

January 6. One of the most incredible and profound declarations from the Bible is found in Matthew 1:23, which is an echo and the fulfillment of the prophetic word by Isaiah. Read: Matthew 1:23. Did you know that God's desire is to be with you? I think this reality escapes so many of us because it seems too good to be true or a poor use of His time. I mean, he's the almighty and powerful creator, yet what He wants to be known for is that He's with us. This really is the theme of the Bible: God created and loves us, sin separated us from Him, and the rest of the Bible is the story of how God brought us close again through Jesus. Read: Psalm 145:18. Over the rest of this devotional, we're going to look at what it really means for us that God is with us. There is so much that could be studied and discovered around this theme, but we're going to look at seven things that come along with God's promise of His presence. So many are living life without all God came to give; my prayer is that you walk in greater fullness of His presence and purpose.

January 7. When Jesus came to Earth, He brought all of the love of Heaven with him. Our God is not a distant, aloof creator, but a close and personal father. When Immanuel comes into our world, He intends to overwhelm us with His love. One of my favorite verses on this is 1 John 3:1. Read: 1 John 3:1. The world that we live in is inundated with rip off and hollow versions of love. Everywhere we look, people are chasing love and acceptance at work, in relationships, and with achievement. There's a desperation to be loved—truly, it is one of the absolute drivers of our lives and existence. The challenge is that most attempt to find this deeply fulfilling love from the wrong source. While we find companionship, friendship, and enjoyment with people, only the love of God can satisfy and fill the longing of our hearts. The most known verse in the Bible is John 3:16, which showcases how the love of God towards us compelled him to act and to respond to us. Really for us to be able to love others correctly we must first know and received the love that God has for us. Read: 1 John 4:7-21 The whole Bible is a billboard and megaphone communicating and showing God's love towards us. You and I don't have to earn it—we just have to receive it.

January 8. "Amazing Grace" is one of the most iconic songs ever written, but it's more than a song. It's the most understated truth. Our sin created a gap that we couldn't cross on our own, but because of the great and amazing grace of God we now stand free, forgiven and pure. Jesus coming to Earth brought unimaginable and unending grace to us. Read: Ephesians 2:8-9 It's so important that we remember that Jesus isn't Immanuel, God with us, because of our own perfection and holiness; it's because of the grace of God. If we assume that we can earn our way to God, or we think we can be "good enough" to make God happy, we will fail and miss the mark every time. Instead, we embrace that our God wants to be with us, knows our limitations, and made provisions for us through Jesus' death on the cross. The more we rest in this grace that covers our sins, the greater ease we'll find in our relationship with God. "Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; Was blind, but now I see. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved; How precious did that grace appear The hour I first believed. [*Amazing Grace, By John Newton*]"

January 9. During Jesus' time on earth He declared that one of the primary reasons He came to be with us is to proclaim freedom. Read: Luke 4:18. What an incredible declaration and a wonderful promise, which is now the reality that we get to live in. Previously we found ourselves held captive and imprisoned by the devil. Sin, in essence, becomes a declaration of allegiance to the enemy's way instead of God's way. We were chained, but Jesus came to set us free! Now this is good news from an eternity perspective, that we get to be with God in Heaven, but it's also incredible news on Earth. We don't have to live in bondage to the lies of our past, or be held back by the addictions and negative habits of our family. We can live free. I think we often forget the reality of the spiritual bondage that we were in before Jesus. In Matthew 20:28, it says that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many. I love that word *ransom*! It means to aggressively take something back. Jesus came to Earth and through the cross, aggressively purchased our freedom! He *ransomed* our lives so that we can be free! Read: John 8:36.

January 10. Hope keeps us anchored; it's what God uses to keep us trusting and building the life that He's promised us. Read Hebrews 11:1. Hope creates the atmosphere for faith to grow. If we lose hope, we lose. In the world we live in today, many people have the feeling that "all hope is lost." The fact that we have such high suicide rates and abuse in a variety of forms is proof that we've lost hope. But, when we reflect on Immanuel, when we reflect on Jesus, and the fact that He is with us, we have hope. Because God is with me I have hope for a greater outcome. This verse in Lamentations speaks to this perfectly. (Lamentations 3:21-23) God's closeness speaks to the goodness of God and his love for us; when we focus on God's goodness, hope rises in our heart. Are you feeling tired? Are you feeling like hope is slipping away? It's time to refocus on Jesus. Read: Isaiah 40:31.

Adapted from: <http://samueldeuth.com>