
Bestowals of
Advent
November 29– December 25, 2026

Introduction

"I simply help people sit still long enough to see what is already there."
— Theo, Theo of Golden

Earlier this year, a book went "viral." It wasn't a book that had a big publisher behind it when it first came out but instead spread by word of mouth until a big publisher heard about it and it spread even wider. It was also not your typical bestselling novel. There's very little "action" in the story, there's some mysterious things, but it isn't a mystery, and there's not a lot of romance *per se* even though love is at the heart of the book.

The book is *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi. You may have read it already. At the heart of the book is a man named Theo, who comes to a small fictional town in Georgia called Golden. He sits down in a coffee house called The Chalice and sees hand drawn portraits of people dotting the walls. When he asks about them, Theo discovers they were done by a local who sketched the patrons that frequent the coffee house. From there, Theo decides he wants to "bestow" each of these, along with what he sees in the portraits, to each portrait subject. What follows through most of the book are his bestowals, along with a wider story that unfolds.

We were both deeply moved by the depth, beauty, heart, and love that this book shares. While reading it, we were reminded of the gift it is to bless another person and to be blessed in return. The book provided the inspiration for us in creating this Advent devotional. Each of us, in our respective ways, have been providing bestowals in our ministry; David with his weekly photo and prayerful poems to the Heartland Conference of the UCC, and Ed with his photographs and writings on imagoscriptura.com. In our friendship, we felt we wanted to bring those together to share bestowals for this holy season ahead.

What you will find in this Advent booklet are bestowals inspired by the daily readings of the Revised Common Lectionary. Not every reading is directly related to Advent or Christmas, but they still speak to this season. On Sundays, one of us will provide a longer reflection looking at the week ahead and then the remaining days will be a prayer we have written that we invite you to prayerfully receive and to offer. While a featured verse will be printed, we do encourage you to read the whole passage each day.

We are grateful that you have received this bestowal, and we pray that it speaks deeply to you of the wide, inclusive, and deep love that God shows through the coming of the Christ Child into our world. May the still-speaking Spirit of God touch your whole self through this season.

Grace, Peace, Love, Hope, and Joy,

Edward Goode and David Long-Higgins

Bestowals of Advent is written by Rev. Dr. Edward Goode and Rev. Dr. David Long-Higgins.
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Sunday, November 29

Day 1



Photo by Ed Goode

Mark 13:24-37

The coming of the Son of Man

13:24 "But in those days, after that suffering, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light,
13:25 and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.
13:26 "Then they will see 'the Son of Man coming in clouds' with great power and glory.
13:27 Then he will send out the angels and gather the elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.
13:28 "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near.
13:29 So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.
13:30 Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place.
13:31 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.
13:32 "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but only the Father.
13:33 Beware, ***keep alert***, for you do not know when the time will come.
13:34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.
13:35 Therefore, ***keep awake***, for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight or at cockcrow or at dawn,
13:36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly.
13:37 And what I say to you I say to all: ***Keep awake***."

Reflection — Staying Advent Awake

David Long-Higgins

Ask anyone in my family and they will tell you that there are times when it's difficult for me to stay awake. Sitting on a soft couch at the end of a long day watching TV is a fairly sure formula for dozing off. Movie theaters have been known to envelop me in their cool darkness and lure me into a cinema of my own dreams. This often results in a conversation with my wife that we have about the aforementioned television shows and movies. It usually begins with my question to her, "Have we seen that before?" This question usually evokes one of two responses. Either she responds, "I have seen it before, but I'm not sure if you have seen it." Or she gives me a simple eye roll accompanied by the line, "This is my surprise face."

Jesus seemed to know that staying awake is not as easy as one might think, true at the end of a long day, true for life. This gospel text that opens our Advent journey might seem a strange one at first with its talk of suffering and heavenly darkness. But Jesus reminds his followers that there is always more going on than meets the eye. If we can live with awakened hearts and minds, God will make things known that might otherwise be missed or covered over by what's going on in the world.

This Advent season, what kind of practice of awakening might be helpful to you? Brother David Steindl Rast has offered a very simple awakened gratitude practice. It goes like this. Stop. Look. Go! He reminds us that such intentional pauses throughout the day can shift everything. Maybe that is exactly what Jesus had in mind. Maybe that is one of Advent's gifts to us.

Stop. Look. Go

Loving God, interrupt the urgencies of my daily schedule that lure me to rush on without pause, causing me to collapse. Grant me the grace and courage to stop, look, and go so that I may remember you are already coming and are fully here. Amen.

Monday, November 30

Day 2



Photo by David Long-Higgins

Psalm 79

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire? Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake. Why should the nations say, **"Where is their God?"**

Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes. Let the groans of the prisoners come before you; according to your great power preserve those doomed to die. Return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors the taunts with which they taunted you, O Lord! Then we your people, the flock of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.

Micah 4:1-5

In days to come the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills. Peoples shall stream to it, and many nations shall come and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken.

For all the peoples walk, each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God forever and ever.

How long, O Lord?

Reflection — A List of Questions

Edward Goode

A child asks… "How long…"
…until Christmas?
…until my birthday?
…until the last day of school?
…until my dad comes home?
…until my mom will be here?
…until my parents stop fighting?
…until my sister gets better?
…until the pain is over?
…until the bombs stop dropping?
…until I have hope again?
…until…?

We all ask…"How long until Micah's promise comes to pass?"
…until swords are turned into plowshares?
…until spears become pruning hooks?
…until nations no longer unleash weapons upon one another?
…until they no longer war against each other?

God, we know you're listening. We await the answers.

Tuesday, December 1

Day 3



Photo by Edward Goode

Psalm 79

O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the air for food, the flesh of your faithful to the wild animals of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. We have become a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.

How long, O LORD? Will you be angry forever? Will your jealous wrath burn like fire? Pour out your anger on the nations that do not know you, and on the kingdoms that do not call on your name. For they have devoured Jacob and laid waste his habitation.

Do not remember against us the iniquities of our ancestors; let your compassion come speedily to meet us, for we are brought very low. Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of your name; deliver us, and forgive our sins, for your name's sake. Why should the nations say, **"Where is their God?"**

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Micah 4:6-13

Restoration Promised after Exile
On that day, says the Lord, I will assemble the lame and gather those who have been driven away and those whom I have afflicted. The lame I will make the remnant, and those who were cast off, a strong nation, and the Lord will reign over them in Mount Zion now and forevermore. And you, O tower of the flock, hill of daughter Zion, to you it shall come, the former dominion shall come, the sovereignty of daughter Jerusalem. Now why do you cry aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counselor perished, that pangs have seized you like a woman in labor? Writhe and groan, O daughter Zion, like a woman in labor, for now you shall go forth from the city and camp in the open country; you shall go to Babylon. There you shall be rescued; there the Lord will redeem you from the hands of your enemies. Now many nations are assembled against you, saying, "Let her be profaned, and let our eyes gaze upon Zion." But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand his plan, that he has gathered them as sheaves to the threshing floor. Arise and thresh, O daughter Zion, for I will make your horn iron and your hoofs bronze; you shall beat in pieces many peoples and shall devote their gain to the Lord, their wealth to the Lord of the whole earth.

Reflection — O Love

David Long Higgins
O Love,
Help me dare the depths
Of every December darkness
Holding Holy promises
Yet to be revealed to me
But nurtured by You
In a pregnancy of possibility
Otherwise unimaginable.

Grant me grace and strength
To trust the place of unknowing
Where Your Spirit forms
Ever-new creations
In movements subtle and slow.

Yes, deepen me here
In the place of unknowing
Entered only through faith's
Door of trust and submission
To Your eternal evolution
Mostly unseen except in glimpses
Awakening awe and wonder
In turns ever-surprising
That reveal Your Holy desire.

Gift me with a courage
That grows my heart larger
With Your Holy love
Using as You always have
The most unlikely people
In the least likely of places
Like babes waiting to be born
In Babylon and Bethlehem.

Wednesday, December 2

Day 4



Photo by David Long-Higgins

Luke 21:34-38

"Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. **Be alert at all times**, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man."

Every day he was teaching in the temple, and at night he would go out and spend the night on the Mount of Olives, as it was called. And all the people would get up early in the morning to listen to him in the temple.

Reflection — Alertness

Edward Goode

Does alertness come easily to you or is it more of a struggle? Today is a "choose your own bestowal." There will first be a prayer for all of us followed by two short prayers. You may choose which prayer connects with you today (and you can return to this on another day when maybe you're feeling differently).

God, we have heard your invitation to be alert. But, depending on the day and depending on each person, that means something different. I know how it is for me to be alert and awake — show me which prayer path is mine today and speak to me regardless of whether alertness comes easily or whether it is a longer process.

If Alertness Comes Easily

God, help me to discern to what I should stay alert. Help me to filter out that which distracts and confuses. Help me to be alert to your ways. Amen.

If Alertness is Hard

God, help me to slowly ease into alertness today. Begin my alertness with your way. Let your way filter through all of what comes after so that I am alert to you before all else. Amen.

Show me which prayer path is mine today

Thursday, December 3

Day 5



Photo by Edward Goode

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. *Selah* Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky. The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and will make a path for his steps.

Hosea 6:1-6

"Come, let us return to the Lord, for it is he who has torn, and he will heal us; he has struck down, and he will bind us up. **After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.**

Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth."

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes away early.

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have killed them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Reflection — O Love

David Long-Higgins

O Love,
Bend me toward You.

Bend my worry into wonder
Yes, bend me toward You.

Bend my despair into delight
Yes, bend me toward You.

Bend my fear into freedom
Yes, bend me toward You.

Bend my losses into loving
Yes, bend me toward You.

Take every distraction
Begging me to choose
My lesser self
And bend me toward You
With Your steadfast love
And unrelenting faithfulness.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet

Friday, December 4

Day 6



Photo by Edward Goode

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations." Then I said, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the Lord said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy," for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me,

"Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Reflection — To Each of Us

Edward Goode

Still speaking God, like so many others, I have said, "You can't be serious about asking me to speak or act for you." I have a hard enough time talking and doing everyday things much less the picking up, pulling down, building, and planting about which you spoke to an ancient prophet named Jeremiah.

But I guess you did use Jeremiah. And in this Advent season, we will hear stories of people like Zechariah, Elizabeth, Mary, and Joseph — people who probably weren't a lot different from me. People who questioned why you were choosing to use them. So, I guess if you used them, you can use even me. Help me have the confidence to say, "I am called…" rather than saying , "But I am only…" Amen.

Help me have the confidence to say. "I am called"

Saturday, December 5

Day 7



Photo by Edward Goode

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13

Lord, you were favorable to your land; you restored the fortunes of Jacob. You forgave the iniquity of your people; you pardoned all their sin. *Selah* Let me hear what God the Lord will speak, for he will speak peace to his people, to his faithful, to those who turn to him in their hearts. Surely his salvation is at hand for those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land.

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky.

The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness will go before him and will make a path for his steps.

...righteousness will look down from the sky

Ezekiel 36:24-28

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you.

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put my spirit within you and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Reflection — O Love

David Long-Higgins

O Love, grant me
Your Advent grace
To notice in love
Every attachment
Occupying my mind
And hardening my heart.

Let everything be held
Lightly in love
Trusting You to reveal
Your motion of creation
Persistent and perpetual
Softening every hard thing.

If there be ego,
Let it be humbled
Into soul-stretched service
Attending to others
Answering Your invitation
To become fully alive.

May Your generous grace
Form a suppleness of Spirit
In me and in the world
That answers every temptation
To an easy hardness of heart.

Yes, Love,
Take me from comfort
To compassionate care
Born of Bethlehem's bounty
Poured by You into creation
At a most unexpected time
Reframing every place and time
Into a sign of Your cosmic coming.