



*2021 Holiday Journal  
& Survival Guide*



Photo Credit: Susan Clabaugh—her cat Mia

Finding hope and joy  
when you don't feel "merry"





# *2021 Holiday Journal & Survival Guide*

*By: Susan M. Clabaugh*

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*Verses taken from the: NIV and NKJV*

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**Introduction—Part of My Story of Holiday Struggle**

Life can be hard during the holidays, but especially for those that are recovering from trauma, or who aren't experiencing the life that others seem to have here on earth.

I chose to put my cat Mia on the cover because she is wondering when this will all be over and I won't torture her with a Santa hat anymore. Do you every feel like that? When will it be over? When will it be January 1st? Can we skip the holidays?

Maybe you have toxic or abusive family, or maybe your depression and anxiety are bad enough that you just don't care or feel merry. Maybe you lost a loved one and that makes this year especially hard. Whatever the case may be, I get the pain the holidays bring. Everyone else seems to be having a great season and you feel like you're the only one who isn't.

I promise that not everyone is feeling merry and bright. (Despite what pictures on Facebook, Instagram and TikTok say.)

If you have followed me very long then you know part of my story. Here's a brief breakdown so that you know that I do know what it's like to struggle during the holidays.

Back in 2009, when I confronted one of my abusers I was told I was no longer "allowed" to attend Thanksgiving and Christmas with any of my family. As I began to remember more and more I had an even harder time. I was severely depressed, anxious, and overmedicated by a doctor. I spent a lot of time self-harming myself—especially during the holi-

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days when the loneliness was at an all time high.



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For years I had a hard time believing that life was worth living. On Christmas Day 2013, I tried very hard to not be here on earth, attempting suicide again (for a second time).

This time I had damaged my liver and I was in the ICU not doing great. I was incredibly sick and all the while I ended up with a large pulmonary embolism (blood clot) in my lung right next to my heart. It would have killed me or given me a debilitating stroke had I not been hooked up for them to see that my oxygen dropped into the low 80's. (The PE was caused by meds unrelated to my suicide attempt.)

After being rushed for a CAT scan I was given blood thinners and eventually the clot cleared. My liver healed and I was physically better. I had no idea at the time how serious it was and honestly I didn't care. After all, I didn't want to even be here anymore.

Now, when I look back and I see all God has done in my life that I never thought possible I see that His plans were so much greater than mine. He chose to save me twice within days despite my attempts not to be here.

I tell you this to know that I get how incredibly hard this season is and I understand. I may not know your exact circumstances, but I get hard. I also know that through years of prayers to God and seeking Him in His word, as well as continuing my therapy processing trauma, that God has brought me some healing.





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This time of year is still truly difficult for me, but that is why this year God led me to do this for you and also for Him to remind me of His faithfulness.

I truly pray you don't have a near death experience before you see the grace and mercy of God, but I do pray that you see it.

This journal and guide was prayerfully put together to walk you through the days up until the new year and help you focus on what the true reason of the season is, as well as how to take care of yourself during a difficult time of year for many. It's my prayer that through each day you will begin to focus on all you do have and the blessings that God have given you.

*"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1  
Thessalonians 5:16-18*

Okay, so before you roll your eyes at the verse I chose let me explain. There were years upon years that I heard this preached or that people told me to just be thankful. My honest answer to each of them? "Screw you! You don't understand my life!"

Really Christ-like response right?! That's okay, I had a lot of anger and I was depressed and tired of trying to be happy when I wasn't. I felt like no one understood what I had been through.



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What I discovered was that by forcing my thankfulness I eventually had my spirits and depression lift. As I focused on blessings instead of things that I thought I didn't have my mood lifted and God began to help me see all He has given me, instead of what I thought I should have instead. As we walk through the days leading to 2022, I will walk you through a process to "force" thankfulness, share self-care tips, and provide a place to journal during this season.

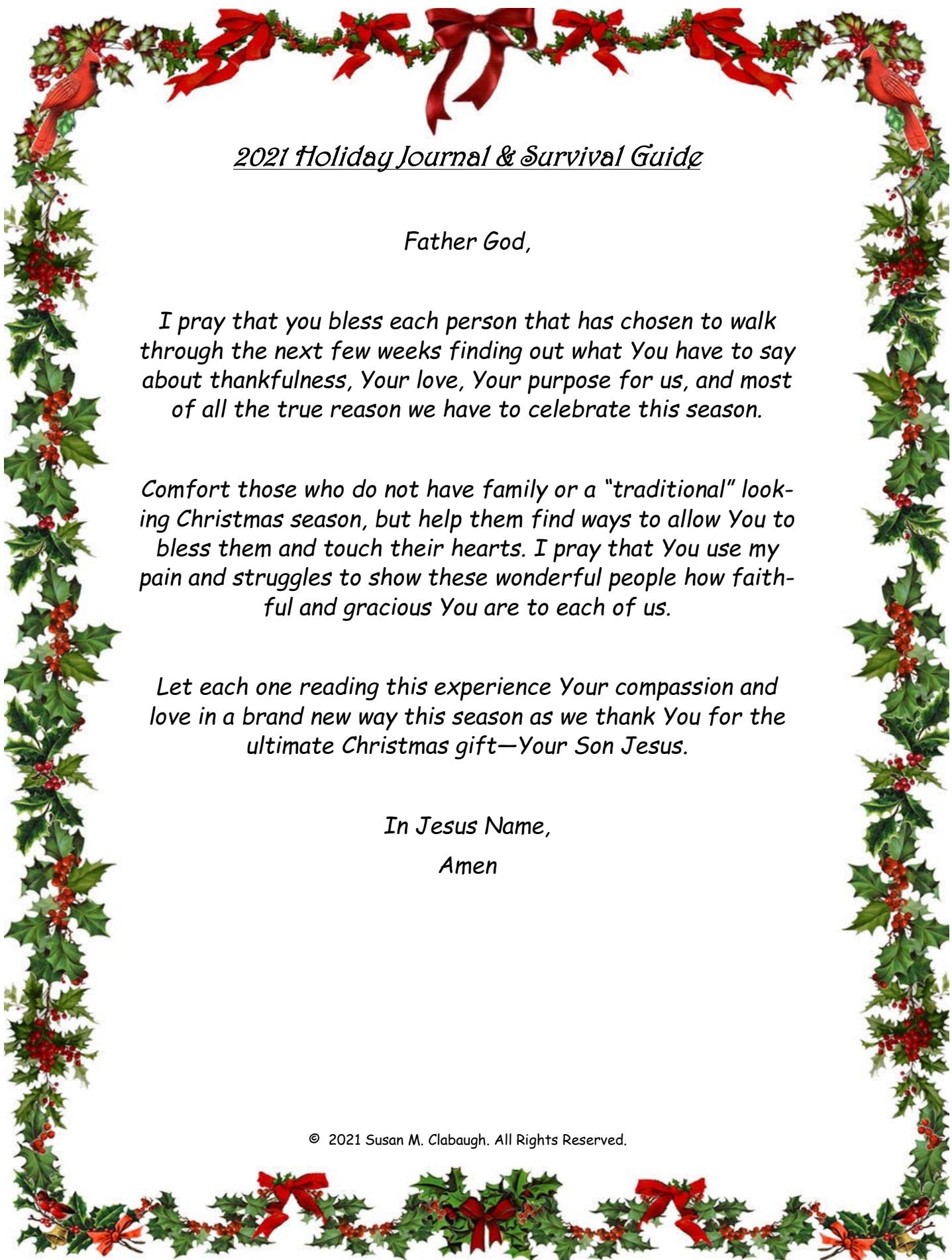
Focusing on the blessings and also taking care of yourself can help the holidays not seem as daunting. (Though, they may still be painful emotionally-sorry that's the truth-but, you'll have a little different outlook when you open yourself to what God has to say, and depend on Him for strength.)

Thank you for choosing to download and read what God has laid on my heart! I pray you find the hope and joy God has for you despite the fact you may not feel "merry".

Blessings to you,

Susan





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*Father God,*

*I pray that you bless each person that has chosen to walk through the next few weeks finding out what You have to say about thankfulness, Your love, Your purpose for us, and most of all the true reason we have to celebrate this season.*

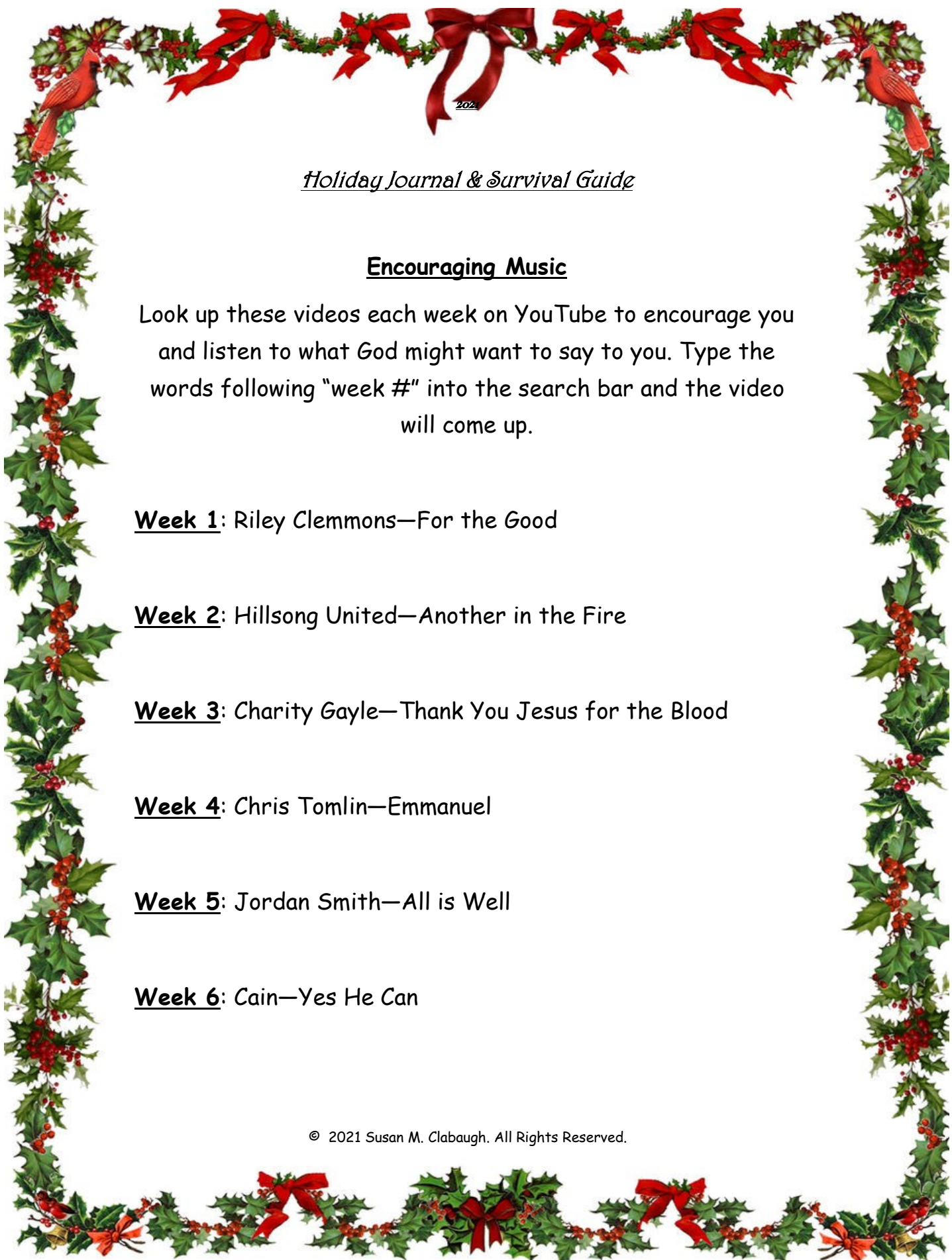
*Comfort those who do not have family or a "traditional" looking Christmas season, but help them find ways to allow You to bless them and touch their hearts. I pray that You use my pain and struggles to show these wonderful people how faithful and gracious You are to each of us.*

*Let each one reading this experience Your compassion and love in a brand new way this season as we thank You for the ultimate Christmas gift—Your Son Jesus.*

*In Jesus Name,*

*Amen*





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**Encouraging Music**

Look up these videos each week on YouTube to encourage you and listen to what God might want to say to you. Type the words following "week #" into the search bar and the video will come up.

**Week 1:** Riley Clemmons—For the Good

**Week 2:** Hillsong United—Another in the Fire

**Week 3:** Charity Gayle—Thank You Jesus for the Blood

**Week 4:** Chris Tomlin—Emmanuel

**Week 5:** Jordan Smith—All is Well

**Week 6:** Cain—Yes He Can



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**Format of This Journal and Guide**

You can download this document and view it on your screen and write your responses in another journal, or you can print it out and follow along with the papers in front of you.

**Bible Verse of the Week**

**Tidbit:**

My brief thoughts.

**Self-Care Tip:**

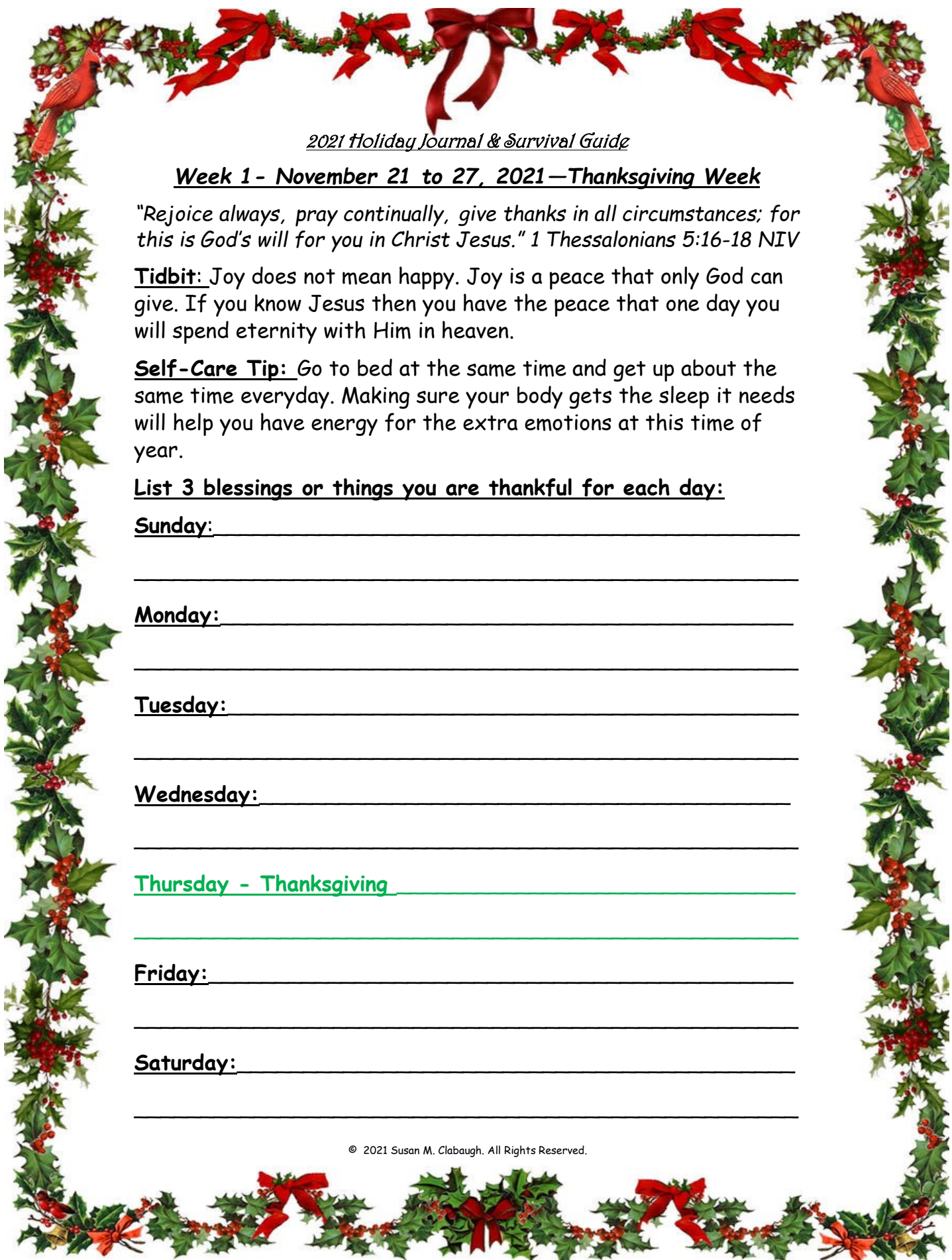
A tip of how to take care of yourself during the holidays.

**List 3 blessings or things you are thankful for each day:**

On this section fake it until you make it. Is your refrigerator working? Do you have food to eat? Start simple. Blessings come in all shapes and sizes. I get it there were days the only thing I was thankful for was deodorant. See, there's all kinds of things!

**There will be 2 lined pages following the main page for each week. This is for extra journaling or prayers.**





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**Week 1 - November 21 to 27, 2021—Thanksgiving Week**

*"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV*

**Tidbit:** Joy does not mean happy. Joy is a peace that only God can give. If you know Jesus then you have the peace that one day you will spend eternity with Him in heaven.

**Self-Care Tip:** Go to bed at the same time and get up about the same time everyday. Making sure your body gets the sleep it needs will help you have energy for the extra emotions at this time of year.

**List 3 blessings or things you are thankful for each day:**

**Sunday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Monday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Tuesday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Wednesday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Thursday - Thanksgiving** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Friday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Saturday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*2021 Holiday Journal & Survival Guide*

**Week 1 - November 21 to 27, 2021—Thanksgiving Week**

**Prayer or Journal Page**

*"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18*

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*2021 Holiday Journal & Survival Guide*

**Week 1 - November 21 to 27, 2021—Thanksgiving Week**

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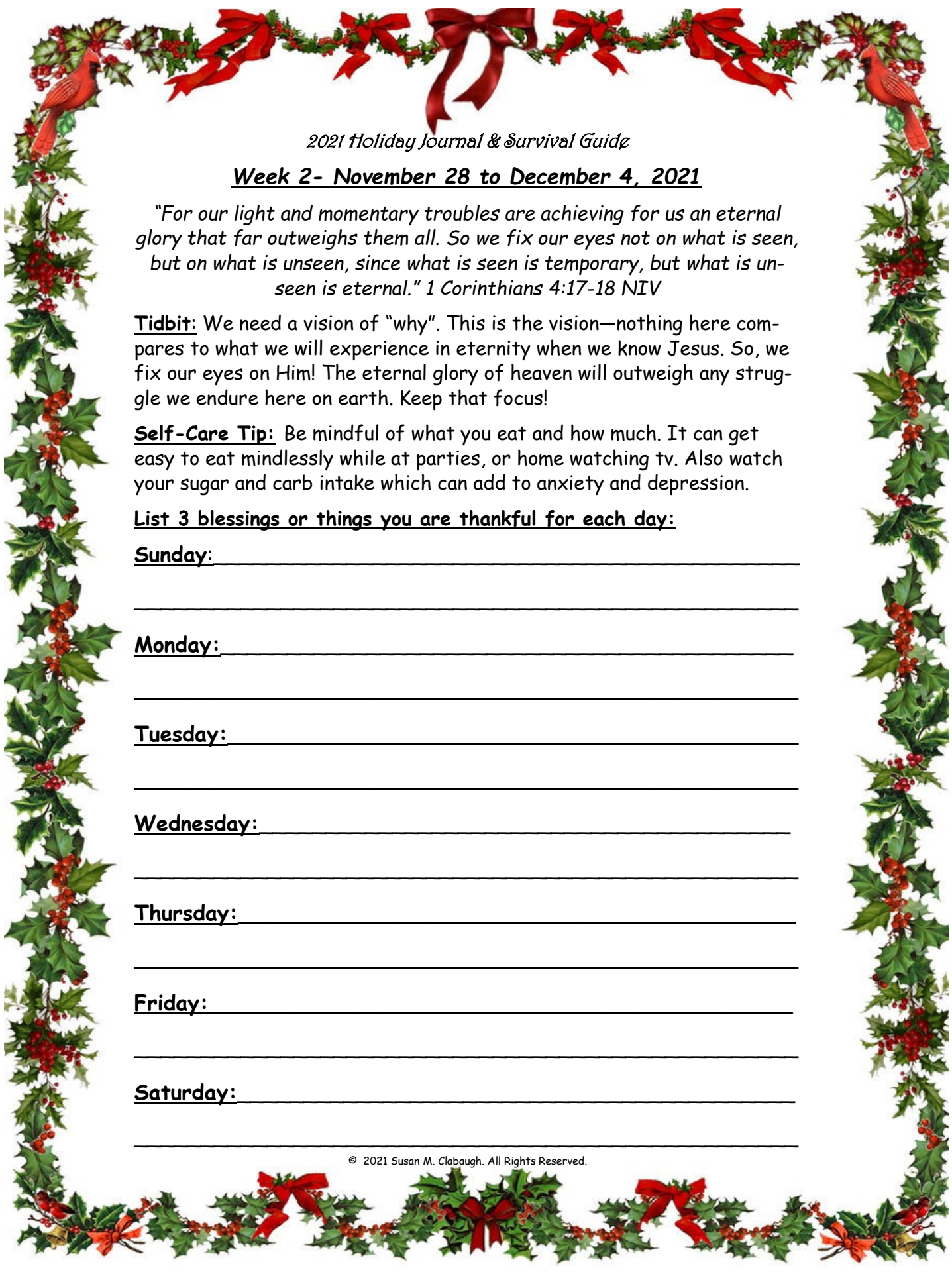
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**Week 2- November 28 to December 4, 2021**

*"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 1 Corinthians 4:17-18 NIV*

**Tidbit:** We need a vision of "why". This is the vision—nothing here compares to what we will experience in eternity when we know Jesus. So, we fix our eyes on Him! The eternal glory of heaven will outweigh any struggle we endure here on earth. Keep that focus!

**Self-Care Tip:** Be mindful of what you eat and how much. It can get easy to eat mindlessly while at parties, or home watching tv. Also watch your sugar and carb intake which can add to anxiety and depression.

**List 3 blessings or things you are thankful for each day:**

**Sunday:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Monday:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Tuesday:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Wednesday:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Thursday:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Friday:** \_\_\_\_\_

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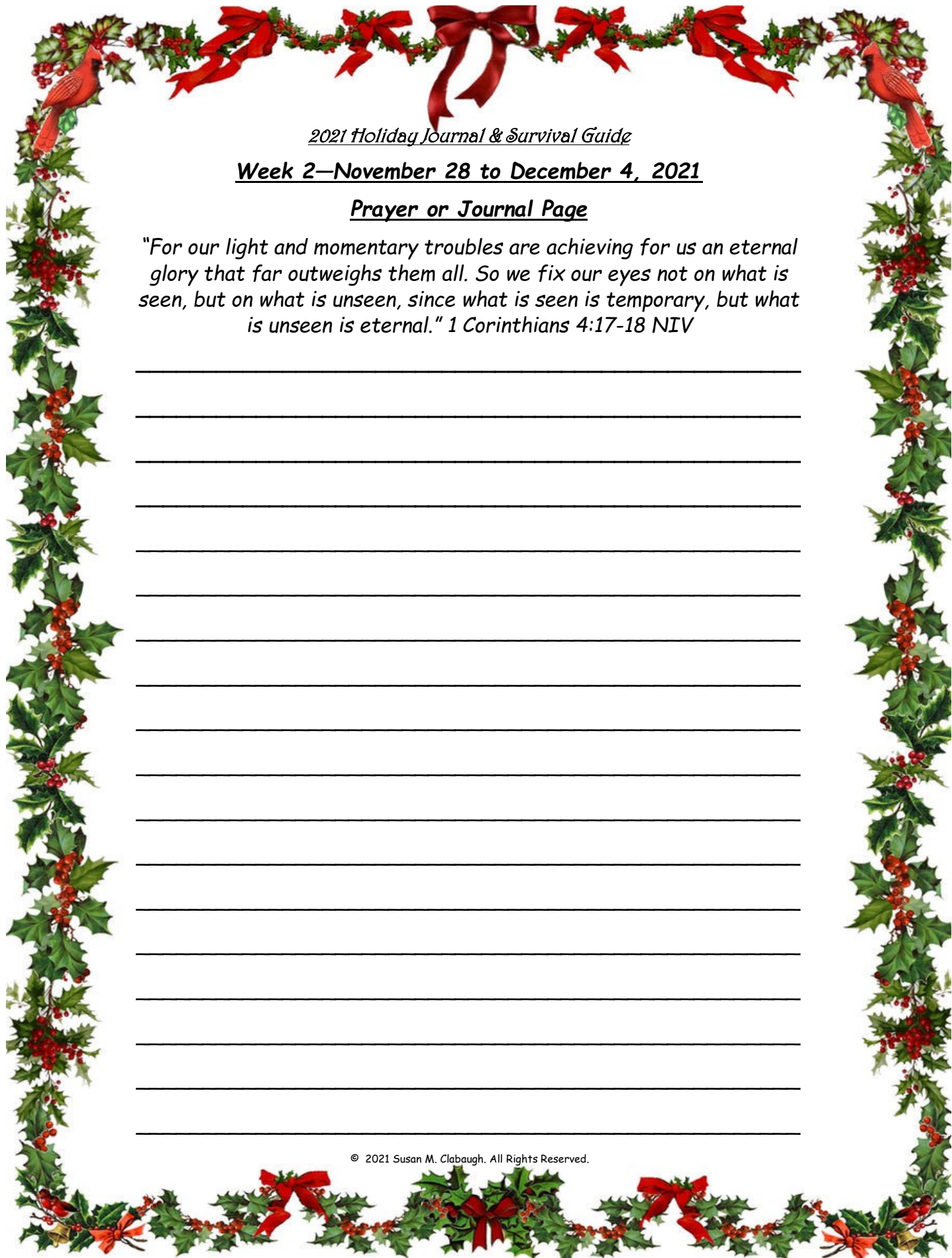
**Saturday:** \_\_\_\_\_

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*2021 Holiday Journal & Survival Guide*

**Week 2—November 28 to December 4, 2021**

**Prayer or Journal Page**

*"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 1 Corinthians 4:17-18 NIV*

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**Week 3- December 5 to December 11, 2021**

*"Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday." Psalm 37:5-6 NKJV*

**Tidbit:** Committing each moment of each day to God will free you up to do what He has for you. It will help you prioritize what truly needs to get done—especially in the holiday season.

**Self-Care Tip:** Exercise—go for a walk with God, and preferably do it outside where you can get sunlight and vitamin D. Try for at least 20 minutes. Set an alarm to remind you to fit this in and boost your energy and mood. While walking tell God anything you are feeling.

**List 3 blessings or things you are thankful for each day:**

**Sunday:**

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**Monday:**

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**Tuesday:**

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**Wednesday:**

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**Thursday:**

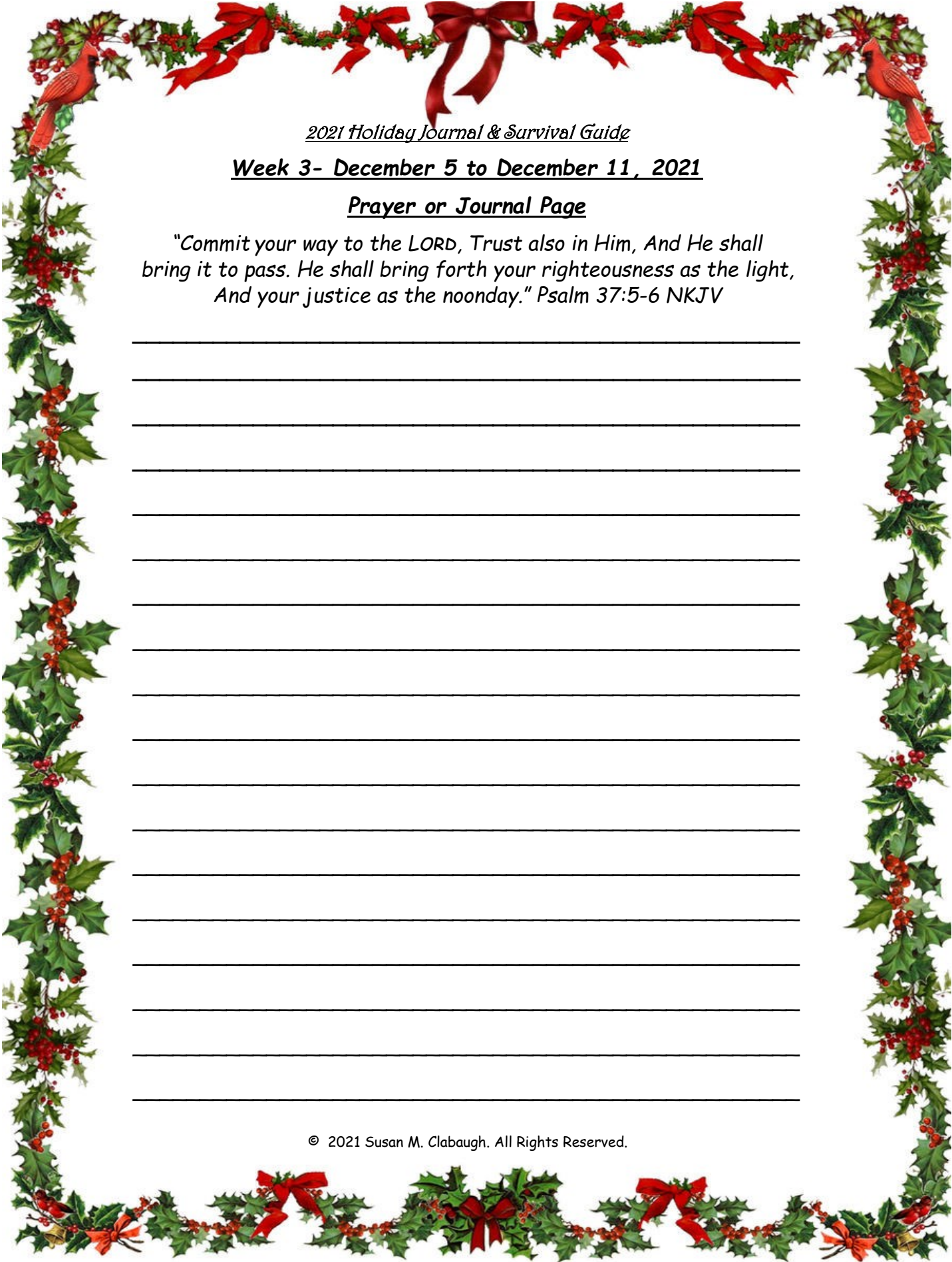
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**Friday:**

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**Saturday:**

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*2021 Holiday Journal & Survival Guide*

**Week 3- December 5 to December 11, 2021**

**Prayer or Journal Page**

*"Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, And He shall bring it to pass. He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, And your justice as the noonday." Psalm 37:5-6 NKJV*

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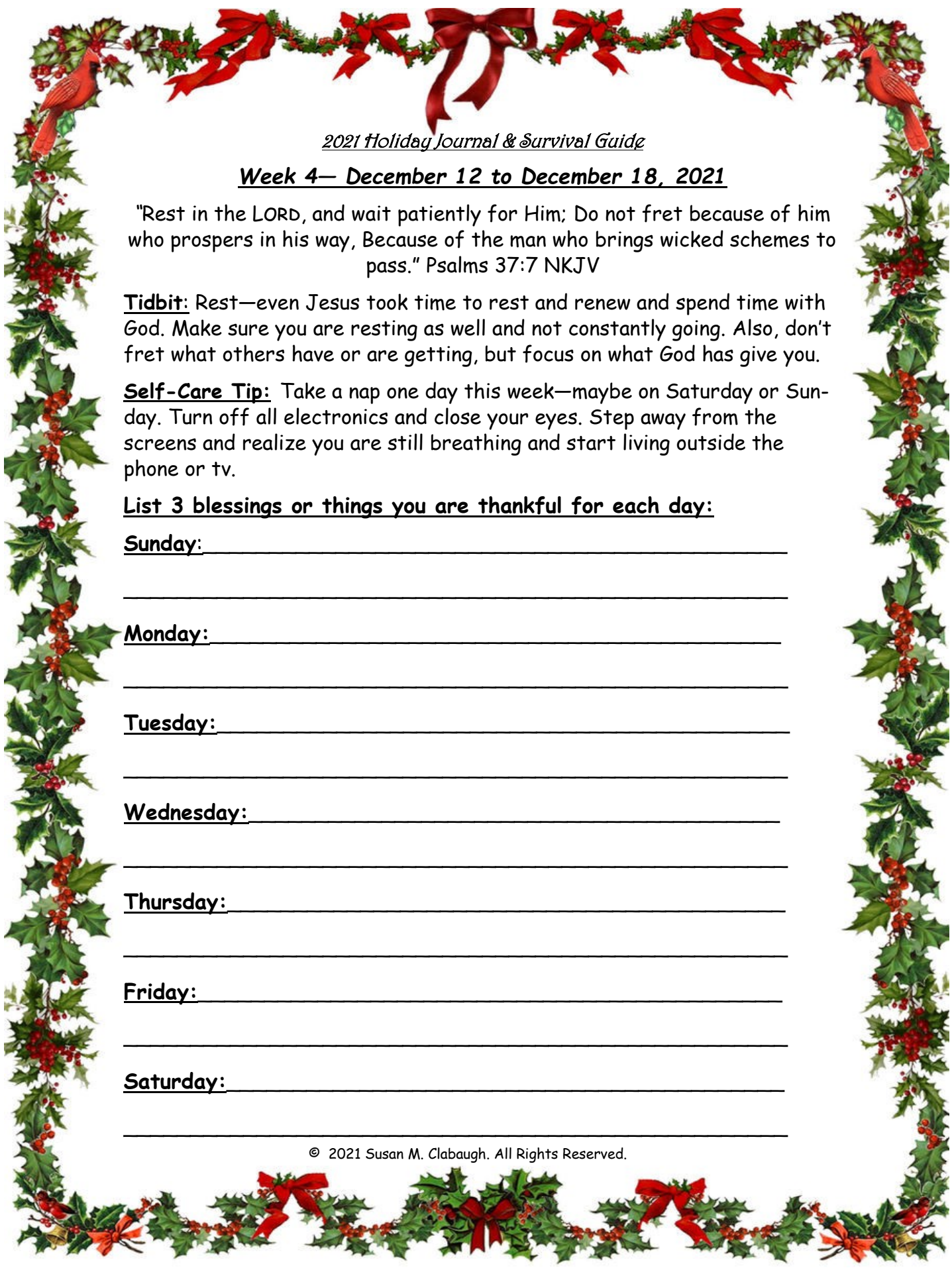
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**Week 4— December 12 to December 18, 2021**

"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass." Psalms 37:7 NKJV

**Tidbit:** Rest—even Jesus took time to rest and renew and spend time with God. Make sure you are resting as well and not constantly going. Also, don't fret what others have or are getting, but focus on what God has give you.

**Self-Care Tip:** Take a nap one day this week—maybe on Saturday or Sunday. Turn off all electronics and close your eyes. Step away from the screens and realize you are still breathing and start living outside the phone or tv.

**List 3 blessings or things you are thankful for each day:**

**Sunday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Monday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Tuesday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

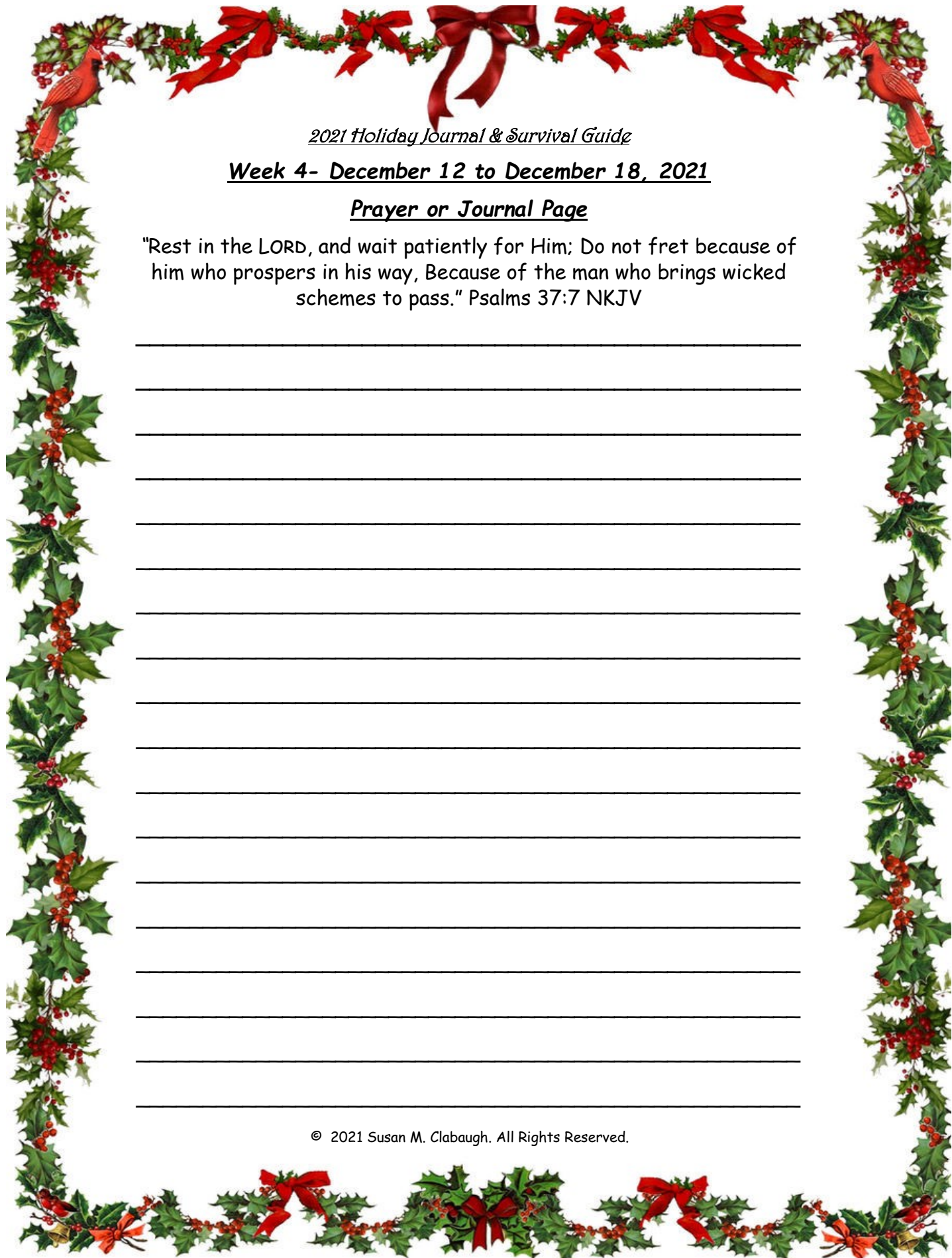
**Wednesday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Thursday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Friday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Saturday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_





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**Week 4- December 12 to December 18, 2021**

**Prayer or Journal Page**

"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass." Psalms 37:7 NKJV

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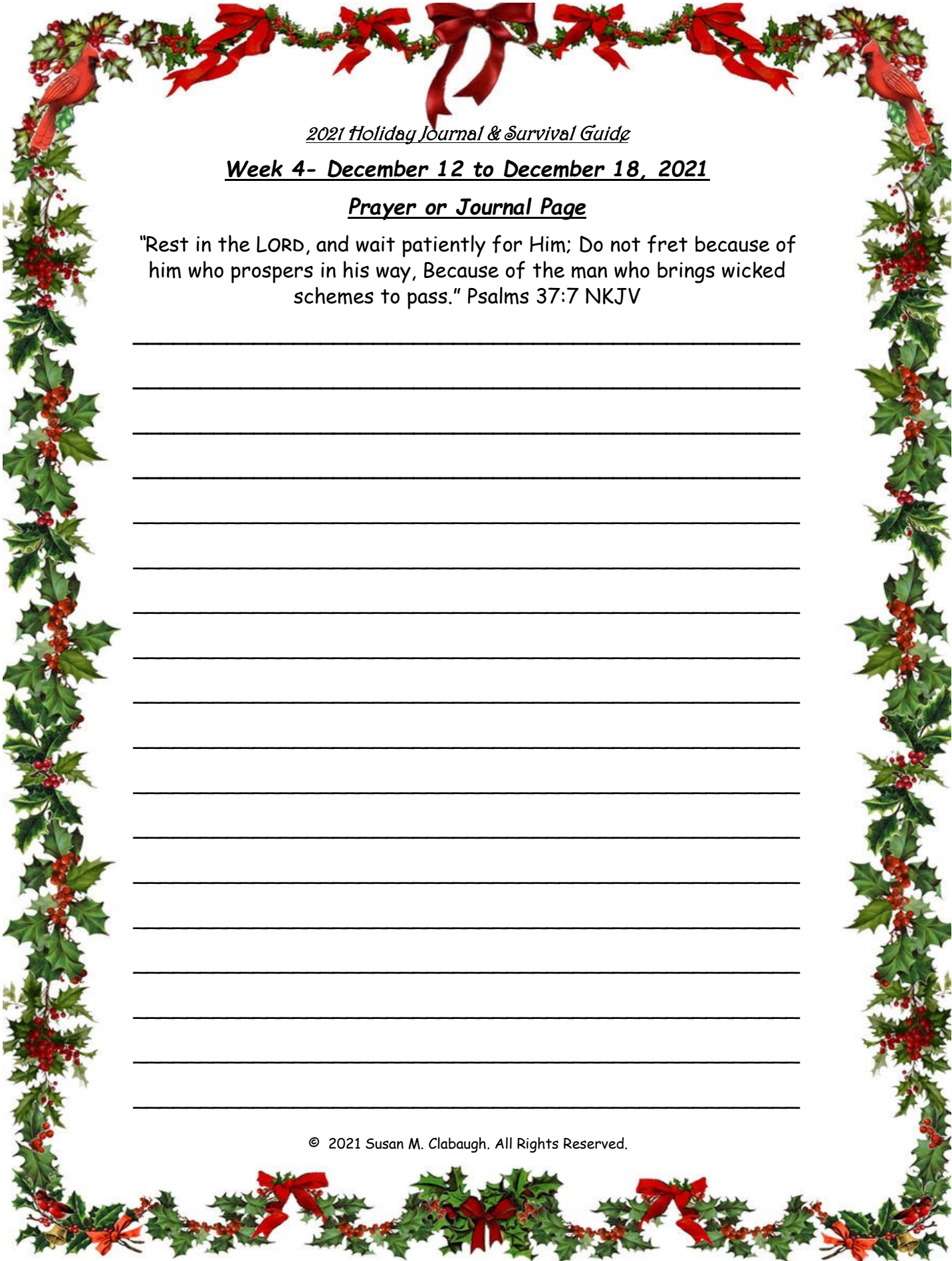
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*2021 Holiday Journal & Survival Guide*

**Week 4- December 12 to December 18, 2021**

**Prayer or Journal Page**

"Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him; Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way, Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass." Psalms 37:7 NKJV

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**Week 5- Special Christmas Message From Me**

The world tells us the holidays are for family, and yet sometimes it's our families who are toxic to us. So, to put things in perspective we have to look deeper than what the world tells us. Christmas didn't come about to give gifts or sit on Santa's lap or even spend time with family.

The whole meaning of Christmas is that Jesus was born as a baby in manger one night 2000 years ago in Bethlehem. He came as a human in the flesh.

He has walked and lived on this earth with all the evil it entails. Yet, He is also God. He saw all the evil and our sin and chose to give His life for ours.

I would not be able to make it on this journey in recovery without depending on Him. It's His strength that gets me through.

There have been times along the way I didn't call on Him for help and when I tried it on my own I came close to death. That is not what He wants for us. He has plans for our lives that we cannot begin to imagine.

So, on this Christmas, if you don't know Jesus, what better time to turn to Him than on His birthday? All you have to do is reach out and He is there.

He never leaves us once we call on Him. I know from our experiences we struggle to trust and understand love, but He can build those in us. I am experiencing it right now.

**Week 5- Special Christmas Message From Me Continued**

I don't believe it's one fancy prayer that leads You to Jesus, just honest, heartfelt confession that you are a sinner and reaching out to Him. The Bible says:

*"If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'" Romans 10:9-13*  
ours.

None of us are perfect. We all have sinned and will continue to, but Jesus came to die for those sins so we can spend eternity with Him in heaven.

What do you say today? Reach out to Jesus and begin a relationship with Him if you don't already have one. He's waiting with arms open wide to welcome you and He longs to help you on this journey. If you already know Him cherish what He's done so far in your life.

As we celebrate Christmas let's remember the real reason we celebrate is Jesus, and when you start to feel down and depressed about this time of year, remember if you know Him He is always with you.

It's only because I know Jesus loved me enough to save me so that I can have the most amazing love relationship with God that I can have hope. It's in this relationship that helps me to have a joy beyond measure during a time of year that is most difficult during my time on earth. I pray you find that joy too.





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**Week 5- December 19 to December 25, 2021—Christmas week**

*"And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7 NKJV*

**Tidbit:** 2000 years ago there was no room for Jesus. Will you make room for Him in your life as we celebrate the fact He came to earth to make a way for all of us to spend eternity in heaven?

**Self-Care Tip:** Limit your time you spend on social media, watching or reading the news, and spend some time talking to God and reading His word.

**List 3 blessings or things you are thankful for each day:**

**Sunday:**

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**Monday:**

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**Tuesday:**

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**Wednesday:**

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**Thursday:**

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**Friday - Christmas Eve:**

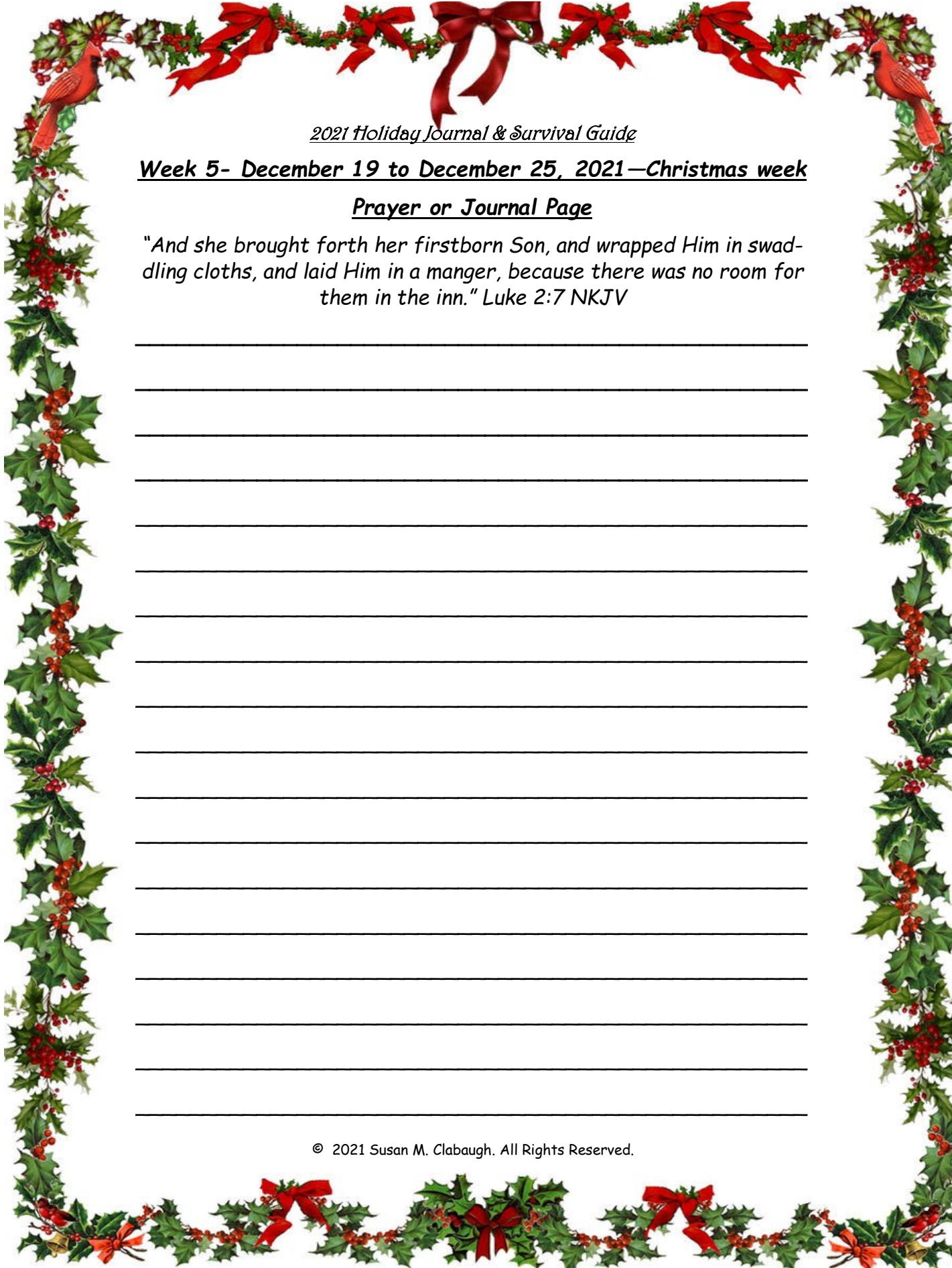
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**Saturday - Christmas Day:**

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**Week 5- December 19 to December 25, 2021—Christmas week**

**Prayer or Journal Page**

*"And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7 NKJV*

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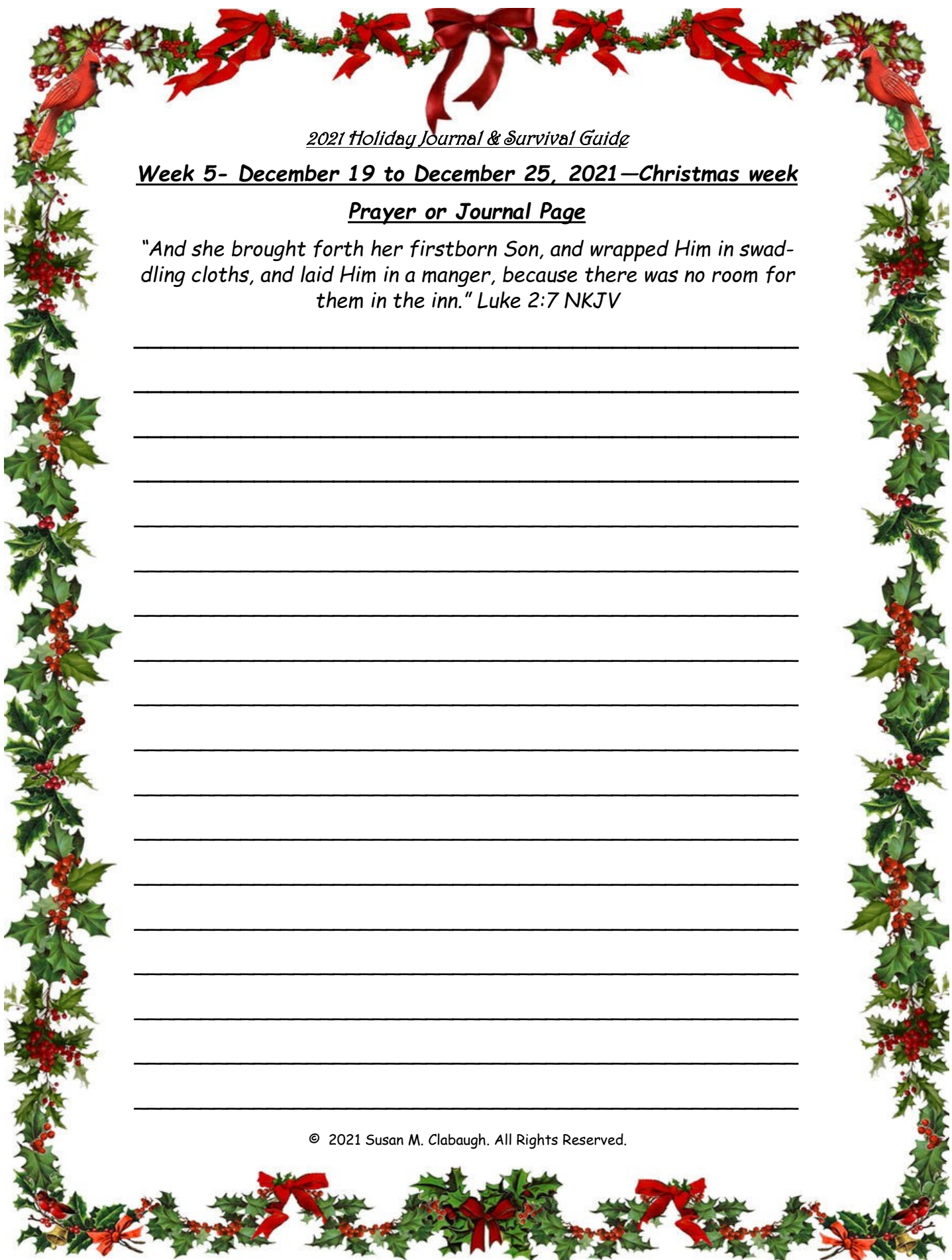
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**Week 5- December 19 to December 25, 2021—Christmas week**

**Prayer or Journal Page**

*"And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." Luke 2:7 NKJV*

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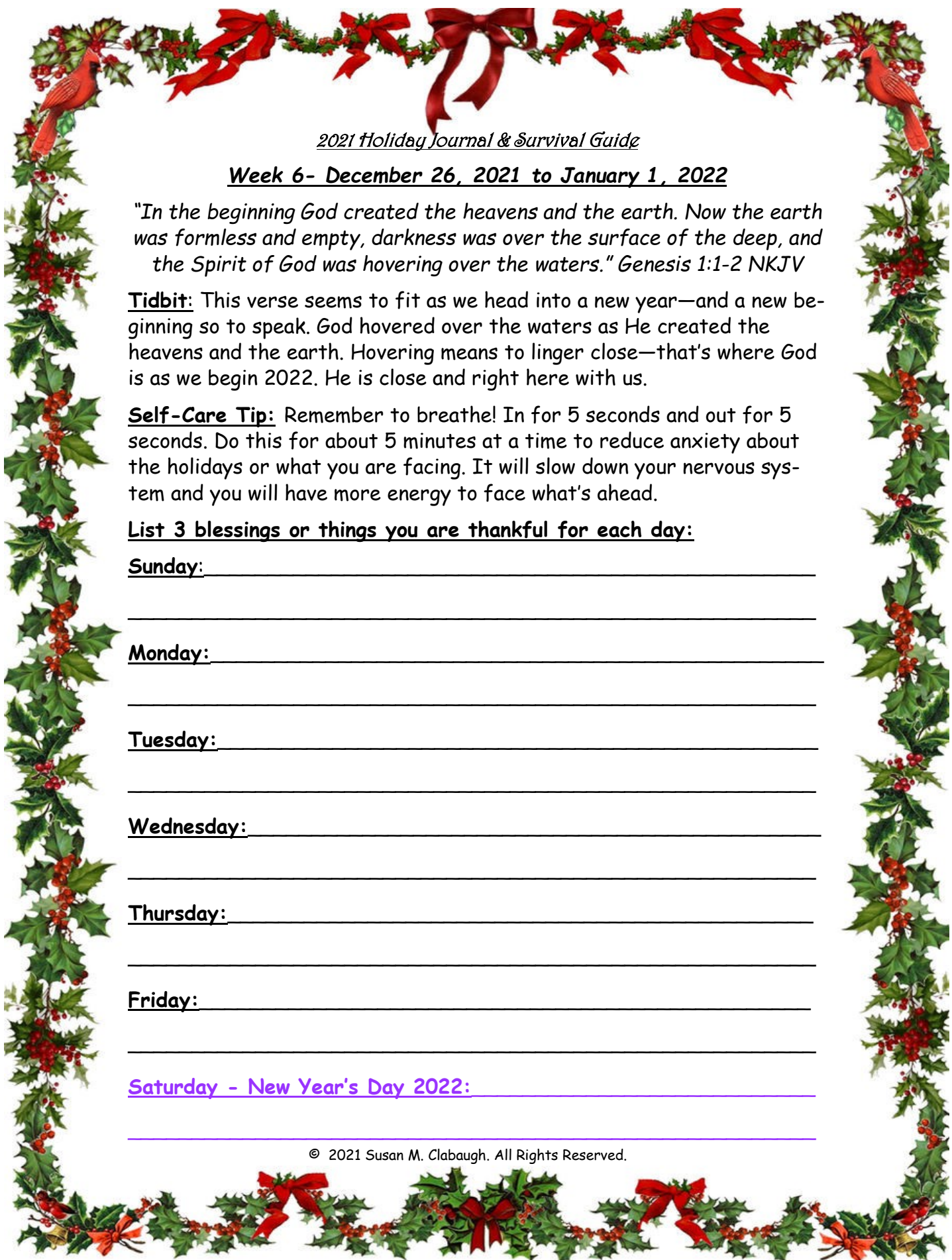
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**Week 6- December 26, 2021 to January 1, 2022**

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters." *Genesis 1:1-2 NKJV*

**Tidbit:** This verse seems to fit as we head into a new year—and a new beginning so to speak. God hovered over the waters as He created the heavens and the earth. Hovering means to linger close—that's where God is as we begin 2022. He is close and right here with us.

**Self-Care Tip:** Remember to breathe! In for 5 seconds and out for 5 seconds. Do this for about 5 minutes at a time to reduce anxiety about the holidays or what you are facing. It will slow down your nervous system and you will have more energy to face what's ahead.

**List 3 blessings or things you are thankful for each day:**

**Sunday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Monday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Wednesday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Thursday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Friday:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Saturday - New Year's Day 2022:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_











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**Additional Self-Care Tips**

- ◆ Spend time with God first thing each day.
- ◆ Spend some time each day journaling your feelings and emotions so they don't stay bottled up inside. (This guide is a way to do that.)
- ◆ Say "No".—Don't overcommit yourself just because you "feel" obligated. Pray about what things God wants you to participate in and what you can let go.
- ◆ Get plenty of sleep.
- ◆ Breathe
- ◆ Exercise
- ◆ Limit your time on social media, watching or reading the news.
- ◆ Stay hydrated—drink plenty of water. (It is truly amazing how our body responds when we make sure it gets what it needs.)
- ◆ Be mindful of what you are putting into your body and how much. (Limit sugar and carbs which can add to depression, inflammation, pain, and a lethargic feeling.)
- ◆ Realize it's okay to feel sad, unhappy, down, or struggle. You are not alone in these feelings and it's okay to feel them. This is why the thankfulness is important so we don't drown ourselves in the negative feelings we do experience.
- ◆ Reach out for support—whether to a counselor, trusted friend, or mentor.
- ◆ Stop trying to be perfect—this is a mentality that our world seems to think is possible despite the fact we live in a fallen world. Let the "perfectionism" go.
- ◆ Take some time to enjoy and worship God for His amazing gift of Jesus.

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**Additional Bible Verses and Thoughts for Encouragement**

**Matthew 6:25-26 NKJV:** “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”

**Tidbit:** God feeds the birds, so how much more will He take care of each of our needs? Of course, as I’ve said before, God feeds the birds, but He doesn’t throw the worms in the nest. We have to choose to do the work—whatever that may be.

**Philippians 4:9 NKJV:** “I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”

**Tidbit:** This is a hard one to come to, but I am proof that with God’s strength you can be content whatever the circumstances.

**Philippians 4:19 NKJV:** “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”

**Tidbit:** I have had, and continue to have, times where I have to trust that God will provide even when my sinful, and trauma filled mind tells me I can only depend on myself. God has proven to be faithful and He can do the same for you if you let Him.



My prayer for you today and in  
the new year ahead.

“The LORD bless you and keep you;  
the LORD make his face shine on you  
and be gracious to you;  
the LORD turn his face toward you  
and give you peace.”

Numbers 6:24-26 NKJV

Thanks for walking through the  
holiday season with me.

Happy New Year!

Susan

## *About the Author*

Susan is a former elementary school teacher and now does reading remediation in her own private practice. She is also still in the process of recovering from years of sexual abuse and rape. She has a blog—[hopzafterssexualassault.com](http://hopzafterssexualassault.com). Follow her there for more of her story of recovery from the trauma she endured, and how God is bringing healing to her life.