



alive

magazine

December '23

What's so
SPECIAL
about
Christmas

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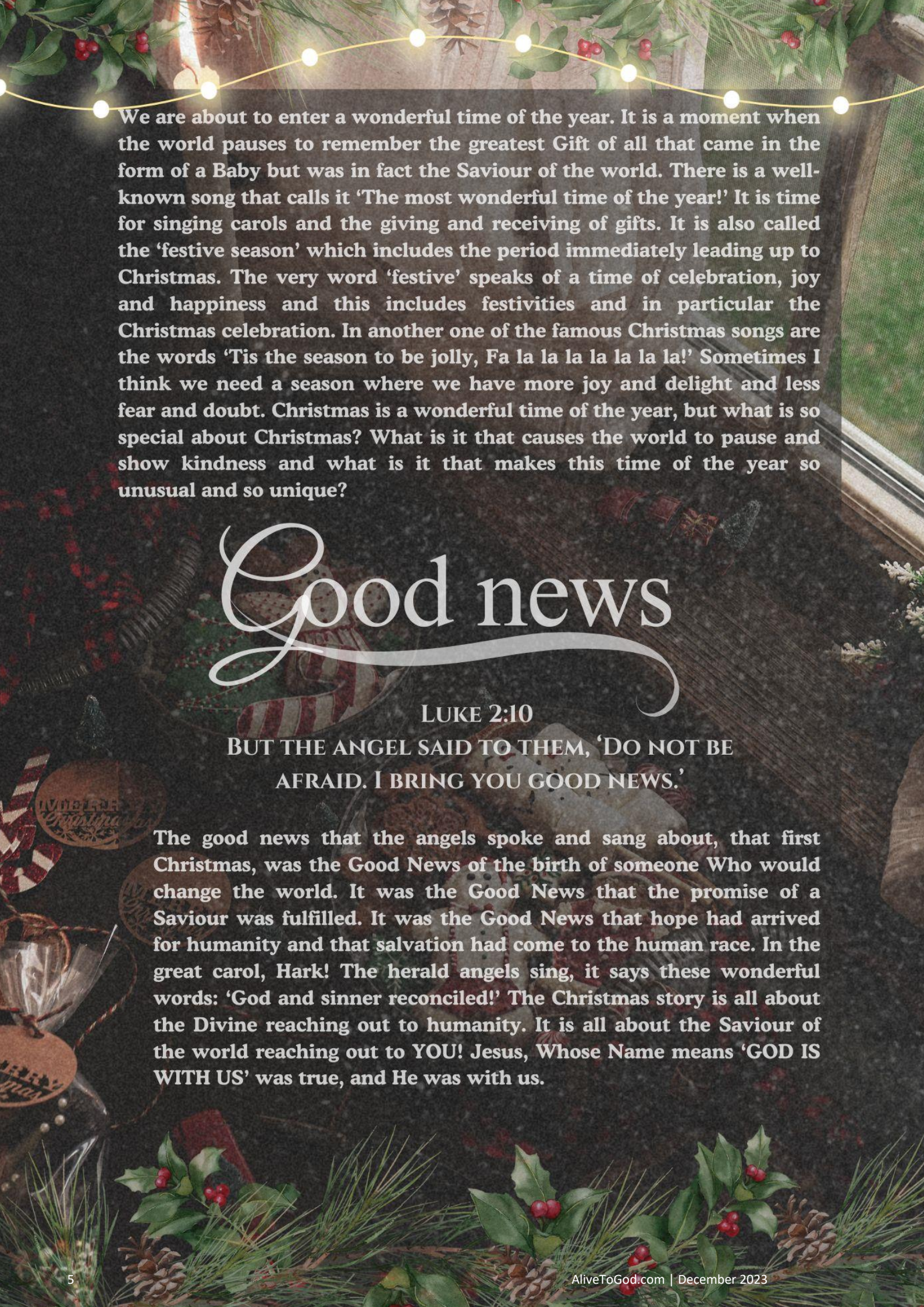
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What's so SPECIAL about Christmas

BY: ANDREW ROEBERT



We are about to enter a wonderful time of the year. It is a moment when the world pauses to remember the greatest Gift of all that came in the form of a Baby but was in fact the Saviour of the world. There is a well-known song that calls it 'The most wonderful time of the year!' It is time for singing carols and the giving and receiving of gifts. It is also called the 'festive season' which includes the period immediately leading up to Christmas. The very word 'festive' speaks of a time of celebration, joy and happiness and this includes festivities and in particular the Christmas celebration. In another one of the famous Christmas songs are the words 'Tis the season to be jolly, Fa la la la la la la la!' Sometimes I think we need a season where we have more joy and delight and less fear and doubt. Christmas is a wonderful time of the year, but what is so special about Christmas? What is it that causes the world to pause and show kindness and what is it that makes this time of the year so unusual and so unique?

Good news

LUKE 2:10

BUT THE ANGEL SAID TO THEM, 'DO NOT BE AFRAID. I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS.'

The good news that the angels spoke and sang about, that first Christmas, was the Good News of the birth of someone Who would change the world. It was the Good News that the promise of a Saviour was fulfilled. It was the Good News that hope had arrived for humanity and that salvation had come to the human race. In the great carol, Hark! The herald angels sing, it says these wonderful words: 'God and sinner reconciled!' The Christmas story is all about the Divine reaching out to humanity. It is all about the Saviour of the world reaching out to YOU! Jesus, Whose Name means 'GOD IS WITH US' was true, and He was with us.

The end result was that God would be with us forever in a way that humanity had never known before.

JOHN 14:16

‘I WILL PRAY THE FATHER, AND HE SHALL GIVE YOU ANOTHER COMFORTER, THAT HE MAY BE WITH YOU FOREVER.’

You can celebrate because of this Good News and because of the knowledge that the living reality of Jesus can be a living truth within your heart.

Great Joy

LUKE 2:10

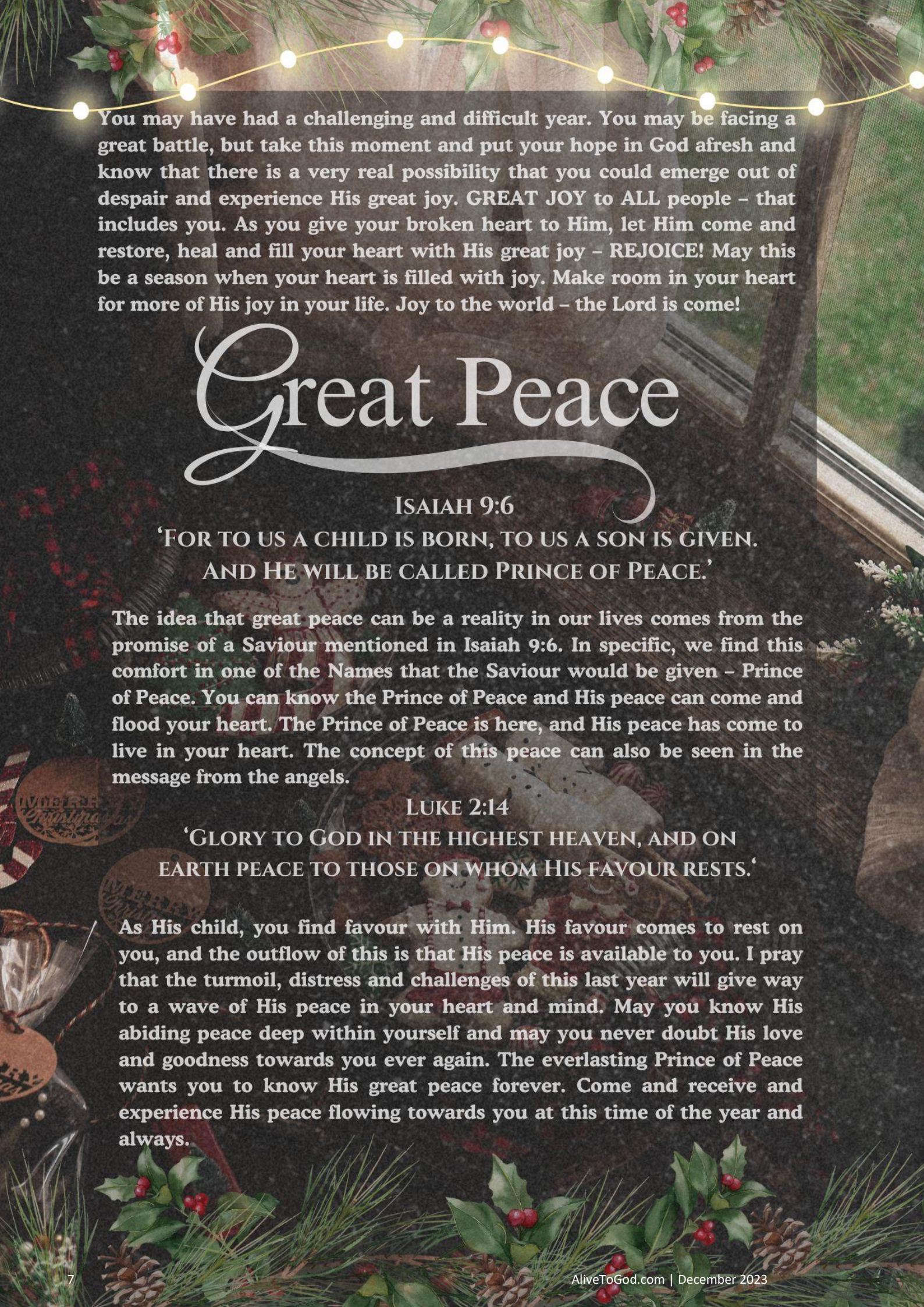
THE ANGEL REASSURED THEM. ‘DON’T BE AFRAID!’ HE SAID. ‘I BRING YOU GOOD NEWS THAT WILL BRING GREAT JOY TO ALL PEOPLE.’

Christmas is a time when we should embrace and hold onto the great joy that God wants to bring into each of our lives. Great joy was a contrast to a condition of great despair and sorrow into which the world had sunk. This is the great joy that we have, that even in the greatest adversity and sorrow we may have to endure, because of His presence in our lives, we will find joy! Regardless of where we may find ourselves, He brings the possibility of great joy in our hearts.

PSALM 42:5

‘WHY, MY SOUL, ARE YOU DOWNCAST? WHY SO DISTURBED WITHIN ME? PUT YOUR HOPE IN GOD, FOR I WILL YET PRAISE HIM, MY SAVIOUR AND MY GOD.’





You may have had a challenging and difficult year. You may be facing a great battle, but take this moment and put your hope in God afresh and know that there is a very real possibility that you could emerge out of despair and experience His great joy. GREAT JOY to ALL people – that includes you. As you give your broken heart to Him, let Him come and restore, heal and fill your heart with His great joy – REJOICE! May this be a season when your heart is filled with joy. Make room in your heart for more of His joy in your life. Joy to the world – the Lord is come!

Great Peace

ISAIAH 9:6

‘FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO US A SON IS GIVEN.
AND HE WILL BE CALLED PRINCE OF PEACE.’

The idea that great peace can be a reality in our lives comes from the promise of a Saviour mentioned in Isaiah 9:6. In specific, we find this comfort in one of the Names that the Saviour would be given – Prince of Peace. You can know the Prince of Peace and His peace can come and flood your heart. The Prince of Peace is here, and His peace has come to live in your heart. The concept of this peace can also be seen in the message from the angels.

LUKE 2:14

‘GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST HEAVEN, AND ON
EARTH PEACE TO THOSE ON WHOM HIS FAVOUR RESTS.’

As His child, you find favour with Him. His favour comes to rest on you, and the outflow of this is that His peace is available to you. I pray that the turmoil, distress and challenges of this last year will give way to a wave of His peace in your heart and mind. May you know His abiding peace deep within yourself and may you never doubt His love and goodness towards you ever again. The everlasting Prince of Peace wants you to know His great peace forever. Come and receive and experience His peace flowing towards you at this time of the year and always.



Great Gift

ISAIAH 9:6

‘FOR TO US A CHILD IS BORN, TO
US A SON IS GIVEN.’

At this time of the year we remind ourselves of the greatest Gift ever given. The birth of Jesus Christ brought us the greatest Gift that was ever given. This Gift represents love, salvation and hope and the prospect of peace, joy and ultimately the gift of eternal life.

JOHN 3:16

‘FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD
THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE AND ONLY
SON, THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN
HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE
ETERNAL LIFE.’

Because of the example that was set for us when God gave the greatest Gift of all, we can emulate this great generosity by giving and being a blessing to others. We can reflect God’s kindness by showing kindness to those around us and to those we love and hold dear. The act of the giving and receiving of gifts is something that mirrors and reflects the very act of kindness and selflessness that God demonstrated in sending Jesus as the greatest Gift of all. So, receive the greatest Gift and be a gift to your Saviour, and to those around you.



Great Hope

The great hope of Christmas is the promise of a better future

HEBREWS 6:18

‘SO GOD HAS GIVEN BOTH HIS PROMISE AND HIS OATH. THESE TWO THINGS ARE UNCHANGEABLE BECAUSE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO LIE. THEREFORE, WE WHO HAVE FLED TO HIM FOR REFUGE CAN HAVE GREAT CONFIDENCE AS WE HOLD TO THE HOPE THAT LIES BEFORE US. THIS HOPE IS A STRONG AND TRUSTWORTHY ANCHOR FOR OUR SOULS. IT LEADS US THROUGH THE CURTAIN INTO GOD’S INNER SANCTUARY.’ NLT

The world is a better place because our Saviour came and made His presence felt among us. And all of us who have fled to Him for refuge can have great confidence and hope in Him. No matter how dark things may seem or become, because He is with us we have what it takes to look the giants in the eyes and declare that ‘greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world’.

MATTHEW 1:23

SHE WILL GIVE BIRTH TO A SON, AND THEY WILL CALL HIM IMMANUEL, WHICH MEANS ‘GOD IS WITH US.’

Everything is better, because regardless of what we may face or go through, we are not alone. The Lord Himself is with you and that makes all the difference. Isn’t He wonderful, isn’t He wonderful – HE IS!

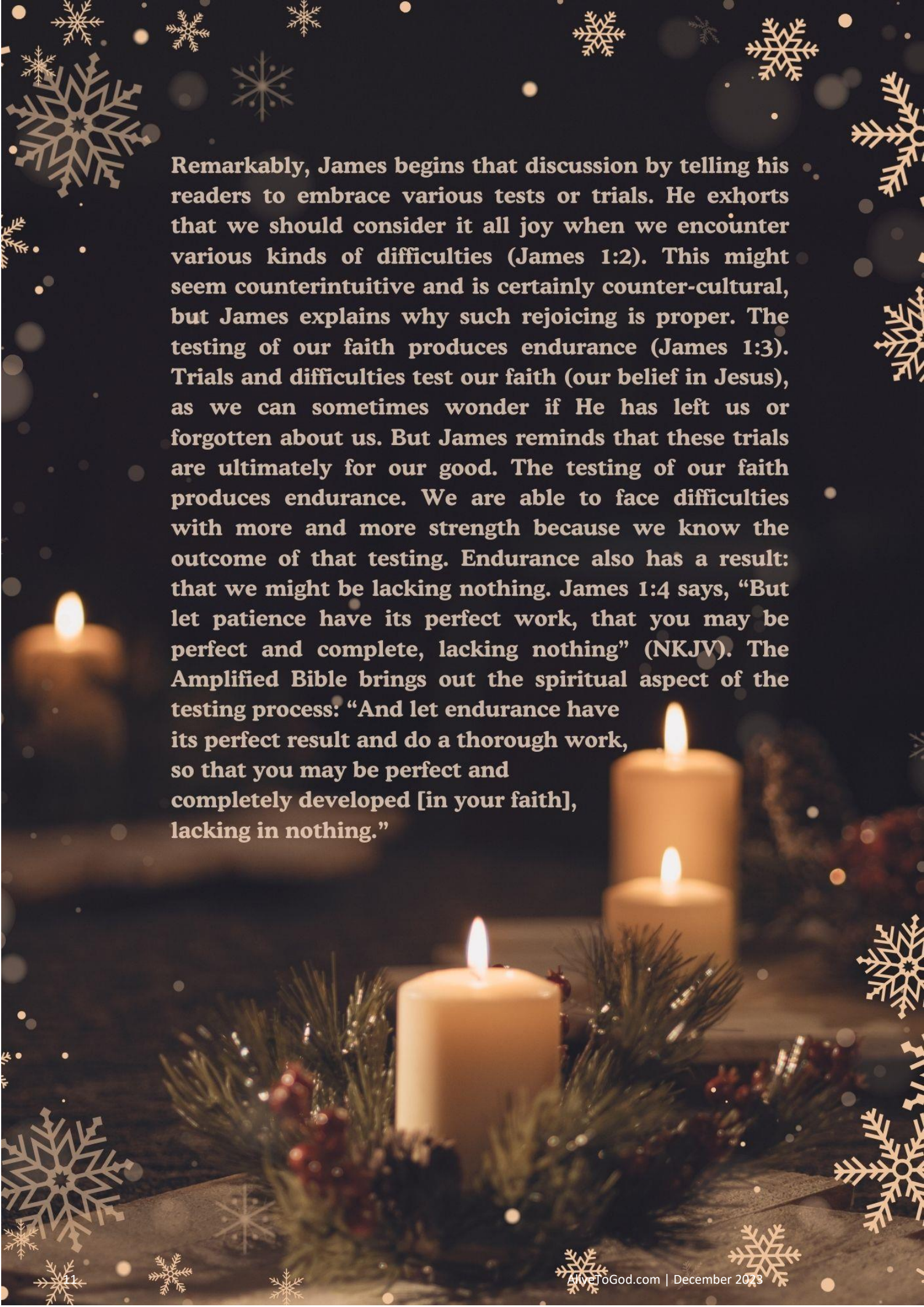
WHAT DOES IT MEAN

To be Lacking in Nothing?

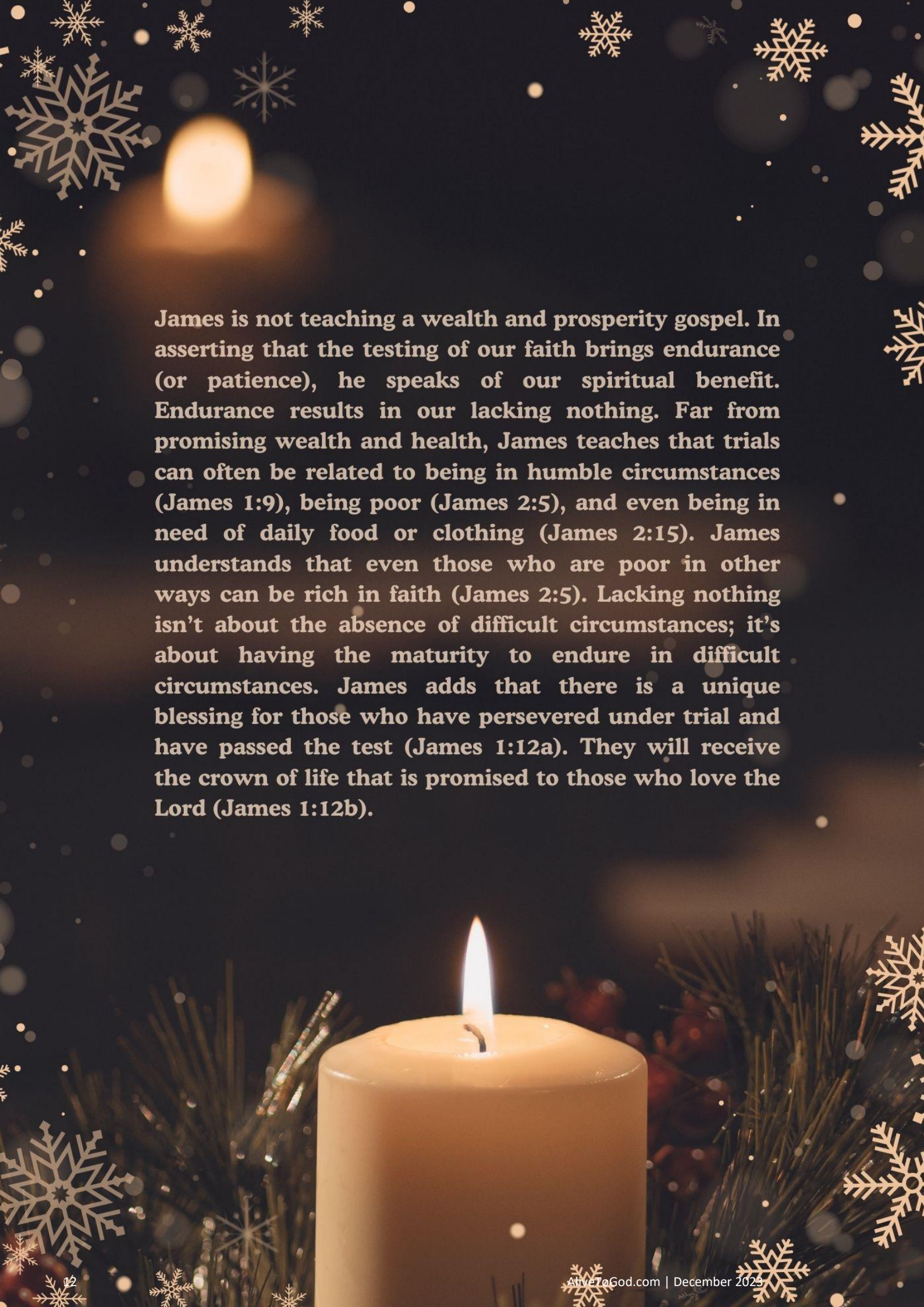
(JAMES 1:4)

James covers many topics in his letter, but all are focused on his readers' growth and ultimately written so that they will be lacking nothing. While some teachers and gurus have taught that right living will bring prosperity in health and wealth, James (and the other biblical writers) help us to understand what it really means to be lacking nothing.

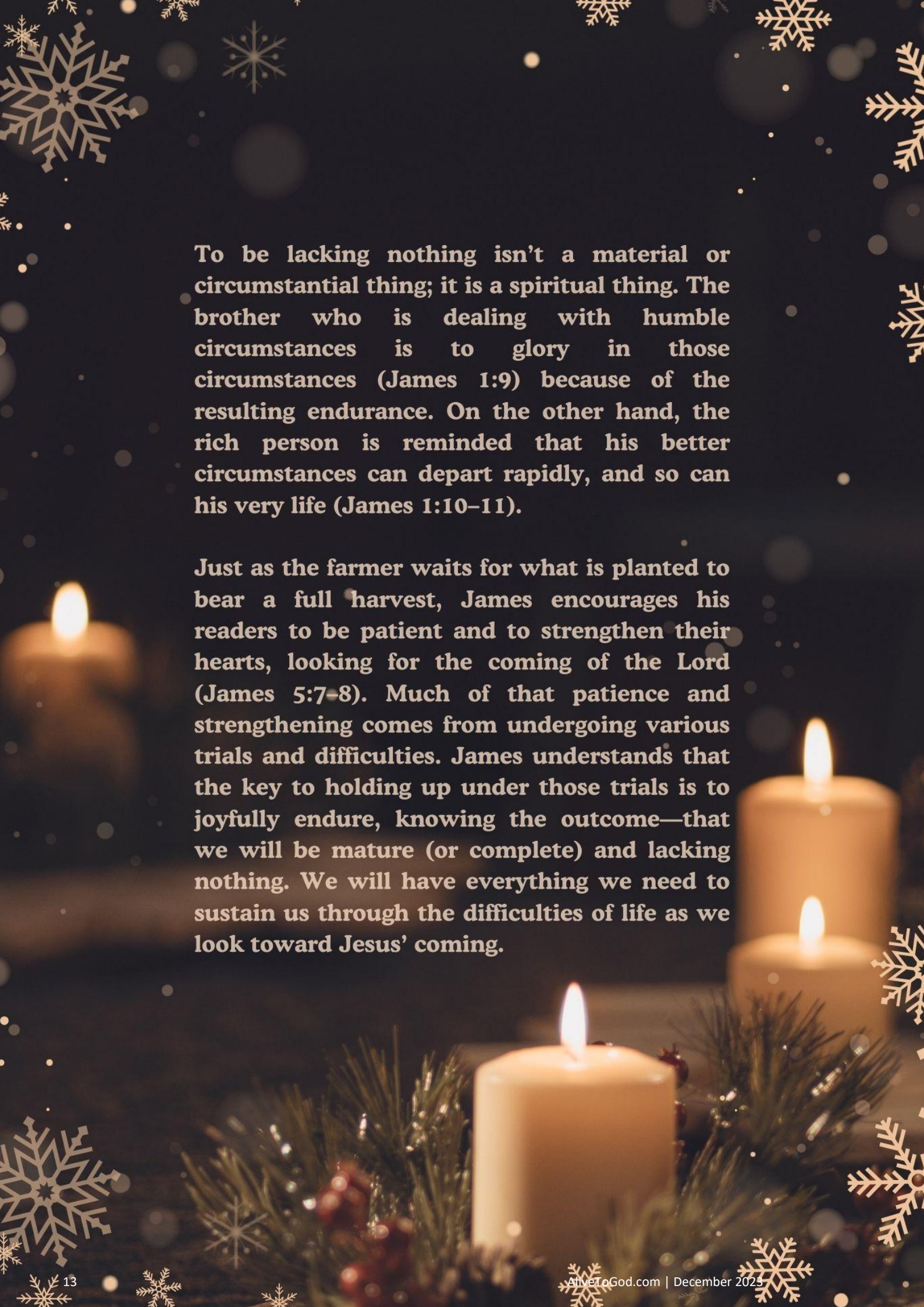
GOTQUESTIONS.ORG

The background of the image is a warm, festive scene. It features several lit candles of varying heights, casting a soft, golden glow. The candles are surrounded by green pine branches and clusters of small, dark red berries. The entire scene is set against a dark, textured background. Scattered throughout the image are numerous white snowflakes of various sizes and designs, some appearing to be falling or floating. The overall atmosphere is cozy and celebratory, typical of a winter holiday setting.

Remarkably, James begins that discussion by telling his readers to embrace various tests or trials. He exhorts that we should consider it all joy when we encounter various kinds of difficulties (James 1:2). This might seem counterintuitive and is certainly counter-cultural, but James explains why such rejoicing is proper. The testing of our faith produces endurance (James 1:3). Trials and difficulties test our faith (our belief in Jesus), as we can sometimes wonder if He has left us or forgotten about us. But James reminds that these trials are ultimately for our good. The testing of our faith produces endurance. We are able to face difficulties with more and more strength because we know the outcome of that testing. Endurance also has a result: that we might be lacking nothing. James 1:4 says, “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (NKJV). The Amplified Bible brings out the spiritual aspect of the testing process: “And let endurance have its perfect result and do a thorough work, so that you may be perfect and completely developed [in your faith], lacking in nothing.”

A lit candle in a winter-themed setting with snowflakes and pine branches. The candle is the central focus, with a bright flame. The background is dark with soft, out-of-focus lights and numerous white snowflake graphics scattered throughout. Pine branches are visible at the bottom of the frame.

James is not teaching a wealth and prosperity gospel. In asserting that the testing of our faith brings endurance (or patience), he speaks of our spiritual benefit. Endurance results in our lacking nothing. Far from promising wealth and health, James teaches that trials can often be related to being in humble circumstances (James 1:9), being poor (James 2:5), and even being in need of daily food or clothing (James 2:15). James understands that even those who are poor in other ways can be rich in faith (James 2:5). Lacking nothing isn't about the absence of difficult circumstances; it's about having the maturity to endure in difficult circumstances. James adds that there is a unique blessing for those who have persevered under trial and have passed the test (James 1:12a). They will receive the crown of life that is promised to those who love the Lord (James 1:12b).



To be lacking nothing isn't a material or circumstantial thing; it is a spiritual thing. The brother who is dealing with humble circumstances is to glory in those circumstances (James 1:9) because of the resulting endurance. On the other hand, the rich person is reminded that his better circumstances can depart rapidly, and so can his very life (James 1:10–11).

Just as the farmer waits for what is planted to bear a full harvest, James encourages his readers to be patient and to strengthen their hearts, looking for the coming of the Lord (James 5:7–8). Much of that patience and strengthening comes from undergoing various trials and difficulties. James understands that the key to holding up under those trials is to joyfully endure, knowing the outcome—that we will be mature (or complete) and lacking nothing. We will have everything we need to sustain us through the difficulties of life as we look toward Jesus' coming.

COURAGE



KEYS TO A SUCCESSFUL LIFE (KEY 8)

BY: ANDREW ROEBERT

Courage is a vital part of our lives. Without courage we cannot move forward. Over the years I have also discovered that we need courage at every stage in life. Many years ago, when my young daughter had just started school. It was a daunting time for her and called for great courage and bravery. I remember when I had to change jobs after 17 years in the only job I have ever had. It called for great courage! When my mother was widowed 27 years ago, she needed great courage to face the future. Having courage is a key to success. I remember once speaking to a friend of mine who had been almost 70 years old at the time. He was telling me the other day that he wishes he had been more aggressive and courageous as a younger man you cannot discover new oceans unless you have the courage to lose sight of the shore.

DEFINITION:

Courage is the strength to venture, the strength to persevere and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty. It implies firmness of mind and will in the face of danger or extreme difficulty. Others words are guts, boldness, bravery, fearlessness, backbone, fortitude, grit. Opposites of courage are dejection and faintness.

CALLED TO BE COURAGEOUS!

We are called to be strong and courageous. Each one of us has a specific purpose and destiny in God. This destiny will not be achieved without courage and loads of it. When God told Joshua to take the nation of Israel into the promised land, He constantly had to remind Joshua to have courage.

Joshua 1:6

Be strong (confident) and of good courage.

Joshua 1:7

Only you be strong and very courageous.

Joshua 1:9

Have not I commanded you? Be strong, vigorous, and very courageous. Be not afraid, neither be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.





Joshua 1:18

Only be strong, vigorous, and of good courage.

In the same way we need to have courage to step into what God has for us!

COURAGE FAILURE

There are times in our lives when courage fails us. These are times when we lose courage and get weak. Courage gives us strength. Courage failure makes us weak.

2 Samuel 4:1

When Saul's son, heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his courage failed, and all the Israelites were troubled and dismayed.



It is possible to have times when our courage fails us. The loss of courage leads to being troubled and dismayed and ultimately weak. Dismay gives way to discouragement and discouragement to despair. Despair in turn leads to depression and depressions leads to a sense of hopelessness. 'COURAGE FAILURE' is a condition that is terminal if we do not recover, pick up the pieces and go forward again.

OBSTACLES TO COURAGE

There are many obstacles to our courage and to a courageous way of life. I want to identify just three.

1. Fear.

Fear is a debilitating condition that robs us of our strength, resolve and courage and keeps us from possessing what God has for us.

2. Doubt.

Doubt is another little things that has the capacity to constantly undermine and erode our confidence and determination. As a result it leads to lack of confidence in ourselves and especially in God.

3. Flying with one foot on the ground.

This might sound a bit strange to you but let me explain. My brother is a pilot and loves flying. One day he was trying to get my uncle to fly with him and my uncle responded and said he would fly with my brother anywhere as long as he could keep one foot on the ground. It is as though we want everything to be guaranteed. We want guarantees before we will move. I have discovered that in life there are no guarantees. Sometimes we must just get in the plane and trust!



COURAGE AND BRAVERY

One of the qualities that go hand in hand with courage is bravery. Courage for me tends to be a bit of a philosophical concept. Bravery on the other hand makes it real. I recently watched a documentary on David Livingstone. He was the Christian Missionary who, in face of tremendous difficulty, went to explore Africa. At times he was sick with malaria and he still went on and was the first European to see The Smoke that Thunders, which he named the Victoria falls. This gave courage a face and that face is called bavery.

2 Samuel 13:28

Fear not; have I not commanded you? Be courageous and brave.

Psalm 27:14

Wait and hope for and expect the Lord; be brave and of good courage and let your heart be stout and enduring. Yes, wait for and hope for and expect the Lord.

COURAGE



A PICTURE OF COURAGE

I once saw a demonstration of courage. The illustration involved two chairs. The chairs were placed just far apart enough that you could not touch the one while touching the other. The one chair represented where you are and the other chair represented the future. To get from the current chair to the next, you have to let go of the current chair and move towards the next chair. The current chair may be something you are familiar with, or comfortable with – a comfort zone. The other chair can be the next thing that God has for you! Comfort zones allow us to live life without courage. Have a little bit of faith in yourself, others and God.

Galatians 6:9

And let us not lose heart and grow weary and faint in acting nobly and doing right, for in due time and at the appointed season we shall reap, if we do not loosen and relax our courage and faint.

I love the phrase 'LOOSEN AND RELAX OUR COURAGE'. It is something that we have to hold onto!

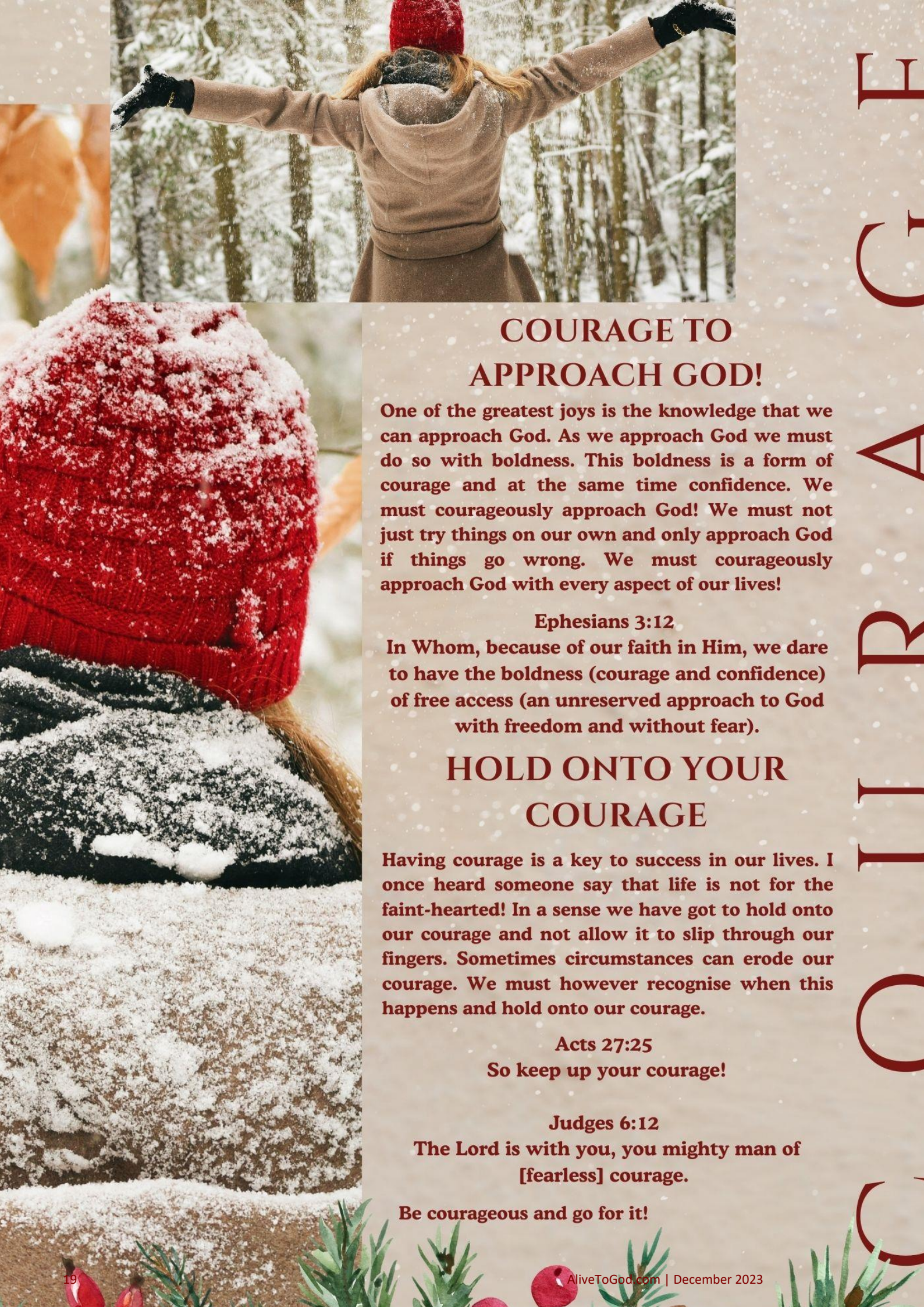
SUMMONS COURAGE!

We need to summons our courage. We need to speak to ourselves and tell ourselves to have courage.

1 Thessalonians 2:2

But though we had already suffered and been outrageously treated at Philippi, as you know, yet in [the strength of] our God we summoned courage to proclaim to you unfalteringly the good news (the Gospel) with earnest contention and much conflict and great opposition.

No matter how much you have been through and no matter how much you have faced, you need to summons, call up, your courage. When we summons someone we call upon them to take a specified action. We must call upon our courage. It is like a well of water that is of no value if we do not draw it to the surface and use it!



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COURAGE TO APPROACH GOD!

One of the greatest joys is the knowledge that we can approach God. As we approach God we must do so with boldness. This boldness is a form of courage and at the same time confidence. We must courageously approach God! We must not just try things on our own and only approach God if things go wrong. We must courageously approach God with every aspect of our lives!

Ephesians 3:12

In Whom, because of our faith in Him, we dare to have the boldness (courage and confidence) of free access (an unreserved approach to God with freedom and without fear).

HOLD ONTO YOUR COURAGE

Having courage is a key to success in our lives. I once heard someone say that life is not for the faint-hearted! In a sense we have got to hold onto our courage and not allow it to slip through our fingers. Sometimes circumstances can erode our courage. We must however recognise when this happens and hold onto our courage.

Acts 27:25

So keep up your courage!

Judges 6:12

The Lord is with you, you mighty man of [fearless] courage.

Be courageous and go for it!

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