HOLY GROUND

A 41-DAY CHRISTMAS JOURNEY

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FOREWORD

Forty-one years ago, in 1983, a song I had written as a 19-year-old Pastor's son was first published. The song was Holy Ground. Of course, I had no idea how God would use it over the next four decades, repeatedly blowing my mind with His goodness. From being sung at a Presidential Inauguration to being included in numerous hymnals, translated into virtually every language in the world, to being sung and/or recorded by numerous artists, including Barbra Streisand, Michael W. Smith, Billy Graham Crusade, Bill Gaither, Sandi Patti, Israel Houghton, Truth, and many more. That's the part people know. What many don't know is how many times this song has brought His presence to me, not only in concerts around the world but in my personal, private devotions. In hotel rooms, on airplanes or tour buses, as well as in my writing room at home, it always brings Him near. That "God coming near to us" has never been more clearly exemplified than in the Christmas story. God came near. His name is Emmanuel - God with us.

Forty-one years later, my dear friends, Dr. Scott Hanberry and Dr. Ray Cummings, have written an amazing and powerful 41-day devotional series for the Christmas season. They have titled it Holy Ground: A 41-Day Christmas Journey. This is a beautiful walk into the Christmas season, helping all of us focus on the Savior. I hope you will take the time, with your family, to create a new tradition of building our lives around the reason Jesus came to Bethlehem . . . for us, for you. Pull your family close, just for a few minutes, and make the holiday a little more sacred. Maybe let this year be less focused on the presents they'll get and focus more on the presence He gives. I have

no doubt that you will be blessed by this book, as I was. I trust that you and your family will be taken, over and over again, to Holy Ground. May the Christ of Christmas fill your home and your hearts!

Geron Davis

HOLY GROUND

Geron Davis

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As I walked through the door, I sensed His presence
And I knew this was a place where love abounds
For this is the temple, Jehovah God abides here
We are standing in His presence on holy ground

In His presence
There is joy beyond measure
And at His feet
Peace of mind can still be found

And if you have a need
I know He has the answer
Reach out and claim it, you are standing on holy ground

We are standing on holy ground
And I know that there are angels all around
Let us praise Jesus now
We are standing in His presence
On holy ground.[1]

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever visited a place where you felt God's presence? Such serendipitous moments of peace, love, and contentment seem to be touched by God Himself. Maybe you were in a church worship service or driving in your car and listening to praise music. Perhaps you were simply at home alone, but you knew that God was there.

Nature sometimes lends itself to an awareness of God. Standing on a misty mountaintop or staring out at an angry sea can draw us to a place of appropriate smallness and simultaneously to the vastness of God. Those moments can tune our perception to His nearness.

We like to call these moments in sacred spaces standing on holy ground. But you might be surprised to consider that we can begin to appreciate every place, every moment, as holy. Why? Because holy ground isn't about a place; it is about His presence. It is about finding ourselves living in the awareness of the very presence of God.

This devotional is all about holy ground. We begin this Advent journey immersed in thoughts about the nature of our holy God and the miracle of meeting with Him. As we prepare our hearts for Christmas, we will rediscover the glory of Christ Jesus coming to the earth and giving us access to God.

The content of each day is structured under two headings: "We are Standing on Holy Ground" and "Let Us Praise Jesus Now." By design, we encourage you to read and reflect, and then respond.

Our prayer is that you will worship in awe and wonder, be moved to take off your shoes in adoration and reverence, and stand on holy ground.

Ray and Scott

HOLY GROUND

Part 1

A HOLY GOD

The God of the Bible is holy. Just to be certain, Scripture says about Him that He is "holy, holy, holy." Not to be missed or mistaken, God's holiness sets Him apart from everyone and everything. He is entirely different than all other things that exist. Theologians speak in terms of God as being "wholly other" to describe the vast and infinite difference between God and everything else.

That chasm begs the question, "How can we, as finite creatures, relate to this infinite God?". More than this, "How can this perfect, flawless Deity associate with marred, sinful humans?". The very thought that a holy God could (or would) interrelate with sinful people is simply astounding! Yet, He reveals Himself. He allows Himself to be known. He comes to us where we are.

Along this journey toward Christmas, we will ponder the holiness of God. And we will encounter intersections of sacred and sinful, infinite and finite, omniscience and ignorance. We will celebrate with awe and wonder how God has reached down into our broken world.

Sometimes He comes when we least expect it. It may happen in a supernatural way, as with Moses at the burning bush or the children of Israel at the Tabernacle. Other times, it may be in ordinary circumstances where we hear His still small voice and sense the presence of God.

But because He is holy, wherever we meet Him - that place is holy ground. We are praying that across the next forty-one days, you find yourself standing on holy ground - in awe of the power and presence of Jesus and responding to Him in trust-filled obedience.

DAY ONE

He is Incomprehensible

However big you think God is,
He is far bigger than that!
Anonymous

Psalm 145:3
Great is the Lord! He is most worthy of praise! No one can measure His greatness.

Job 26:14
"These are just the beginning of all that He does, merely a whisper of his power. Who, then, can comprehend the thunder of His power?"

Romans 11:33-34
Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand His decisions and His ways! For who can know the Lord's thoughts?
Who knows enough to give Him advice?

"We are Standing on Holy Ground"

The next forty-one days are about meeting with God . . . especially as we prepare our hearts for Christmas. But where do you even begin? God is infinitely exalted above us. Our finite minds cannot grasp the magnitude and nature of the Creator of all things. Even the adjectives that we affix to Him are beyond us - Perfect. Holy. Eternal. Resplendent. Infinite. All-powerful. All-knowing. Everywhere-present.

Knowledge of this God, much less a relationship with this God, seems so far beyond the realm of possibility.

Yet, He has revealed Himself and invited us into His presence. So, as we begin a trek toward Christmas, let us accept that invitation and, like Mary, ponder these things in our hearts.

If meeting with God seems intimidating, let me ask a fun question. Who's the most famous person you've ever met? A celebrity? An athlete? Maybe you spent time in the presence of an actor, singer, or TV personality. What was it like? Was it awe-inspiring, or was it disappointing? Did they live up to all the hype or appear boringly normal? I've met people who seemed "larger than life" on a big screen but were much shorter in stature (or character). Culture today is fascinated with the famous. Becoming an "influencer" is now a life goal, and more and more, we are moving towards the worship of the 'glory' of celebrity and fame. People want to either be famous or be near the famous.

Whether your brush with fame was with a president or a pro athlete, it pales compared to a face-to-face encounter with God. Just imagine being invited into the presence of the King of the entire universe. God is beyond our comprehension! It needs to be said. He is God, and we are not! His ways are higher; His thoughts are higher. He is incomprehensible.

God, however, wanted to make a way for us to become welcome in His presence, and He had a plan to solve the problem. Everything we do know of God is that which He has revealed. Thankfully, God has revealed Himself to us in the person of Christ. That is why Advent is so important for the believer. We prepare our hearts for the grand revealing - God with us.

He sent Jesus to pay for our sins with His death, which immediately tore the temple curtain in two, proving to us that the separation is now gone. We've been invited into

God's presence. Our encouragement throughout this Advent Season is that you seek the Lord in His Word and experience Him on holy ground.

> Nothing is so satisfying for the true Christian as an ever-increasing and experiential knowledge of our God. This knowledge cannot be gained safely without diligently searching the Bible.[1]

"Let us Praise Jesus Now"

1. How should we respond to this incomprehensible God? Worship Him today for His infinite glory.

Father in Heaven, You are far beyond my ability to fully comprehend. Your ways, Your thoughts, Your very nature are high above my limited capacity. Yet you have revealed Yourself in ways that allow us to know and love You. I acknowledge that you are God and I am not. So please accept my worship as sincere even though I am finite, mortal, and much like a small child. I commit to seeking and spending time in your presence over the next 41 days. In Jesus' Name, Amen.