

Dear God,

We thank you that you are a God whose love is steadfast when ours is not; that you are always hemming us in both behind and before, graciously calling us back to yourself after our hearts have so easily wandered. God, we thank you, too, for your protection and care; that you are our stronghold, our Rock and Fortress, often in the midst of a chaotic world. You provide a shield from those things in which you know are not for our good, and yet give us the strength and grace to persevere the struggles you know that will more align our hearts with yours. We thank you for the recent sweet reminder of the incarnation- that Jesus came in the flesh as the light and hope of the world; that through His life, that led to a tragic yet glorious death, you are doing a mighty work in the world. God, as we approach the New Year, we pray that you renew our hearts. May we be reminded of your Son's redeeming work, from the work on the Cross to changing the world into a more heavenly place. We confess that we desire to 'get our lives together' on our own, and we want to keep things in our control. Please forgive us. We pray that the Gospel will penetrate our hearts, and that your Spirit will give us the grace to change and that Jesus will be sole the object of our affections. May we be compelled to love those around us more deeply; our families, our friends, our Memphis community. Help us to step outside of ourselves and serve for the sake of you Kingdom expansion. We pray specifically for the missionaries and ministries we support as a church.. Bless the efforts of those people end places, and make connections for us with them, that we may be both more prayerful for them and become more of a part of the work that they are doing. We pray that you be with those who are struggling financially right now. We pray for the general welfare and economic stability of our country, and rest in knowing that ultimately your Hand is over our nation, that the government does 'rest on your shoulder'. We do pray for more job opportunities for those who are in need. We pray, too, for giving hearts that are willing to help those who have been affected by the economic turn. We pray for our leadership locally, nationally, and globally, that you bless those who lead and that a true desire for social justice and the good of all will be the goal. Father, be with those who are sick. Heal baby Josiah. Continue to shower your love and grace over Merri and Stephen as they press on in this fight. Please be with those who are struggling to see your goodness, and trust that you are there. God, we know that we are a lost people, battling addictions, fear, deceitfulness, depression, and hatred. Forgive us and have mercy on us. Thank you that you came for broken people, and that you are day by day, putting us back together, to one day be fully restored. Thank you for the blessing of community, that through your people we are encouraged, loved, and challenged to look at the world as you long for us to see it. God, we pray you will continue to build that community within Redeemer, that it will infiltrate into the city . Again, bless our feeble efforts to live as Jesus did, and thank you that in the end, your grace, love and mercy are those things in which our final hope and victory lies.

We plead, as the words of the sweet Christmas hymn declare, "Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set they people free. From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in Thee.." In His name, Amen.