

# *Partners in Prayer*

*Advent 2011*



**Lia Claire Scholl**

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in  
Prayer*  
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### ***About the Author***

**Lia Claire Scholl** is an ordained Baptist minister committed to social justice and inclusivity. Originally from Alabama, she earned her M.Div. from Beeson Divinity School at Samford University and pastors the Richmond Mennonite Fellowship in Richmond, Virginia. Lia has a heart for nontraditional ministry and has spent much of her adult life serving others as Jesus did. Look for Lia's upcoming book from Chalice Press in the spring of 2012.

#### **Please note:**

In our attempt to keep our costs as low as possible and to avoid increasing the price on *Partners in Prayer*, the candlelight service section normally found at the back of the booklet can be downloaded free from

<http://www.chalicepress.com/Advent-Devotional-Partners-in-Prayer-2011-P938.aspx>. Thank you for your understanding.

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## *Introduction*

Advent means coming. For the next four weeks, we celebrate and anticipate the coming of Jesus. We celebrate and anticipate God entering the world in the form of a little baby. We think about a pregnant mama. We think about unjust systems in the world that make that little baby unsafe. We think about prophets yelling into the seemingly endless darkness—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—begging Israel to repent of her sins. We think about the vulnerability of this small child. And we think about what it means that the little baby is entering the world.

Anne Lamott tells the story of a young boy, scared of a storm, calling to his mother. She reassures him that Jesus is with him, but he answers, “Sometimes you just need Jesus with the skin on.”

And like the baby who enters the world, God with skin on, we are to “be” Jesus with the skin on in this world today. We’re to be as Jesus to a world that is hurting, hungry, poor, lacking justice, and in need of comfort.

But being Jesus with the skin on is hard. It makes us as vulnerable to pain as the individuals we’re comforting. It makes us as susceptible to injustice as those we’re supporting. It makes us as defenseless as those we’re defending.

It’s natural to be afraid. But we must not succumb to the fear. We take our strength from the idea that God, the Almighty, entered into the world as a little baby; that Jesus came into the world to bring light into the darkness, and that through his love and tender care, we can do the same.

Advent means coming; a yearning for justice and love, and the means to contest injustice and fear. It’s about to be born, if we just let it. And instead of passively waiting for it to be born, let’s welcome, with open arms, the Advent of the Christ in us.

SUN • NOV 27

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## *Crashing In*

**Read Isaiah 64:1-9**

*O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, / so that the mountains would quake at your presence/ —as when fire kindles brushwood and the fire causes water to boil—/ to make your name known to your adversaries,/ so that the nations might tremble at your presence! (Isa. 64:1-2)*

When the ancient Hebrews thought about God coming into the world, they had a very specific idea of how that would happen: the heavens would tear open, the mountains would quake. It would be a violent entrance.

Many events in the last few years could be like God coming into the world: the earthquake and tsunami in Japan, the earthquake in Haiti, the hurricane in New Orleans. The ancient Hebrews would recognize those moments as God breaking into the world, the heavens tearing open, the mountains quaking.

God did come into the world, but not in the shaking and quaking. God came down into the world through human response to those in need. God came down through the nuclear power plant workers in Japan who sacrificed their own health and safety to bring the power plants back on line. God came down into the world through the health workers in Haiti, heading off a cholera breakout. God came down through the thousands of workers who have returned again and again to New Orleans to rebuild the homes that were destroyed. God came down through every hand that reached out, financially, emotionally, prayerfully. God came down.

Incarnation is embodying the Spirit of God; being the hands and feet of God. As we celebrate Advent, we are anticipating that God is going to burst into the world, be here in a visible, touchable, and audible way. And all the while we are anticipating God coming into the world, we are being God in the world.

***Loving God, let me be your feet today. Let me be your hands today. Let me be present today when someone needs to know that God is near. Amen.***

MON • NOV 28

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## *Replacement or Restoration?*

**Read Psalm 80:1–7; 17–19**

*Restore us, O God;/ let your face shine, that we may be saved.  
(Ps. 80:3)*

Today we have a penchant for new things. We like shiny new houses. We like new cars, with that new car smell. We like new coffee makers, new computers, new clothes. Things are more fun when they're new!

But the Bible doesn't talk about things being new very often. Once you get past Genesis (when everything is new), and through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, most things are old. This place called Israel is old. This city of Jerusalem is old. Experiences are old.

But nothing is old in our postmodern society. Even when we have an older home, we put a brand-spanking new kitchen and bathroom in it. When we have an older car, we trade it for a new one. We can't even have an old television without some sort of adapter to make it pick up digital waves. It's not just our desire for brand-spanking new that's a problem. It's the discarding of old things. Toasters, televisions, and computers don't get repaired. We just toss them into landfills that are already too full.

How can we respect and honor restoration if we don't like things that are restored? One of the mainstays of the work of the Holy Spirit is restoration—making old things as good as new. Restoration isn't transformation into something new, it is the process of repairing or renovating, so as to restore the piece to its original state. What would a restored heart look like? It would look like the healthy heart that had never been broken, never been shattered, and never been hurt. A restored heart would love without the fear of being broken, because it would be like it had never experienced pain. And even if it experienced pain again, it would know that it could be restored again.

*Loving God, restore us that we may be saved.*

TUE • NOV 29

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## *Everything You Need*

### **Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–9**

*I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Cor. 1:4–7)*

Paul wrote the letter to the Corinthians because of specific challenges that the church in Corinth was experiencing from influences within and without the congregation. There was conflict in the church, some from people and others from belief structures. But even before he starts to outline the problems, Paul tells the people that they have everything they need.

They have Jesus Christ. They have the grace of God. They have speech and knowledge. They have strength. And they are not lacking any spiritual gift. And finally, everything is going to turn out great, because the revelation of Jesus Christ is coming.

So often we forget this. We get bogged down in “I don’t have,” or “I’m not enough,” or “I’m afraid to fail,” or “I’m afraid to succeed.” We forget to trust that we have everything we need. We have the strength, gifts, grace, power, and influence that Paul promises in the opening greeting to the Corinthians. Everything you need, you have.

In my little church, whenever we look for someone to fill a job, there’s always someone who is available, willing, and skilled. We need a youth worker? Check. We need someone to write checks? Check. We need someone to clean the sanctuary? Check.

Look around your life. What is missing? Is there enough food? Enough love? Enough intellectual stimulation? Enough relaxation? Enough knowledge? Enough strength? It may take looking closely, but in your life you have all you need.

It’s like Paul is saying to the Corinthians, “You’ve got this.”

***Loving God, you are everything I need.***

WED • NOV 30

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## *God Is Faithful*

### **Read 1 Corinthians 1:3–9**

*God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Cor. 1:9)*

When we put the letters “er” on the end of an adjective, we create an inflectional adjective, which means a similar word with a similar meaning, but with the result of a greater degree to the word. The man is strong; the woman is stronger. There’s the greater degree. The suffix is best used in sentences where things are being compared.

There is, however, an improper use of the inflectional “er.” One example would be “littler.” Little doesn’t take the suffix. If you believe that something is “littler,” you write “smaller.” Also, other words do not take the greater degree—you either are or you aren’t—you can’t be more eternal, you are either eternal or not eternal.

I wonder if the characteristic of faithful is like that. No one ever says that this or that person is “faithfuller,” and yet we do believe that God is more faithful than us. What if faithful is just that—faithful. God is faithful. We are faithful. God is not more faithful than us; we are not less faithful than God.

When we talk about being faithful, it means we have trust in God. If God is faithful, doesn’t it mean that God has faith in us? We are full of faith in God and God is full of faith in us.

*Loving God, help us to be worthy of the faith you have in us.*