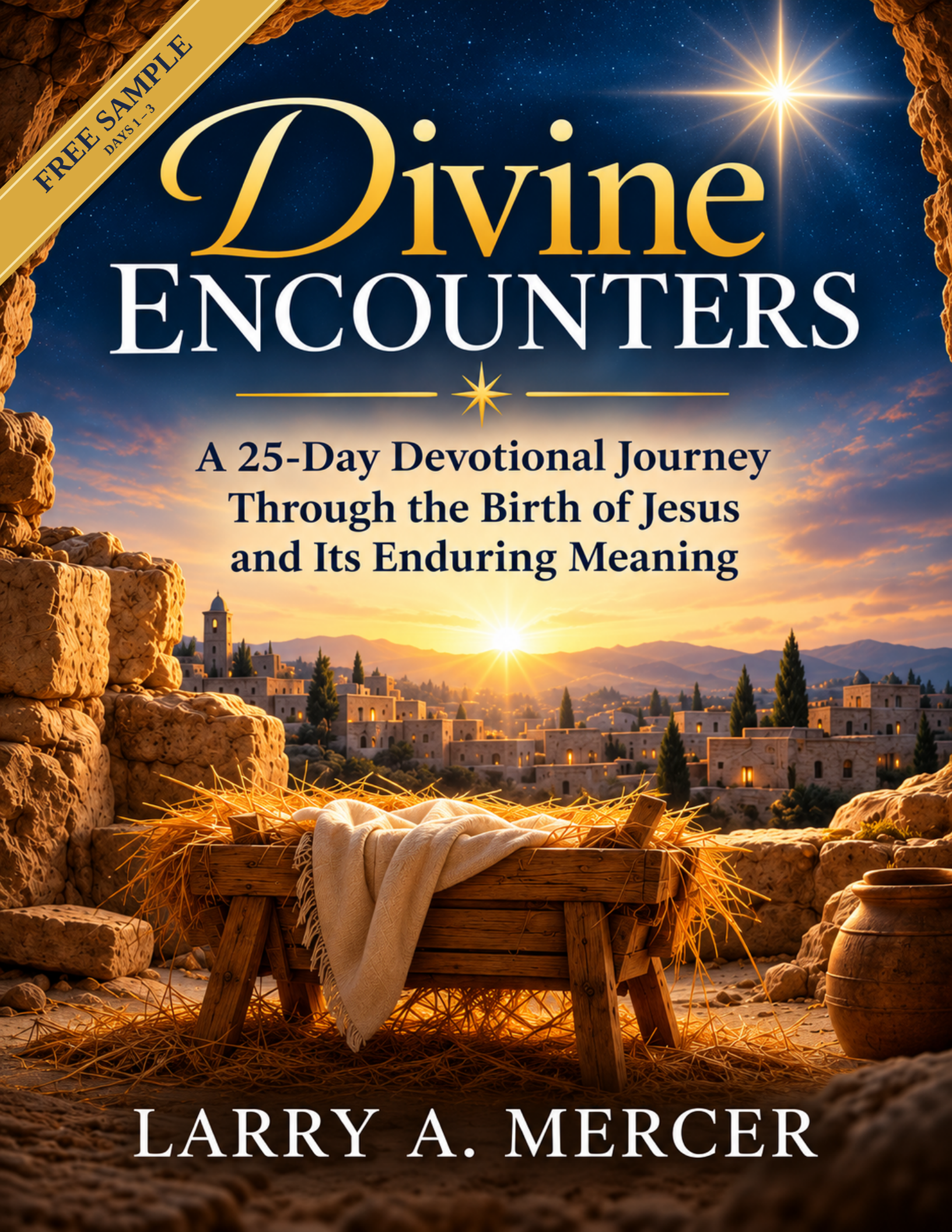

FREE SAMPLE
DAYS 1–3
Divine
ENCOUNTERS
A 25-Day Devotional Journey
Through the Birth of Jesus
and Its Enduring Meaning
LARRY A. MERCER

DIVINE ENCOUNTERS

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Therapon Leadership Services, LLC

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Divine Encounters

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All Scripture quotations in the devotional readings, postscript, and appendix are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB 2020), unless otherwise indicated. Quoted excerpts may omit surrounding verse text.

This devotional is intended for spiritual formation and Christian education. It is not a substitute for pastoral care, professional counseling, medical care, or other qualified assistance when those services are needed.

For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11 NASB 2020

Introduction

The birth of Jesus Christ is more than a familiar scene revisited each December. It is the arrival of the promised King, the revelation of God with us, and the opening movement of the saving mission that leads to the cross, the resurrection, and the reign of Christ. The Christmas story deserves both careful reading and a faithful response.

Divine Encounters traces twenty-five readings through five parts: God Prepares the Way (Days 1–5), The Promise Draws Near (Days 6–10), The Savior Has Come (Days 11–15), The World Encounters the King (Days 16–20), and Living in the Light of Christ (Days 21–25). Zechariah's song, Mary's praise, the witness of Simeon and Anna, and the flight into Egypt remind us that the Christmas story includes waiting, mercy, obedience, danger, and hope. Each reading begins with Scripture and moves toward reflection, a concrete response, and prayer. The aim is not to decorate the narrative with imagined details, but to listen carefully to what God has made known.

Some readers will approach these pages with joy; others will carry grief, uncertainty, loneliness, or fatigue. The gospel makes room for honest sorrow while directing us toward durable hope. Jesus entered a world marked by sin and suffering. He came as Savior, Christ, and Lord. Because He has come, darkness does not have the final word.

A familiar holiday scene can conceal the strain within the biblical story: an elderly couple waiting for a child, a young woman asked to trust an astonishing promise, a righteous man making a costly decision, parents carrying out ordinary duties, and a family later fleeing a violent ruler. Scripture does not invite us to invent their private feelings. It does invite us to notice that God's saving work enters a world of real responsibilities, threatened lives, and persistent hope. That is also the world in which we seek to follow Christ.

May this journey deepen your worship, strengthen your trust, and renew your willingness to follow Christ. Read slowly enough to notice both the wonder of the incarnation and the ordinary places where obedience becomes visible. The goal is not simply to finish twenty-five readings. It is to know more truly the Lord revealed in Scripture, to love Him more deeply, and to walk in His light long after the Christmas season has passed.

How to Use This Devotional

Set aside fifteen to twenty minutes each day, with additional time if you use the reflection space. Begin by reading the biblical passage itself; this book is a companion to Scripture, not a replacement for it.

Use a notebook or the reflection line provided with each reading. Record one truth about God, one honest response of the heart, and one faithful step. Return to those notes on Day 25.

Read. Read the assigned passage in its biblical context. Notice what the text actually says before asking what it means for you.

Receive. Read the key verse and the reflection. Look for the movement from God's revelation to your understanding, affections, relationships, response, and transformation.

Reflect. Consider all three questions. Notice what the text teaches, what it awakens in your heart, and how it should affect the way you treat other people. Record a brief response if you keep a journal.

Live. Complete the suggested action or identify another concrete response consistent with the passage.

Pray. Use the printed prayer as a beginning, then continue in your own words. Bring both gratitude and struggle into God's presence.

Share. When appropriate, discuss what you are learning with a spouse, friend, family member, small group, or ministry team.

If a reading raises a significant theological, emotional, or relational concern, seek wise pastoral or professional support. Spiritual formation grows in community, not isolation.

A note on reading the narratives: the Gospels sometimes leave details unreported. Where a familiar tradition or a pastoral inference goes beyond the text, the readings identify that distinction rather than presenting imagination as history. When the reflections summarize a passage without quotation marks, the wording is the author’s explanatory paraphrase, not a quotation from the NASB 2020. The key-verse lines are Scripture excerpts and should be read in their complete biblical context.

Before You Begin

A Prayerful Starting Point

Before reading Day 1, take a few moments to name where you are beginning. This is not a spiritual examination to pass or fail. It is a way of paying attention to the Lord's work over the next twenty-five days.



The Journey at a Glance

Five movements through the birth of Jesus and its enduring meaning

PART I — DAYS 1–5

God Prepares the Way

PART II — DAYS 6–10

The Promise Draws Near

PART III — DAYS 11–15

The Savior Has Come

PART IV — DAYS 16–20

The World Encounters the King

PART V — DAYS 21–25

Living in the Light of Christ

Read slowly. Consider carefully. Respond faithfully.



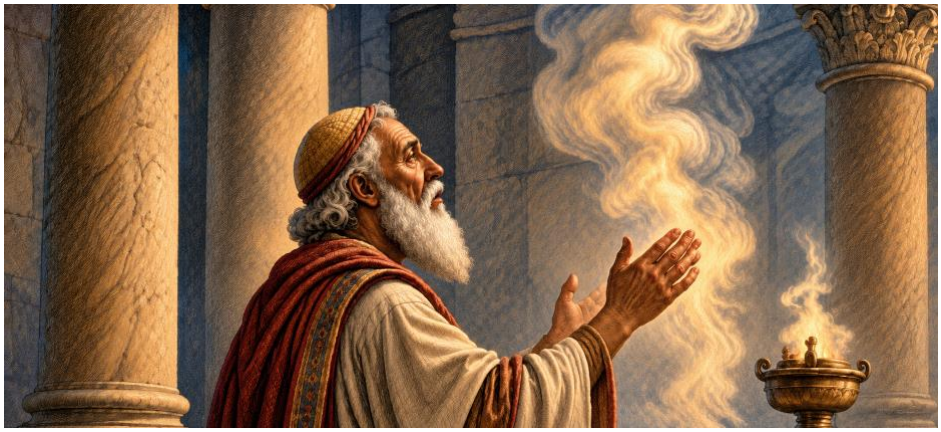
God Prepares the Way

God is at work before His people understand all that He is doing. These readings follow promises, prayer, and faithful responses as the coming of Christ draws near.

"And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what had been spoken to her by the Lord."

Luke 1:45 · NASB 2020

DAY 1 • When God Answers After Long Waiting



Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard... - Luke 1:13 (NASB 2020)

Waiting can test our confidence in God. Luke describes Zechariah and Elizabeth as righteous, advanced in years, and without a child (Luke 1:6–7). Their unfulfilled longing was not evidence of divine displeasure. When Gabriel announced John's birth, the answer addressed their family while serving God's larger purpose: preparing people for the coming Lord (Luke 1:16–17).

Gabriel's description recalls Malachi 4:5–6. John would minister in the spirit and power of Elijah, turning hearts and preparing a people for the Lord. This is a genuine prophetic connection, not a guarantee that every delayed personal request will receive the answer we prefer.

Zechariah questioned Gabriel's message and was temporarily unable to speak because he did not believe it (Luke 1:18–20). When John was named, Zechariah's speech returned, and he praised God's covenant mercy and the salvation promised through David's house (Luke 1:63–79). This account distinguishes a particular rebuke for unbelief from the honest questions we bring to God. Its central message is the Lord's faithfulness to His redemptive promises.

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 1:5–25; 1:57–79

REFLECTING ON THE ENCOUNTER

Some readers are waiting for healing; others for reconciliation, a vocational opening, or the return of a loved one to faith. Scripture does not give us authority to announce the outcome of each situation. It does call us to pray honestly, seek wise counsel, and remain responsible for the work already entrusted to us. Waiting and faithfulness are not competing activities. Often they must be practiced together.

The important question, then, is not simply how long we have waited. It is what kind of people we are becoming while we wait. Zechariah's story directs us from a private timetable to God's enduring mercy in Christ. We can acknowledge disappointment without surrendering hope, and we can serve today without pretending to know tomorrow.

CONSIDER

1. Where has delay begun to shape your view of God's character?
2. What does Zechariah's praise teach you about placing personal hopes within God's larger purposes?
3. Who needs your patient presence rather than an explanation?

LIVE THE TRUTH

Name one unresolved concern in prayer. Then fulfill one present responsibility with care and offer practical encouragement to someone who is also waiting.

TRUTH TO CARRY FORWARD

God's faithfulness is larger than our timetable, and our calling to obey continues while we wait.

PRAYER

Faithful Father, You know the longings I carry and the questions I cannot answer. Keep disappointment from hardening into distrust. Anchor my hope in Your mercy revealed in Jesus Christ, and give me grace to serve faithfully today. Amen.

REFLECT & RECORD

What responsibility can I fulfill faithfully while a cherished answer remains unknown?

DAY 2 • Do Not Be Afraid



And the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." - Luke 1:30 (NASB 2020)

There are moments when a single responsibility seems to alter the direction of an entire life. Mary's encounter with Gabriel was such a moment. She was troubled by his greeting before she knew the full meaning of his message. Scripture does not invite us to dismiss that response. It shows that God's gracious purposes can enter circumstances that we do not immediately understand. The promise of David's throne recalls God's covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:12–16), while Isaiah 9:6–7 anticipates the enduring reign of the promised ruler. Gabriel's announcement identifies Jesus within that royal expectation.

Gabriel's announcement is first and foremost about Jesus: He will be called the Son of the Most High, receive David's throne, and reign forever (Luke 1:32–33). These words recall God's covenant promise concerning David's royal line (2 Samuel 7:12–16). Mary's calling matters because her Son is the promised King, not because God promises every obedient believer a similarly extraordinary assignment.

Gabriel's command not to fear addressed Mary within this particular announcement (Luke 1:30); it was not a promise that obedience would eliminate hardship. Neither did it supply an explanation for every consequence of obedience. The account records the revelation Mary received, but it does not disclose every question she may have had about the future. Her response as the Lord's servant appears later in the same account (Luke 1:38) and directs us to trust what God has actually revealed. That is often where faithfulness begins: with attention to what God has made clear rather than mastery of what He has not disclosed.

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 1:26–38

REFLECTING ON THE ENCOUNTER

Fear may make us postpone an honest conversation, resist a needed change, or avoid an obligation we know is right. In such moments we need more than a comforting phrase. We need to remember the character of the God who speaks, to test our choices by Scripture, and to seek the wisdom of mature believers. Courage is not recklessness dressed in religious language; it is responsible obedience under God's authority.

Mary's calling was unique. We are not asked to repeat her place in redemptive history. Yet her encounter raises a question for every disciple: will we allow God's truth to govern our response when obedience becomes costly? Fear may remain present, but it need not have the final word. God's purposes deserve our trust and our next faithful step.

CONSIDER

1. Which responsibility are you viewing mainly through the lens of fear?
2. How does the identity of Mary's Son change the center of this passage?
3. What wise, concrete step can you take without claiming to know the outcome?

LIVE THE TRUTH

Write down one decision you have delayed because of fear. Identify the biblical principle involved, seek appropriate counsel, and take one responsible step.

TRUTH TO CARRY FORWARD

Faithful courage begins with who God is, not with our ability to foresee what comes next.

PRAYER

Lord, when uncertainty unsettles me, bring my attention back to Your character and Your Word. Give me courage without presumption, humility to seek counsel, and willingness to obey what You have made clear. Amen.

REFLECT & RECORD

What fear will I bring to God, and what small step will I take today?

DAY 3 • Nothing Will Be Impossible with God



For nothing will be impossible with God. - Luke 1:37 (NASB 2020)

The question Mary asked was direct: how could the announced birth take place? Gabriel's answer pointed not to human capacity but to the work of the Holy Spirit. Luke records a unique act of God in the coming of His Son. The passage deserves both careful interpretation and reverent wonder. We should not treat the virgin conception as a general formula for achieving what appears impossible to us. Matthew 1:22–23 explicitly connects Jesus' conception and birth with Isaiah 7:14. Luke's announcement should be read on its own terms, while Matthew helps us recognize the broader prophetic significance of the Savior's coming.

The angel attributed Jesus' conception to the Holy Spirit and said that the child would be holy, the Son of God (Luke 1:35). Matthew separately identifies Jesus' conception and birth with Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy (Isaiah 7:14; Matthew 1:22–23). These connections identify the Savior and affirm God's reliable Word; they do not establish a general formula for extraordinary personal outcomes.

Gabriel's statement that nothing will be impossible with God (Luke 1:37) must be read alongside the promised conception and Elizabeth's pregnancy (Luke 1:35–36). It does not turn our wishes into promises. It assures us that God's declared purposes cannot be frustrated by human limitations. Biblical faith distinguishes between what God has promised and what we earnestly desire. We may bring every desire to Him, but we may not require Him to adopt our preferred outcome.

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 1:34–37

REFLECTING ON THE ENCOUNTER

That distinction matters when we pray for a child, a marriage, a medical concern, or an opportunity for ministry. We should pray with expectation because God is powerful and good. We should also pray with submission because He is wise and sovereign. When someone suffers, our ministry is not to question the strength of that person's faith. It is to stand with them, pray truthfully, and serve in love.

God's power should enlarge our worship and steady our obedience. It should never become a means of claiming control over Him. The virgin conception demonstrates that the Savior's coming is God's initiative, not a human achievement (Luke 1:34–35). The wider New Testament teaches that salvation itself is received by grace through faith, not earned by our works (Ephesians 2:8–9). We may therefore bring honest requests to God while resting our confidence in what He has promised, rather than in outcomes He has not guaranteed.

CONSIDER

1. What is the difference between a biblical promise and a deeply held personal hope?
2. Where have you been tempted toward either despair or presumption?
3. How can your prayers for another person express confidence without making guarantees?

LIVE THE TRUTH

Choose one clear promise from Scripture and pray in light of it. Name your personal request separately and entrust its outcome to God's wisdom.

TRUTH TO CARRY FORWARD

God is able to fulfill every promise He has made; faith does not require Him to fulfill every wish we make.

PRAYER

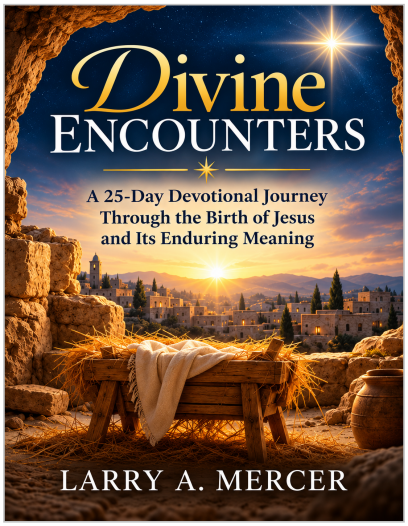
Almighty God, strengthen my confidence in Your Word and correct the ways I confuse my desires with Your promises. Teach me to pray boldly, trust humbly, and care gently for those who suffer. Amen.

REFLECT & RECORD

Where must I distinguish God's promise from my preferred outcome?

YOU HAVE READ DAYS 1–3 OF 25

Continue the Journey



Twenty-two more encounters are waiting: Joseph's quiet obedience, the road to Bethlehem, the sign of the manger, the shepherds' good news of great joy, the wise men who sought the King, and the Light of the World who still shines today.

Read along with me: one encounter a day, from December 1 through Christmas morning.

Available November 25, 2026, on Amazon

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Please feel free to share this free sample with anyone who could use a little hope this Christmas.

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