



Spark THE WONDER

It's the most WONDERful time of the year! No other time captures our imagination quite like Christmas. The twinkly lights going up in our neighborhoods, seeing the excitement of the season through the eyes of a child, finding the PERFECT gift for someone...and it's on SALE! All of these are amazing parts of Christmas...but we can easily get wrapped up in the details, and the parties, and the to-do lists. If we aren't careful, the season can pass us by before we actually stop and ponder the WONDER of it all. And while twinkly lights and gifts are great...the most wonderful part of the season is God, in all His majesty, coming to Earth on a dark winter's night. A baby's cry that would change not only the course of human history, but also change the trajectory of our own individual lives. Christmas brings the certain hope that God will have the final word over our brokenness.

Over these stations on the Christmas Walk, it is our prayer that God would spark your wonder once more. That the truth of God's love and redemptive power would resound in your heart in new and fresh ways. That we would start to see our circumstances differently and be filled with a fresh expectation for what God is going to do in and through us!

Before we get started, why don't you take a couple moments to ask God to open your eyes and heart to what He might want to say to you.



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on your phone!



THE PEOPLE WHO WALK IN DARKNESS
WILL SEE A GREAT LIGHT.
FOR THOSE WHO LIVE IN A LAND OF DEEP
DARKNESS, A LIGHT WILL SHINE.

Isaiah 9:2

It doesn't take much to look around our world and see so much darkness. These words from Isaiah, while they sound like they could have been written in 2018; they were actually written in the 8th century, nearly 700 years before that first Christmas night when Jesus was born. That is one of the most WONDERous aspects of Christmas. So much of who Jesus is and what he would do was foretold hundreds of years before he set foot on Earth. In fact, over the next few stations, we're going to be reading more of these words written about Jesus way before he ever burst onto the scene.

But let's start with these words. Words about darkness. Words about the human condition. These words were written in a very dark time for the people of God. They were beaten down, oppressed, lost, trying to fumble their way in the darkness, choosing to go their own way, rather than listen to the wisdom of God. Most of their darkness was brought about by their own hands. In reality, humanity had been going down this path since the first moments Adam and Eve decided that they might know better than God. It is the path that humanity has been on ever since, and unfortunately it is the same path many of us find ourselves on as well.

BUT...these words written so many years ago, carry with them a certain promise of hope. Those who walk in darkness WILL see a great light. I don't know what kind of darkness you are facing in your lives. We all carry a different heavyness. But I can assure you, no matter how deep the darkness that surrounds you, a light WILL shine. That is the wonder of Christmas. Hope in darkness. Help is on the horizon. It may not look how you think, but it is coming!



← more on hope

Dear God,

Thank you that you have seen our condition, our lost-ness, our darkness, and that you have a solution for it. Help me to see the light in my own circumstances. Even if I feel surrounded by a cloud of uncertainty, help me to trust in your miraculous hope!

Amen

FOR A CHILD IS BORN TO US,
A SON IS GIVEN TO US.
THE GOVERNMENT WILL REST ON HIS
SHOULDERS.

Isaiah 9:6

A child! A son! The LIGHT has come! Jesus, who they had been waiting for, was not really what they expected. After all, a baby, born under humble circumstances, isn't really the flashy fireworks of vengeance the people of God were looking for. However, HOPE is a funny thing, and God loves to hang out in the realm of the unexpected.

God, the creator of galaxies and redwood trees, in all His majesty, somehow being contained inside the still, small frame of a seemingly ordinary newborn human baby. The answer to a million cries of desperation, found in the fragile cry of a small child. The LIGHT of the world had stepped down into our darkness. He wasn't what they were asking for...but he was exactly what their souls had been searching for.

That is just so like God. We come to him with all our requests and worries and desired outcomes...and we can usually only see the most obvious solution. However, GOD SEES. He sees beyond our frantic cries for immediate assistance. He sees beyond our circumstances. He sees US. He sees YOU. He sees deep within the cloudiness of your soul and knows the only solution that will satisfy once and for all. This CHILD, himself, GIVEN TO US. Jesus. The greatest gift you've ever been offered. And I realize it may sound trite, or even cliché, or just too intangible to wrap your mind around. But Jesus himself said that he has come to give you LIFE...an abundantly rich and satisfying life. It may not be full of earthly riches or power or position, but if you allow him, Jesus will dig a deep well within you full of everlasting water to quench your deepest of thirsts. And you will get to carry this light with you wherever you go. Light in the darkness.



← more on this child

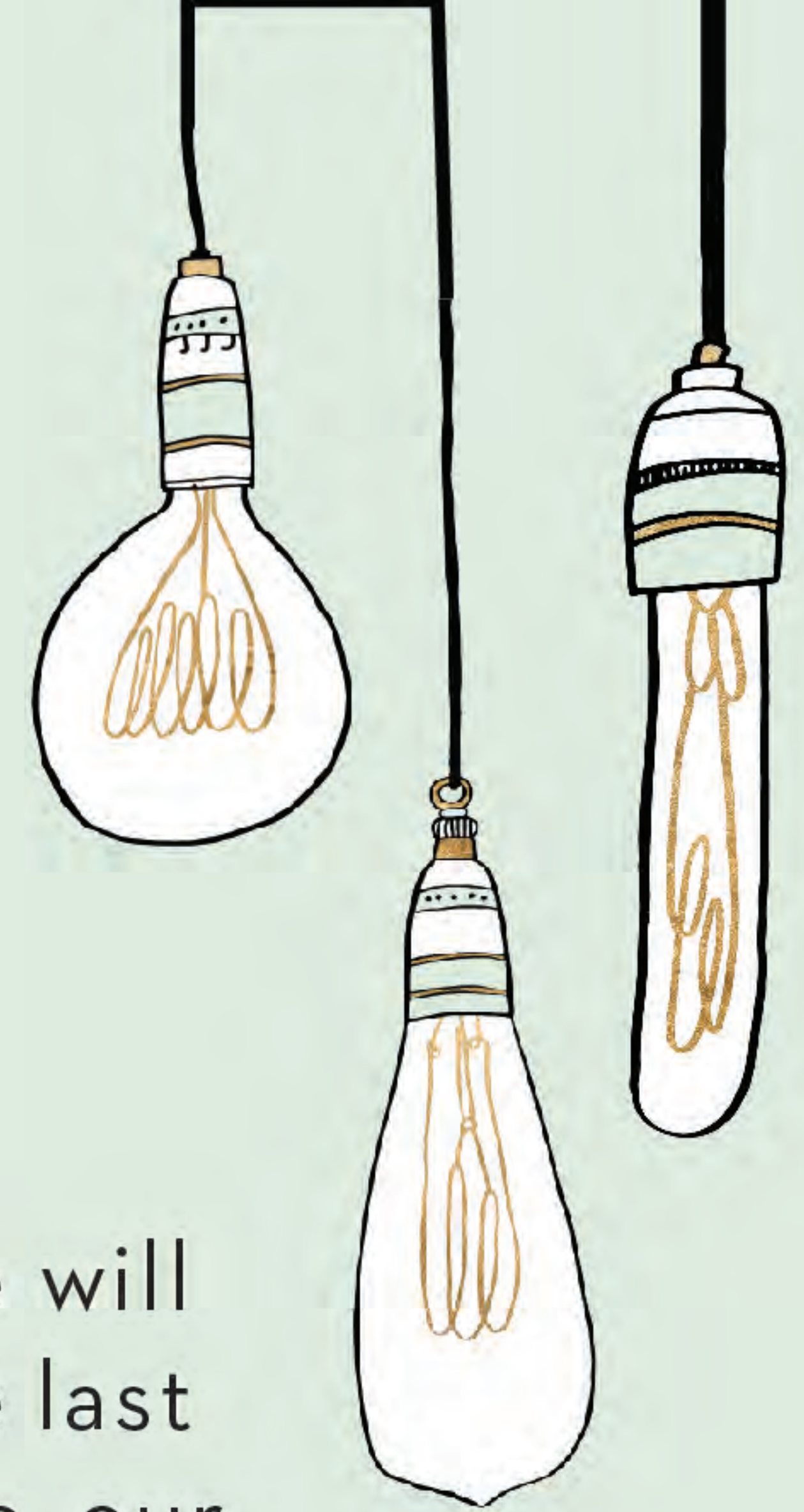
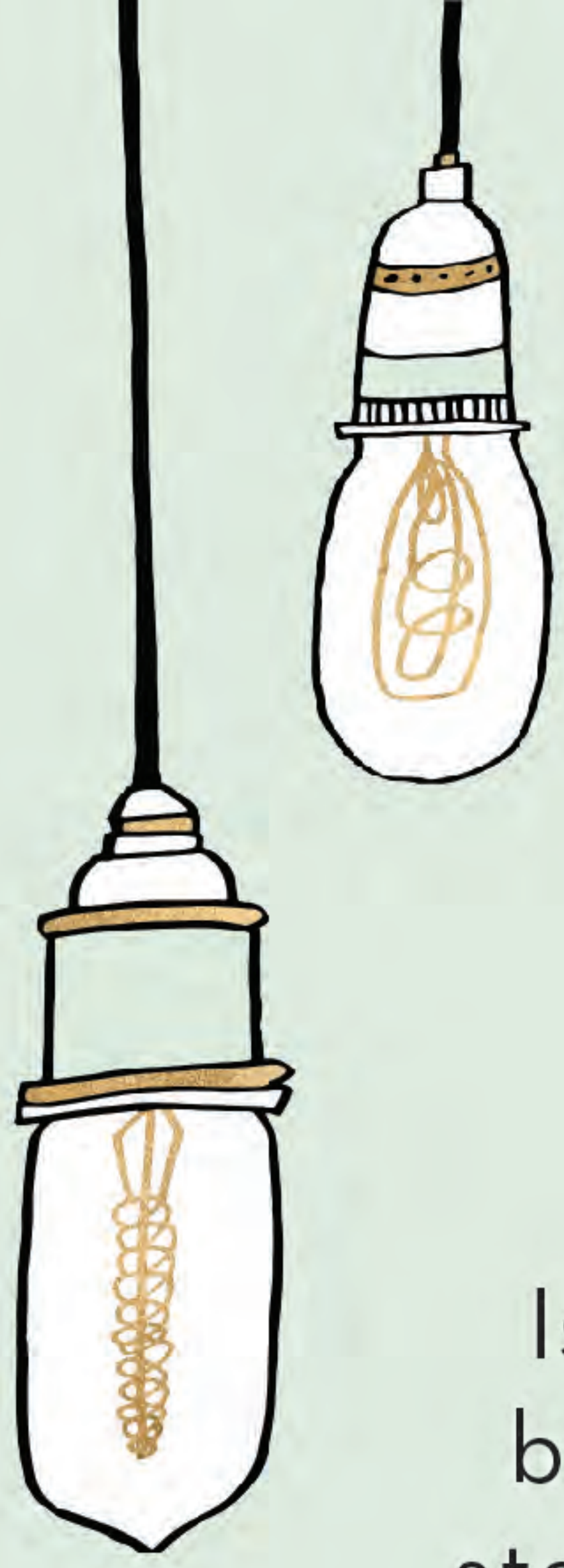
Dear God,

Open my eyes to the wonders of Christmas. Help me to believe in impossible things. You are bigger than my circumstances, and higher than my doubts. Thank you in advance for what you will do!

Amen

And he will be called...
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR

Isaiah 9:6



Isaiah goes on to say who this child will become, and what he will be called. He has a few different names. Like we learned at the last station, God saw into the human condition, and he sees into our inmost places and he wants to fulfill our deepest needs with himself. Which means, he is going to show up at different times in our lives in different ways. Same God, different names.

The first name Jesus is given is Wonderful Counselor. I'm not sure if you've ever had a really great mentor in your life. Maybe you had amazing parents, or a super-wise college roommate, or a licensed therapist who seemed to know exactly what you needed to hear. There is such comfort in being around someone who always seems to know the best course of action. But even the wisest of earthly mentors pales in comparison to the supernatural, extraordinary counsel that Jesus brings. It's like visiting a new city. On your own, you probably wouldn't even be able to find the nearest gas station. With Google maps on your side, you could at least get to where you wanted to go. But if you ALSO have a trusted friend who has lived in the city their whole lives...NOW you will really will learn your way around. Then, imagine your friend could see what is happening, simultaneously at all ends of the city! THAT is the type of guidance Jesus provides. Is that the role you're most needing Jesus to satisfy right now? He probably won't show the whole map laid out before you. Even if he did, without context it would be way too overwhelming. But if we take time to listen, he is faithful to guide us, one turn at a time, with the comfort of a friend who has walked this path before and knows all the secret hidden gems as well as all the streets you're going to want to avoid.

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Dear God,

At times I feel lost. I'm not sure where to turn next. I don't need to know all the answers at once, but just show me my next step. Grant me the comfort that you are with me and are guiding me!

Amen

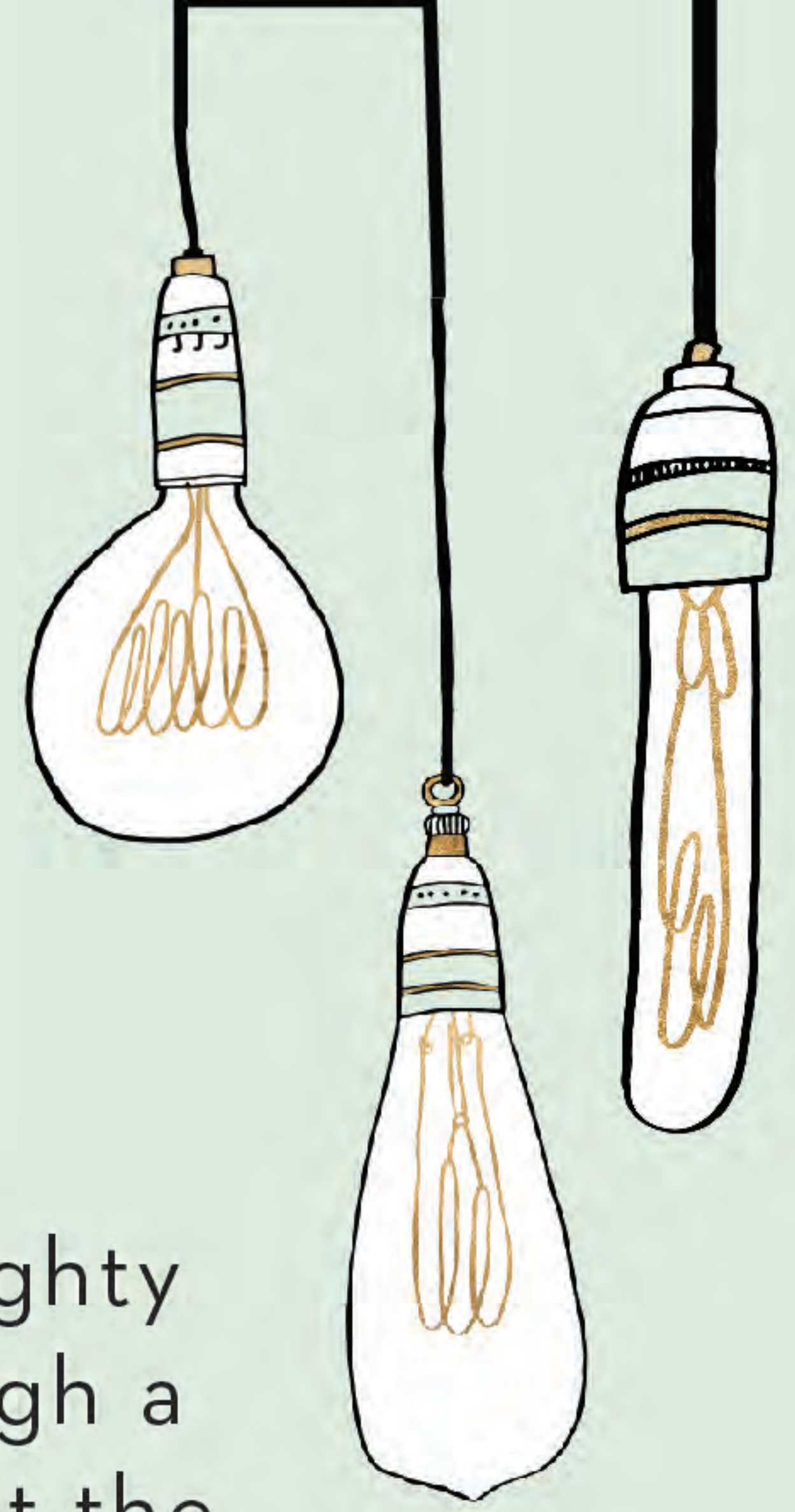
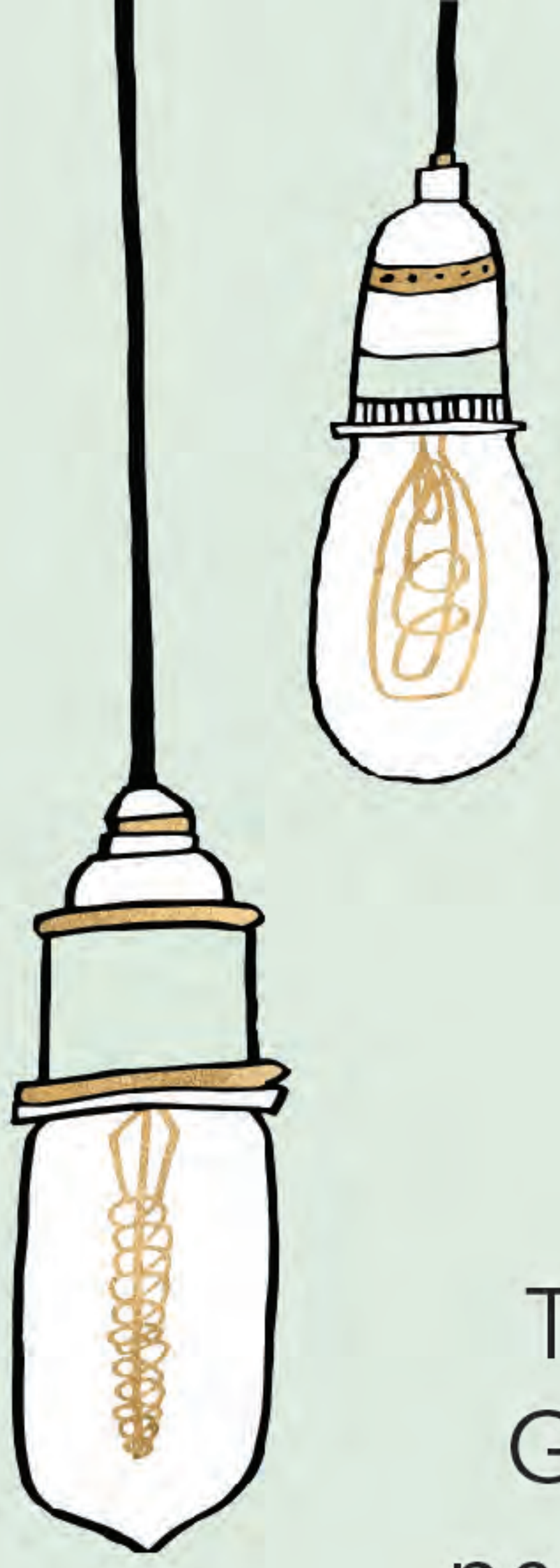


← more on listening

And he will be called...

**MIGHTY GOD**

Isaiah 9:6



There are times in life where what we need most is a very mighty God...a little muscle to give us the strength to make it through a particularly tough season. The beginning of this verse says that the governments will rest on his shoulders...and let me tell you, they are some MASSIVE shoulders. Our mighty God has the power to bear any burden we might be carrying. Later in Matthew 11, Jesus says, "Take MY yoke upon you...for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light". Nowadays, we don't really talk about yokes, so we may not understand the context. A yoke was a contraption that binded two pack animals together so that they could pull more weight together. They would share each other's burdens. The cool part about being yoked with Jesus is that he has those massive shoulders. When we allow ourselves to be connected to Jesus he pretty much pulls the weight and we are just along for the ride!

The Bible is full of scriptures about the mighty hands of God. Psalm 29:3 says, "The voice of the Lord echoes above the sea. The God of glory thunders. The Lord thunders over the mighty sea." I don't know what you're facing, whether it is a heavy burden or an obstacle in your path that you can't seem to break through. I can tell you that Jesus wants you to call upon him. He is able to break any chain, or move any mountain that might be keeping you from that abundant, richly satisfying life we talked about earlier.

The wonder of Christmas is that this mighty God, who commands the seas and placed the stars in the sky...he also sees us and wants to be WITH us. More on that next.

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Dear God,

You are mighty and powerful and nothing is too big for you to handle. Here are a few things that have been weighing me down and blocking my path. Help me carry them. I trust in you.

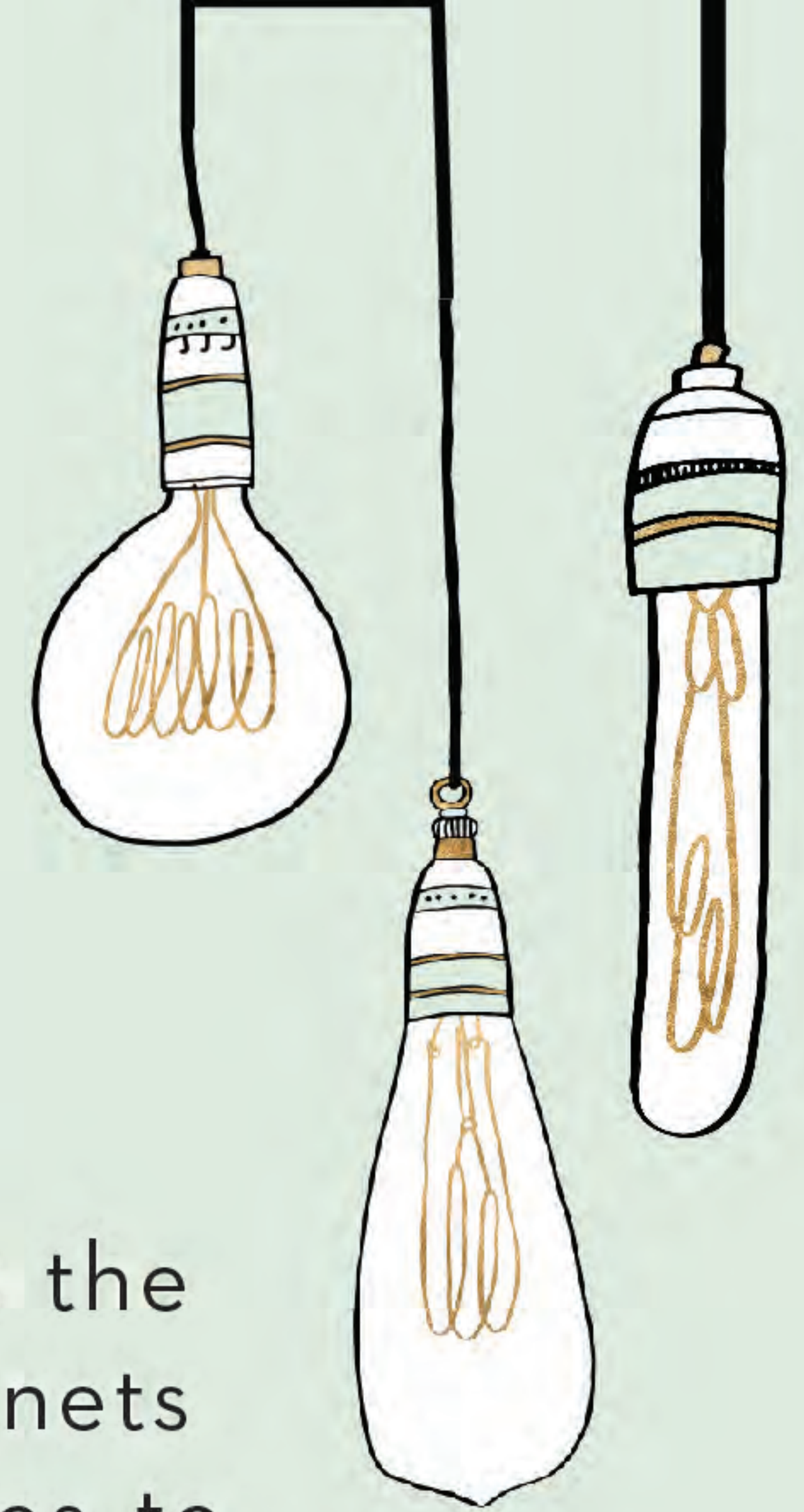
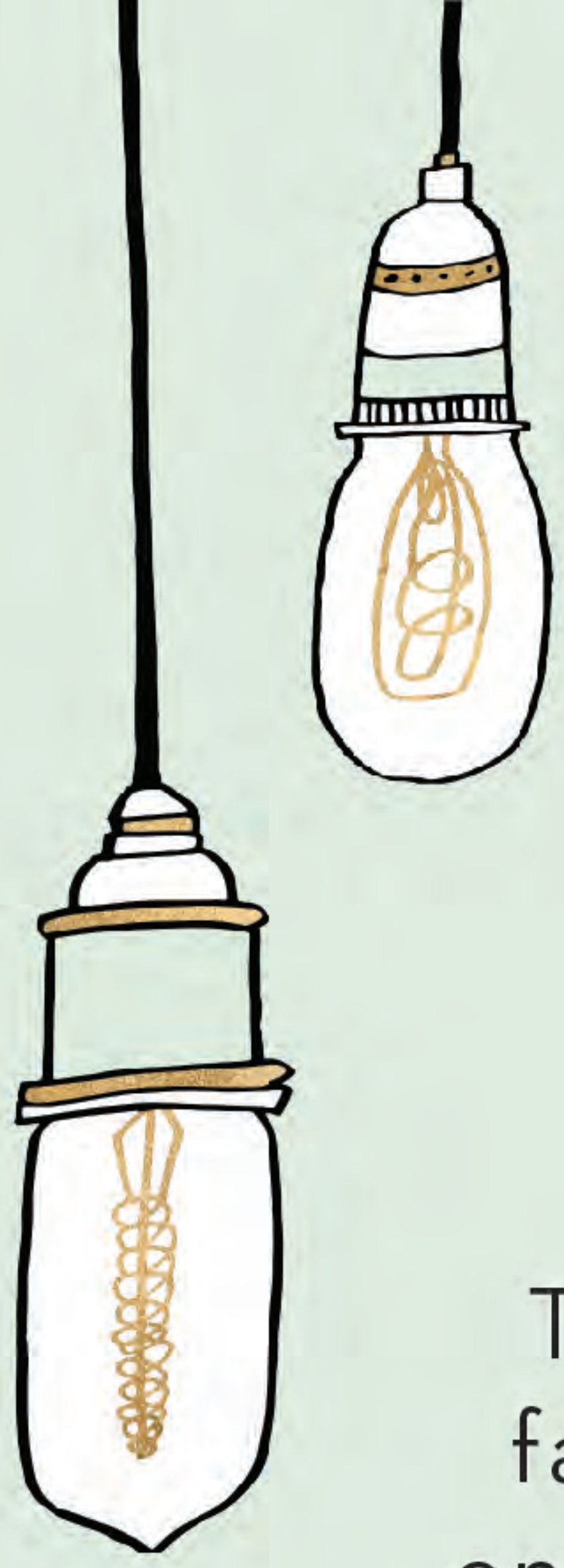
Amen



← God is mighty to save

And he will be called...
EVERLASTING FATHER

Isaiah 9:6



The thing that always sparks the most wonder within me is the fact that the mightiest, most creative God who spun the planets on their axis and thought up the Northern Lights, also desires to have a relationship with ME. In fact, it's no coincidence that right after Isaiah names the foretold Jesus, "Mighty God", he follows it up with "Everlasting Father." Now, I know, whenever we start to talk about fathers, we all have different experiences and the imagery of a father can conjure up some really painful scars. There is no doubt that our earthly fathers, no matter how great or terrible, have let us down. But God is not like that. He is a good, good father.

In fact, even more so, he desires for us to call him "Abba"...the Aramaic term basically translating to "Daddy." This is the type of intimate relationship that Jesus desires with us. He wants us to come to him when we are sick and weary; he wants us to come to him when we are excited about something or have a new brilliant idea; he wants us to come to him when we are filled with guilt and shame. He wants to be with us. He is loving kindness. He is peace and mercy. He is home.

Not only that he is the EVERLASTING father. He's not going anywhere. No matter how much your earthly father was there for you, your heavenly father will never leave you. He is the home that goes with you wherever you go. He knit you together and he knows everything about you, including the number of hairs on your head and the difference between your real and fake laugh. The best part...He knows you intimately, even the shadow parts, and he loves you the same. How wonderful is that!

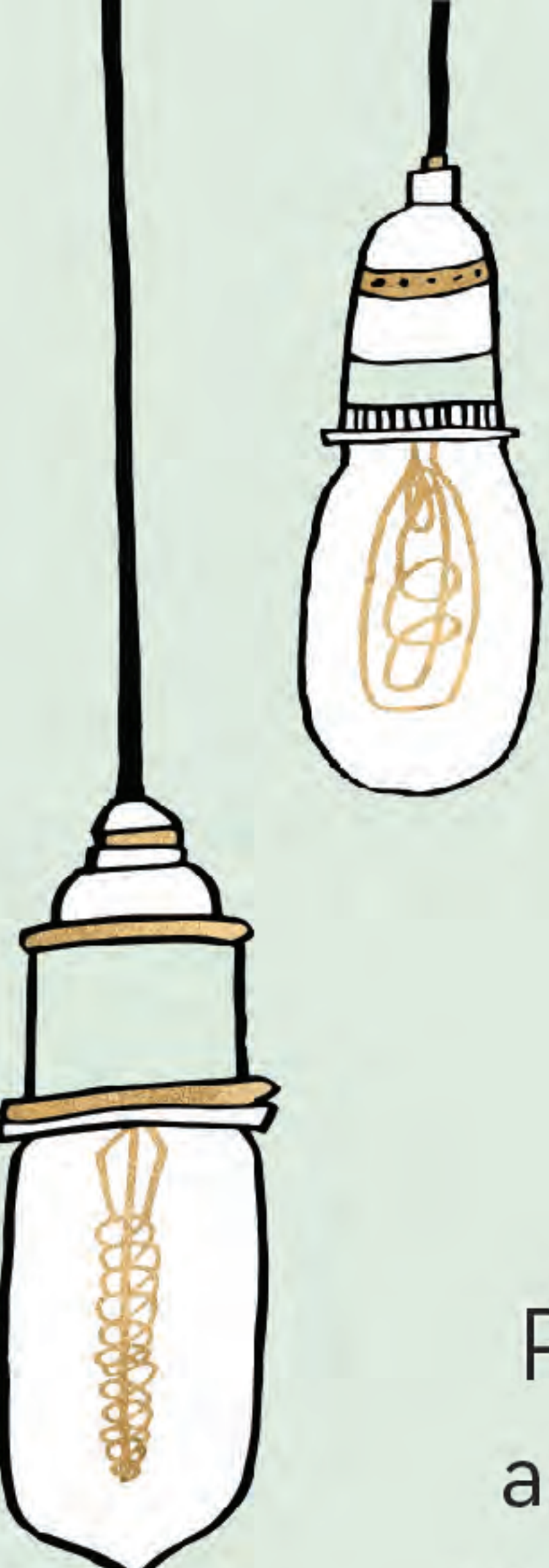


← He is a good Father

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Dear God,
Thank you for knowing me and for loving me. Thank you that you'll never leave me. Remind me to come to you with every part of me. You are where my soul finds its home. I love you.

Amen



And he will be called...
PRINCE OF PEACE

Isaiah 9:6



Peace. It seems like such an elusive thing in life, doesn't it? If you are a parent of young kids, I'm sure you understand. You've probably forgotten what peace and quiet even feels like. No matter what stage of life you're in, I'm sure you feel crowded and noisy and busy most days. We all long to be led by still waters, to feel the quietness in our souls, and to be at peace. And, while that is part of the reason why Jesus came, it isn't really the whole picture of what his title of "Prince of Peace" means. I mean he's not a tie-dye wearing hippie with a crown. (that's not the image you were thinking of when I said Prince of Peace? Just me? Ok. Moving on.)

The word peace as it's understood in the Bible is not merely about the absence of conflict. It is more about taking that which is broken and restoring it to wholeness. When we are seeking peace, we are seeking to be made whole, complete, lacking nothing. THAT is what Christmas is all about. We as humanity, and we as individuals have been broken. Whether that's due to some poor decisions we've made, or whether that's hurtful things that have been done to us. Whether we'd like to admit it or not, we are not complete. Pieces of us have been chipped away as we've endured defeats, disappointments, guilt, shame, and discouragements. BUT God, came to Earth as a tiny baby and he came to restore us all back to himself. To smooth out the rough edges. To give us a fresh coat of paint. To restore us to be the people he intended us to be when he created us. Not only is he restoring us as individuals, he has given us a role in this peace-making process...not just to settle conflict but to help others find restoration and redemption to become whole people once again. We get to follow in his footsteps and become people of peace.

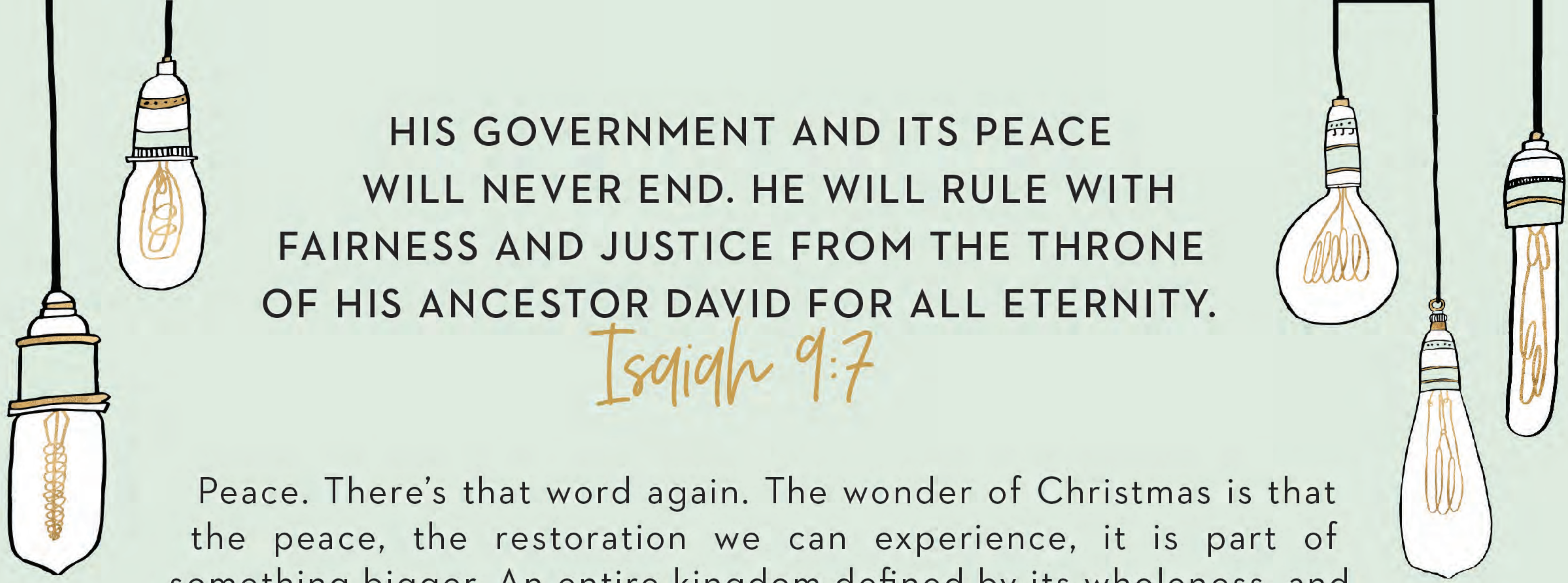


← More on peace

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Dear God,

I recognize that I am not whole. Restore the broken places of my soul. I've been hurt. I've made poor choices and I've hurt other people. Redeem those areas of my life and help me to experience your peace.

Amen



HIS GOVERNMENT AND ITS PEACE
WILL NEVER END. HE WILL RULE WITH
FAIRNESS AND JUSTICE FROM THE THRONE
OF HIS ANCESTOR DAVID FOR ALL ETERNITY.

Isaiah 9:7

Peace. There's that word again. The wonder of Christmas is that the peace, the restoration we can experience, it is part of something bigger. An entire kingdom defined by its wholeness, and it will never end. I know, we look around at our world and the last thing we see is peace. It's easy to see the division and discord. However, there is another kingdom that is bubbling under the surface. It's an underground movement of hope and love and fairness and justice...and PEACE. It started the night that Jesus was born...an entire kingdom wrapped up in swaddling clothes. What wonder!

And yes, part of that eternal kingdom is the promise of heaven for those who've found their home in Jesus...but that's not the whole story. The kingdom of Jesus is here and now, if only we'd have eyes to see and ears to hear. There is a reason why Jesus told us to pray "ON EARTH as it is in heaven." Jesus' kingdom is anywhere Jesus is king. The beauty of it all is that it is so unlike any other kingdom we've seen on Earth or read about in history books. Unlike other governments it is not based on power or position (although Jesus certainly has that authority as we learned a few stations ago). No, it is a government of peace, or wholeness and restoration. God, through the wonder of Christmas, is making all things new.

We can look at Earth and at humanity and maybe think it is a lost cause. Let's just hunker down and protect our own. But God looks at humanity and doesn't see it as dilapidated house destined for demolition. No, he looks at humanity and says, "it has good bones...let's rebuild it together." And that is the kingdom he is building. Here, now, and forever into eternity.



← *more on the kingdom*

eeeeeee

Dear God,

I want to be a part of your family and your kingdom. I not only want you to restore me from the inside out, I want to be a part of what you are doing here on Earth.

Amen