet you there.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for the gift of Your grace. I don’t deserve it, but You give it freely. Help me to accept it and live in the joy of Your mercy. Amen.

**Challenge:** Write down one area of your life where you need to receive God’s grace. Pray and release it to Him.

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#### **Day 2: Trusting God’s Plan**

**Scripture:** *Jeremiah 29:11* – “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

**Reflection:** Life can feel messy and uncertain, but just as God used Joseph’s trials for good, He is working in your story. His plans are greater than we can imagine. Are you struggling to trust His timing or purpose? Surrender those doubts to Him.

**Prayer:** Father, I trust that Your plans for me are good, even when I don’t understand them. Help me to walk in faith and believe in Your purpose. Amen.

**Challenge:** Write down one area where you need to trust God’s plan. Reflect on how He has been faithful to you in the past.

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#### **Day 3: Our Eternal Home**

**Scripture:** *John 14:2-3* – “My Father’s house has many rooms... I am going there to prepare a place for you.”

**Reflection:** The glories of Christmas—lights, carols, and feasts—are a glimpse of the eternal home Jesus has prepared for us. Heaven is not just a promise for the distant future but a hope that anchors us today. How does knowing you have a home with God impact the way you live?

**Prayer:** Jesus, thank You for preparing a place for me in heaven. Help me to live each day with the joy and hope of my eternal home. Amen.

**Challenge:** Spend a few moments imagining the beauty of your eternal home with God. Share this hope with someone today.

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#### **Day 4: Transformation Through God's Love**

**Scripture:** *2 Corinthians 5:17* – “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

**Reflection:** God's work in you doesn't stop at salvation. He is continually shaping you into His image, just as He transformed Peter from a denier to a leader. Are there areas of your life where you feel stuck? Trust that God is still working in you.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for never giving up on me. Keep shaping me into the person You created me to be. Help me to trust Your process. Amen.

**Challenge:** Identify one habit or mindset you want God to transform in your life. Commit it to Him in prayer.

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#### **Day 5: Living with Gratitude**

**Scripture:** *Psalms 103:1-2* – “Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits.”

**Reflection:** Gratitude is a powerful way to refocus our hearts on God's goodness. David's psalms overflow with thankfulness, even in difficult times. What blessings can you thank God for today?

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for Your countless blessings. Open my eyes to see Your goodness in my life, and fill my heart with gratitude. Amen.

**Challenge:** Make a list of five things you're grateful for today. Share one with someone else to encourage them.

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#### **Day 6: Sharing God's Light**

**Scripture:** *Matthew 5:16* – “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

**Reflection:** Christmas is a time to share the light of Christ. Just as a single candle can brighten a dark room, your kindness and love can point others to God. Who in your life needs to see His light through you?

**Prayer:** Jesus, help me to be a light in the darkness. Use my life to show others Your love and hope this Christmas season. Amen.

**Challenge:** Do one intentional act of kindness today to reflect God's love to someone in need.

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#### **Day 7: It's Not Too Late**

**Scripture:** *Luke 23:43* – “Jesus answered him, ‘Truly I tell you, today you will be with Me in paradise.’”

**Reflection:** The thief on the cross reminds us that it's never too late to experience God's grace. No matter your past, God invites you to embrace His love today. Christmas is the perfect time to turn to Him with your whole heart.

**Prayer:** Lord, thank You for reminding me that it's never too late to come to You. Help me to embrace Your grace and live fully in Your love. Amen.

**Challenge:** Spend time in prayer, asking God to show you how to live with renewed hope and purpose.

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This devotional provides an opportunity to connect with God daily and deepen your faith during the Christmas season.

## **Expanded Devotional or Teaching Series: “It’s Not Too Late: Themes of Grace, Purpose, and Transformation”**

This expanded devotional or teaching series builds on the key themes identified earlier, connecting each to Scripture, biblical characters, and real-life applications for believers. Here's a detailed plan:

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### **Theme 1: The Gift of Grace and Mercy**

**Focus Verse:** *Ephesians 2:8-9* – “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

**Biblical Example:** The thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). Despite his life of sin, he turned to Jesus in his final moments and received the promise of paradise.

**Application:** God’s grace meets us where we are, regardless of our past. Encourage participants to reflect on how they’ve experienced God’s mercy and challenge them to show that same grace to others.

**Activity:** Write down three ways God’s grace has changed your life. Share one example with a trusted friend or in a small group.

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### **Theme 2: Trusting God’s Purpose**

**Focus Verse:** *Jeremiah 29:11* – “For I know the plans I have for you... plans to give you hope and a future.”

**Biblical Example:** Joseph (Genesis 37-50). Sold into slavery, falsely accused, and imprisoned, Joseph trusted God’s plan through every trial, which ultimately led to the saving of many lives.

**Application:** When life feels uncertain, remember that God’s plans are always for good. Invite participants to surrender their worries and embrace His purpose.

**Activity:** List one current challenge and pray for God’s wisdom and peace as you trust His plan.

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### **Theme 3: The Promise of Eternal Home**

**Focus Verse:** *John 14:2-3* – “In My Father’s house are many rooms... I go to prepare a place for you.”

**Biblical Example:** Abraham (Hebrews 11:8-10). He obeyed God’s call to leave his home, trusting in the promise of a heavenly city.

**Application:** God’s promise of heaven provides hope and perspective for our earthly journey. Reflect on how this hope impacts daily life.

**Activity:** Meditate on Revelation 21:1-4. How does this vision of heaven encourage you today?

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### **Theme 4: Transformation Through Christ**

**Focus Verse:** *2 Corinthians 5:17* – “If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

**Biblical Example:** Peter (Luke 22:54-62; Acts 2). From denying Jesus to boldly preaching the Gospel, Peter’s transformation was a testament to God’s power.

**Application:** Transformation is a continual process as we walk with Christ. Ask God to shape your character to reflect His love.

**Activity:** Identify one area where you’d like God to work in your life. Pray for transformation and take one practical step toward change.

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### **Theme 5: Living with Gratitude**

**Focus Verse:** *1 Thessalonians 5:18* – “Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

**Biblical Example:** David (Psalm 103). David praised God for His blessings, even in difficult seasons, modeling gratitude as a response to God’s faithfulness.

**Application:** Gratitude shifts our focus from what we lack to God’s abundance. Challenge participants to develop a daily habit of thanksgiving.

**Activity:** Keep a gratitude journal for a week, listing three things you’re thankful for each day.

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**Theme 6: Being a Light for Others**

**Focus Verse:** *Matthew 5:14-16* – “You are the light of the world... let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.”

**Biblical Example:** Esther (Esther 4:14). She used her position to save her people, reflecting courage and faith in action.

**Application:** God calls us to be His ambassadors, spreading His love and hope. Encourage participants to be intentional in showing kindness and sharing the Gospel.

**Activity:** Do one act of kindness this week that reflects God’s love to someone in need.

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**Theme 7: It’s Not Too Late**

**Focus Verse:** *Luke 23:43* – “Today you will be with Me in paradise.”

**Biblical Example:** Paul (Acts 9). From persecutor of Christians to apostle, Paul’s story is a powerful reminder that God’s grace is always available.

**Application:** No matter your past, God invites you to start fresh. Christmas is the perfect time to embrace His grace and walk in newness of life.

**Activity:** Spend time in prayer, asking God for a fresh start in areas where you feel stuck.

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**How to Use This Series**

- **For Personal Devotion:** Reflect on one theme each day, journaling your insights and prayers.
  - **For Teaching:** Use the themes for a 7-week series, incorporating group discussion and practical applications.
  - **For Outreach:** Share these themes with seekers, emphasizing God’s grace and hope this Christmas season.
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