



KINGDOM COME

Advent
Devotionals
2022

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ADVENT DEVOTIONALS // *written by*

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KINGDOM COME // *Advent 2022*

READ THIS FIRST

It has been such a blessing studying through the Book of Luke over the past year together. There have been many themes that we have hit on, but one that has been there through it all is the Kingdom of God. In Luke, we see our kind and loving Father usher in the Kingdom by sending his Son to be born in a manger. We see the Kingdom lived out by Jesus and his disciples as they take care of the poor, the sick, the hungry. We see the Kingdom preached as the Gospel is shared. We see the Kingdom have victory over the powers of this world as it is lived out in faith.

But we also hear a promise of the Kingdom that is coming. One that is already here, just not yet. We are people who are part of the Kingdom now because Jesus is the King of our hearts and lives, but we are also looking forward to the eternal Kingdom that cannot be shaken, that we will taste in full one day. It is sure because our Lord has spoken, but it is unseen, so we walk in faith.

That is what this advent devotional is about. It is about pictures of the Kingdom and the King. It is about seeing who our King is and how we can live for the Kingdom each and every day through this advent season. It is about remembering that our Good King Jesus has come, he has made all things new and right, and he is coming back again. It is about our hope, our joy, our peace, our comfort, our wisdom, our righteousness—it is about our King, Jesus.

I pray that this devotional is a blessing to you and your family. I encourage you to take time together as a family and read through it every day. Talk about the wonderful gift we have been given together in Christ. Pray together. Cherish this time in the word together.

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The Lord is our Righteousness.' – Jeremiah 23:5-6

Thank you to all who wrote our devotions this year. I am grateful that you leaned on Jesus during the writing process.



LUKE 19:1-10

NOVEMBER 28, 2022 // Day 1
Monday

WHY JESUS CAME

For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost. – Luke 19:10

What's your why? It is a question that pastors, self-help gurus, motivational speakers, and influencers have been asking for decades. Why do you get up? Why do you go to work? Why do you do what you do? What is the purpose behind it all? What is your reason for existing? It is a really great question and one that helps you to prioritize what is truly important; helps you to sift through the madness of life and focus on what truly matters.

Jesus had a why, and it is that why that drove him every day of his life. Why did Jesus come to this earth? Luke 19 answers that question. While passing through Jericho on his way to Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world, he comes face to face with a man named Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus had heard about Jesus, he wanted to see what he was all about, so he came out to meet him while he was passing through. The crowds were thick, he couldn't get to him, so he climbed up a tree to get a better view. As Jesus came to where he was, he looked up, saw him, and invited himself into his home to stay. While there, Zacchaeus came to know the Son of Man, the promised Messiah who came to take away the sins of the world. He repented of his sin and turned to Jesus. Salvation came to his house that night.

Many would say this was a happy little accident. How fortunate it was for Zacchaeus that Jesus was passing through. But this was no accident. This was a rescue mission from the start. Jesus knew Zacchaeus, knew his life, knew his heart, and he came looking for him. This is why he came to Jericho, to seek and to save Zacchaeus.

Why did Jesus come? Why was he born in that humble town of Bethlehem? Why did he walk this earth proclaiming the Kingdom, performing miracles, sharing the Good News? Why did he forsake the temptations of this world? Why did he go to the cross to die for our sins? Because he came to seek and to save the lost. This is why he came for Zacchaeus, for you, for me and all those that call on his name. He knows us, he knows our lives, he knows our sin, he knows our best and our worst, and he came to seek us and to save us. It was his why. You could make the argument that every time you look in the mirror, you are looking at his why. All to the glory of God the Father.

All of us were like Zacchaeus, dead in our sins with no purpose or hope. But, because of God's great love for us, he sent his Son to seek us and to save us. This advent season, and in every season of life that we have, let us hold fast to that truth. That the God of the universe became like us, to seek us and to save us, so we could be like him.

Father, thank you for sending your Son to seek us and to save us.



NOVEMBER 29, 2022 // Day 2
Tuesday

ROMANS 3:23-25

OUR NEED FOR A SAVIOR

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. – Romans 3:23-25

What amazing verses! They outline the current condition of the world, of you and me in it. As we will see that current condition is a very bad one...HOWEVER there is an amazing gift that can be received. A gift that clears up the awful condition fully. The greatest gift one could ever receive. Let's investigate...

ROMANS 3:23 – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

Here is the very bad, awful, current situation. This is a fallen world. Humanity rebelled against God. You, me, everyone has sinned against God. Romans 6:23 tells us that “the wages of sin is death”. That means we all deserve eternal separation from God. That is the judgment we are due. YIKES! So what hope do we have in such a desperate state?

ROMANS 3:24 – “and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”

As this is a continuation from the verse above, it is still talking about all of us. And it says something very interesting about all of us. We “are justified by his grace”. Justified...like justified before God? Declared innocent before God? YES, by grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! But HOW? What did Christ Jesus do?

ROMANS 3:25 – “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith”.

So what did Christ Jesus do? He served as a propitiation. This means that God the Father put forward God the Son to endure the judgment we deserve. To endure the judgment fully, leaving us nothing to do to earn salvation. Forgiveness and redemption before God are given (the greatest gift), we just need to receive it by faith.

These verses represent the essence of the Gospel... and should serve as encouragement to us today. Even though we have sinned against God, we can be justified by the grace of God. We do not have to do anything to earn this, no work could ever earn this justification. Christ Jesus took the penalty for us, all of us, on himself. And by faith in this, we are now righteous before God.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your love for us. Even though we deserve your wrath you sent your Son, who accepted our punishment, atoning for our sins. We put our faith in you and receive your grace, help us live out of this abundance of grace and lead others so that they too can receive this amazing gift.



NOVEMBER 30, 2022 // Day 3
Wednesday

2 PETER 1:3-4

THE PROMISES OF GOD

His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises. So that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. – 2 Peter 1:3-4

It's called "The Amazon Effect." It refers to the impact the digital marketplace has had on traditional forms of commerce, like brick-and-mortar stores. It's aptly named because Amazon has led the way and dominated the evolution of digital commerce. One major reason—Amazon is reliable. If you need a hydraulic torque wrench, a pedestal sink, slip joint wrench, or a telescoping magnetic pickup tool, chances are you will find it at Amazon. It will be in stock, and you can have it delivered to your front door, probably by tomorrow. Love 'em or hate 'em, you have to admit, Amazon delivers...consistently. They dominate the marketplace because they keep their promises to their customers.

But long before Amazon ruled online shopping, God led the way in demonstrating reliability. In His love letter to the world, God made thousands of promises. Most have already been fulfilled. Some, we wait to see. At the end of his life, Joshua bore witness to God's faithfulness as promise-keeper: "Now I am about to go the way of all the earth. You know with all your heart and soul that not one of all the good promises the Lord your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled; not one has failed" (Joshua 23:14).

Here at Christmas, we celebrate God's greatest on-time delivery, His ultimate demonstration of reliability. As far back as the dawn of creation, when Adam and Eve first sinned, God began promising a Savior (Gen. 3:15). He renewed that promise through the Old Testament prophets, and echoed it to Simeon and Anna, who waited for the Promise just before His birth. For 400 years after the last Old Testament prophet, the faithful were praying and waiting for the Messiah. The infant Jesus was living proof that God always keeps His promises.

For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. – 1 Corinthians 1:20

One of the benefits of having lived more than a few years is perspective. You've lived through some stuff. And if you have trusted God along the way, you have learned that He is unerringly faithful. Corrie Ten Boom, who survived the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp during the Holocaust testified: "I've experienced His Presence in the deepest, darkest hell that men can create...I have tested the promises of the Bible, and believe me, you can count on them."

Faithful Father, Your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ is the living fulfillment of your most precious promise to us. Celebrating His birth, we are reminded that you are the ultimate promise keeper. What you have said, you always do. Thank you for the boundless riches of your promises to us for all that we need to live for you in this life and join you in glory afterwards. Help us live in the assurance that whoever else may fail us, we can fully rely on You.



DECEMBER 1, 2022 // Day 4
Thursday

PSALM 37:3-6

TRUSTING IN GOD

Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness. Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him, and he will act. He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. – Psalm 37:3-6

Trust is a fragile thing. It is hard to gain and easy to lose. At least that is what we say. However, if you stop and think about the things that we tend to put our trust in, we see that they let us down over and over again. We trust that the political systems, the stock market, our careers, or our relationships will make everything right. But far too often we are left wanting by these things. The politicians lie, the stock market fluctuates, we are forced to make a career move, our friends and even our family let us down. Yet even after the disappointment, we find ourselves running back to them again and again.

I think that Psalm 37 gives us the answer as to why we do this. We run back to them because that is what we find our delight in, those are the things that we desire. We want the world and because of that we end up trusting in it, and we have to justify our feelings and our desires. We would only pursue after things that are sure and trustworthy, but the heart wants what the heart wants, so we justify our actions by saying the things we want are the true and trustworthy things. The unhealthy relationship, the wealth and riches of the world, the place of power in our career. Those are all things to trust, or so we think.

What if, like the psalmist wrote, we actually trusted in the Lord? Afterall, he above all else is worthy of being trusted. He is the one who has never let us down and never will. He is the one who always answers, always shows up, always acts for our good. Well if we did trust in the Lord, what would happen? He will act, he will give us the desires of our heart, he will bring forth our righteousness as the light and your justice as the noonday. He will work for you, he already proved that on the cross.

If we want to see him act like that in our life, we must do what the psalmist says. We must delight in him; we must commit our ways to him. We delight in the things of the world and so we put our trust in them. What if we delighted in Christ? We would put our trust in him. And when we do, we get more of him, because he would be the desire of our heart!

This is a season of joy—for the Christian, every season is. But especially now, we get to celebrate and delight in Christ. I pray that as we delight in Jesus, we will trust in him. And as we trust in him, we will see him work.

Lord, reorient my heart to delight in you. Help me trust in you so that I can see you at work.



ISAIAH 9:6

DECEMBER 2, 2022 // Day 5
Friday

THE COUNSEL OF GOD

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. – Isaiah 9:6

Who do you go to for sound advice? Is it your spouse? A friend? Your parents? Your attorney? Your pastor? A financial advisor? Regardless of your answer, it is probably someone you know and trust very well if you are seeking their guidance and counsel.

Over 2,700 years ago, the people of Judah, about to be overtaken by their enemies, were given the good news of hope from Isaiah. He prophesied that a child, given by God, would be born to govern and save all. He would be called by several names that accurately describe his awesome, divine nature, including Wonderful Counselor. Although they may not have fully understood the message at the time, we now know that most perfect gift would be the Messiah, Jesus Christ!

Unlike your well-intentioned family and friends, Jesus is omniscient, knows the very depths of you, and knows what is best for you. He was born in the flesh and understands the hardships, temptations, and sins you face. He is honest, gentle, loving, trustworthy, and kind. He will never waver or change. When life gets scary, difficult, uncertain, or dark, there is no better counselor to turn to than our Wonderful Counselor, Jesus. His appointment book is never full, and he is always willing to take new patients. You can call on him through prayer, conversation, and reading God's Words in the Bible. Before turning to a friend, make it a habit to seek the counsel of God first.

Lord, You are so awesome and great! Thank you for being a secure place to reveal all of my problems and fears. You know me better than anyone else. Give me ears that hear your advice, a will that aligns with yours, and the ability to trust you in every circumstance.



DECEMBER 3, 2022 // Day 6
Saturday

1 CHRONICLES 29:10-13

THE GREATNESS OF GOD

*David praised the Lord in the presence of the whole assembly, saying,
Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.
Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor,
for everything in heaven and earth is yours.*

*Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all.
Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things.
In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all.
Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.
– 1 Chronicles 29:10-13*

This passage is David's last prayer. In today's world, I imagine it might be similar to the final speech of an exiting CEO, listing their accomplishments during their time of leadership and advice for the company moving forward. David doesn't do that, instead he simply and beautifully gives God all the glory. David reminds the Israelites where everything comes from, who it belongs to, and how God bestows His blessings on His people.

It is so easy for me to accept God's will in my life when I agree with my circumstances and its outcome. And when I disagree? I can quickly become a squalling toddler throwing a temper tantrum. I am reminded of Jacob in the Old Testament wrestling with God. Jacob didn't win that battle and I never do either. In these moments a wise friend would simply state, "Things are exactly the way they are supposed to be or else they would be different." God is always in control of our circumstances.

It is easy, ever so easy for me to give credit, praise, and glory to God when things are on my sunny side of the street. David praised God at the end of his life. Mary, the mother of Jesus, praised God at the beginning of the story of the first advent. She was a young girl, most likely a teenager. She was faced with a difficult situation, being a teenage single mother. She could have whined and complained or fought against God like Jacob, instead she simply trusted God's plan, praised him, and she was blessed. She has more wisdom, grace, and faith than I may ever find. And like so many others in the Bible, she is a guidepost for me on how to live. May it be for you as well, today, and always.

*Heavenly Father, most gracious God of all seen and unseen, Yours is the power and the might and the glory. In all ways and in all times, You provide for me, and Your path is beautifully written in the lives of the people surrounding me, challenging me and lifting me up when I fail. Today, let me be the person to lift another up quietly and fully giving only You the glory.
Amen*



DECEMBER 4, 2022 // Day 7
Sunday

MATTHEW 13:44

TREASURE IN CHRIST

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field. – Matthew 13:44

What does it mean to be a treasure? Webster's says it means valuable, cherished, very important, special, not easily discovered.

In the ancient world, before banks, it was not uncommon for people to hide their valuables by burying them in the ground. It was also not uncommon for the memory of these valuable caches to pass away, making them a "treasure" only to be discovered by another. Jesus' parable would have been relatable for his audience—perhaps they even knew of someone who experienced such a find.

The idea of the parable is that any sacrifice is worth belonging to the kingdom of heaven. God's kingdom is so indescribably valuable that a person should want to give up everything to be a part of it. So how does the value of the kingdom of heaven relate to our "treasure in Christ"?

Jesus is the kingdom! Christ exemplifies the treasure of the kingdom as he undoes the power of sin in the lives of those around him. As Jesus explains, "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). How valuable is restored sight to the blind, walking to the lame, or physical death reversed? Christ overcomes the world, the flesh, and the enemy by destroying the power of the kingdom of darkness. By purchasing a kingdom people at the cross, Jesus proves himself to be the rightful ruler of the restored kingdom. Where the King is, there is the kingdom. This is why Jesus says to the Pharisees, "The kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:21).

God "buried treasure in the field" when he created our redemption through Christ. His kingdom began not with the creation of a mighty king in the world but in the birth of a crying baby. As Jesus' ministry begins, he announces, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). What Israel had long awaited, Christ had now inaugurated.

This Advent season let's consider how we might treasure the kingdom and its King above all. Jesus is calling us to himself—He paid the price and received his crown through the humiliation of his incarnation and the cross. Jesus was born as a man to be like those he was seeking to rescue, and he is calling us to go and do likewise. The treasure has been revealed to us. Let us each do what we must to "buy the field" for the sake of the world around us, that we might share in the life of Christ by loving God and loving our neighbors.

Father, help us to find our treasure in Christ, forsaking all for our good and His glory.



DECEMBER 5, 2022 // Day 8
Monday

PSALM 89:1

WHY WE SING

I will sing of the Lord's great love forever; with my mouth I will make your faithfulness known through all generations. – Psalm 89:1

When I was a newly single mother, I would put my babies to bed as early as was reasonable to allow myself time to clean up from the day. Sweeping the floors and tidying the kitchen, I would sing songs of praise in our tiny house with wood floors that carried every creak and melody. My mom had taught me as a young child, that whenever I woke up from nightmares, to sing a song of praise to combat the fear. Years and many bedtimes later, my now adolescent daughters told me they loved when I sang at night, that it made them feel safe and at peace. I had no awareness that their little ears were waiting in anticipation for me to sing songs of praise through a season when all of our hearts were broken.

God, like my babies once did, waits for our song with anticipation. Our song is one of many offerings that we bring to lay at his feet. But our song is also a balm for our own broken hearts, realigning our eternal design with the plans our Maker has for us, the purpose stamped upon our hearts. It is because of Jesus, his birth, death, and resurrection, that we need not fear the unknown terrain ahead. It is Jesus, flawless in every way, who bore all the weight of our hasty decisions to sin and lose perspective of eternity. Then tenderly, he draws us back into his fold, reassuring us that there is a better way, and he has already paved it for us with his gift on Calvary.

We sing because our eternal soul that resides within these temporal walls of flesh and blood cries out in joy and gratitude for all that he has done for us, while we were yet sinners cloaked in our own understanding. We sing out of the agony of our small understanding of life, trusting him with our fears. We sing because the notion that we are truly free in Christ causes joy to bubble up and demand to be expressed. We sing, because it brings us in unity with all of his creation, and should we be silent, the very rocks would cry out.

Lord, we thank you for the gift of voice, that we can sing your praises, knowing that you hear us and delight in our offering of praise. We thank you that you have given us an everlasting love to sing of, throughout the generations. Remind us to bring you our praise when times are hard and when times are good, because we know that your love is steadfast.



DECEMBER 6, 2022 // Day 9
Tuesday

HEBREWS 4:14-16

THE GRACE OF GOD

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. – Hebrews 4:14-16

I must admit that I often have to look up the definitions of grace and mercy to distinguish between the two and to give my mind a full understanding of what they mean in relation to God. I use the word grace a lot when I'm talking and thinking about myself extending grace to others but for some reason I have a harder time grasping God's grace extended to me. Maybe because I have trouble seeing my own sin and my need for grace. When I do think of grace I tend to think of forgiveness. God has forgiven me of my sin through grace, something that I have not earned. God extends it because He loves me and has bestowed his favor upon me because I am His child.

A price was paid for grace and although we should be the ones paying that penalty, Jesus chose to pay it for us on the cross. But God's grace and our need for it didn't end at the cross. Our sinful nature didn't cease to exist when Jesus died for us. I think I can speak for all of us when I say, we sin every day and as I'm writing this, I'm understanding more and more why I need to be approaching the throne of God in "prayer and supplication with thanksgiving" (Philippians 4:6) and ask for that loving Grace that only God can provide.

Jesus, who sits at the right hand of God, was the most tempted and burdened of all mankind. He understands our struggles because he's been there. He has experienced the heartache, ridicule, violence, isolation, physical and emotional pain that the rest of mankind can't fathom. This alone should propel us to the throne of God seeking his help and grace. It's important for us to have someone who can relate to our situations. What's crazy awesome about this statement is that Jesus can be that "someone" for everyone. Think about a time in which you just needed to talk to someone who has gone through something similar. You needed that validation and sometimes just to be heard; well, who better to run to in times like these than Jesus Christ, who knows and understands fully what you're going through. We need only to run to the throne of God to receive grace.

God, help us to boldly approach your throne in humility so that we may receive your grace upon our lives. Soften our hearts so that we can recognize our need to lay all we are at the feet of Jesus and to learn how to love, show grace and mercy as you do. We love you and thank you for who you are and who you will remain for all eternity. Amen



DECEMBER 7, 2022 // Day 10
Wednesday

PSALM 139:23-24

PREPARING OUR HEARTS

Search me, God, and know my heart, test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting. – Psalm 139:23-24

Psalm 139 is an intimate psalm between the created and Creator. The psalmist, King David, describes how God was with him in his mother's womb before he came into this physical world and continues to know every moment of his life. Through poetry, he reflects on God's omnipresence, to a point where he cannot even hide in darkness from Him. The psalmist describes being fully known and completely loved by God. He loves God so much that he counts God's enemies as his own.

The psalm ends with our verse of the day and it is a vulnerable invitation to allow God to completely search him and find anything that is not like God within him. Not only does he want God to find what is unholy, but he wants to change that way so he can turn back to the "way that is everlasting." It is an invitation for us to remember how deeply loved we are by God, the sacrifice His Son completed for us and the joy of not only being in His presence but having the Holy Spirit within us. Just as the Gospel was not something that we did by ourselves, this change is not by willpower or our own might, but by being in His presence and allowing the Lord and the Holy Spirit to complete a loving work within us.

So how do we do this practically? The easiest way is to sit in silence and solitude with the Holy Spirit. Set a timer for 5 minutes and allow your anxious thoughts to rise up to the surface. Breathe in love, joy, peace and patience and breathe out hurry and stress. Sit in the presence of the Lord as He searches your heart and convicts you of where you are trying to take control and be god yourself or have an idol in place of God. Remind yourself of the Gospel. As with most testing, it can be quite uncomfortable, but the outcome is us living and loving others out of a generous, beautiful love as we follow the everlasting Way prepared and lived out for us by Jesus our Savior.

Prayer: Insert your name in today's verse wherever it says "me"

Search _____, God, and know _____'s heart, test _____ and know _____'s anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in _____ and lead _____ in the way everlasting.



DECEMBER 8, 2022 // Day 11
Thursday

MATTHEW 11:28-30

RESTING IN CHRIST

Are you weary, physically or mentally exhausted, lacking joy, lonely, sad, worried, or overwhelmed with your to-do list? All of us struggle with these emotions at times, especially during the holidays. You may think this is an inevitable part of the season, but what if I told you it is NOT? That there is a WAY out of the worldly/fleshly path of navigating this time of year? That you can find REST from any or all of these thoughts or feelings, and that it is never necessary to walk alone through any of them?

“Come to me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Jesus literally said that to us in Matthew 11:28-30—what a verse! What a promise! No matter how overwhelmed or weary you may be feeling, Jesus extends this invitation to YOU. As Christians we are to “... not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22). Brothers and sisters—take His yoke upon you, learn from Him, and you will gain wonderful rest for your soul. Jesus will walk beside you, share your burden, make it light, guiding and directing you.

How can that be? And what does it look like? In Jesus’ time, a yoke was a harness that was used to connect two animals (like oxen) across the shoulders to share the burden of work. The more experienced animal could also guide a less experienced animal. Jesus illustrates that He will help us—we simply need to accept and submit to Him (His yoke) and He will share in and lighten our burdens. What an honor that Jesus is willing to take me into a yoke with Him! The Sovereign King of the Universe willing to guide me and help me with my burdens. I’ll take it!

We should devote quiet time to talking to Him, praying and studying His word. Every day, in addition to short prayers throughout the day. Talk to Him about your feelings, ask for His help finding rest for your soul, and open your heart to allow Him to work. Pray the verses listed above: Matthew 11:28-30 and James 1:22, asking God to help you personally. Every single day. Memorize or carry them with you so you can pray them any time you feel those emotions pressing in.

God said through Paul in Philippians 4:6-7: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” You can present your request for “soul rest” to God, then fully experience His promise of both rest and peace that transcends all understanding! You can do this ANY time and in ANY situation!

As we celebrate Christ’s birth this Christmas, let’s ask Jesus for the “soul rest” that only He can give. Let’s submit to him daily and ask for His guidance and help. We can then be a better witness to others in how to do life (and the Christmas season) the Jesus way. It is ironic that we can simultaneously rest and do more for others by tapping into Jesus for “soul rest”. “So are my ways higher than your ways” (Isaiah 55:9).

Dear Lord, thank you that you are my savior. Thank you for sending your Son to die for our sins, to teach us and to set an example for us to follow. Thank you for your Word and for your promises and for giving us the perfect way to have rest for our souls—anytime, anywhere. Praise you Jesus. Amen



DECEMBER 9, 2022 // Day 12
Friday

PHILIPPIANS 4:4–9

THE JOY WE PROCLAIM

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. – Philippians 4:4–9

Christmas time is characterized by themes of “joy and “peace.” While this season certainly can be a time of joy and peace, it can also be a time of loneliness, anxiety, and conflict for some. On the surface, Paul’s words, “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I say, rejoice,” appear to be a simple scripture to understand. But what does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? Is it even possible to rejoice always? How can I command joy in a world full of deep brokenness?

This is my favorite Bible passage, but I was discouraged when I first read it. During a deep depression, I couldn’t imagine being able to rejoice all of the time. Paul writes this letter from prison, a place known for its suffering, but he writes about the joys of following Christ and being content in any circumstance. In verse 4, Paul urges the Philippians to “rejoice in the Lord always.” He is not calling them to rejoice in their circumstances but in the Lord. It is easy to become discouraged when going through a difficult time, but God is faithful, which is why we can rejoice. As Jesus’ followers, we can rejoice because our sins are forgiven, and Jesus has defeated sin and death. God has promised never to leave or forsake us. Our Heavenly Father loves us with an everlasting love, reigning supreme over all our anxieties and worries. We have been called to an enduring joy that sustains us even when life is burdensome.

How do we do this? Paul gives the command in verse 4, and the rest of the passage explains why we can rejoice. Paul reminds the church that the Lord is present and near to them amidst their troubles. Our Father loves his children, and He delights when we give our burdens to him. God can provide us with peace and joy that surpasses all understanding, but we must give our fears over to Him through prayer.

Finally, verse 8 serves as a reminder that maintaining peace requires a kingdom mindset. It is easy to lose sight of God and the peace he offers us when we focus on the challenging circumstances in our lives. To guard our hearts, Paul says we’re to dwell on whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and anything worthy of praise. When we rejoice in, pray for, and dwell on the things of God, we receive peace and joy that only he can offer through the hope we have because of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Dear God, Thank you for sending your son Jesus to die for our sins so we may have hope. We ask for protection for our hearts and minds so that we can fully experience the joy and peace only God provides. Amen



DECEMBER 10, 2022 // *Day 13*
Saturday

PSALM 34:8

COME AND SEE

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. – Psalm 34:8

God equipped his greatest creation (Genesis 1:27) with 5 powerful and amazing senses for our safety and pleasure. God protects us from the touch of a hot pan or with a warning sound from an approaching storm and tantalizes us with the sweet taste of a favorite dish, the aroma of our favorite flower, or the sight of an image that remains etched in our mind's eye forever. Our senses invite us to intimately experience the world around us and help shape and define who we are. Has someone ever told you to try the greatest dessert ever made, only for you to find out it is only worthy of going in the trash? We are each uniquely created (Psalm 139:13-14) with different likes and dislikes; we can't simply rely on someone else's senses; we have to experience the world for ourselves!

David writes this Psalm to show praise and gratitude to God for protecting him after being on the run from King Saul. He evokes two senses—taste and sight—in praising the goodness of the Lord and imploring the reader to actively seek that same goodness. He wants us to personally experience the goodness of God—taste and see are written in the active, not the passive. To fully experience the Lord we have to go all-in. We must fix our eyes upon Him, we must study His word, we must find ourselves in constant prayer, we must surround ourselves with fellow believers to encourage us, and we must find refuge only in Him.

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of his Spirit, washed in His blood

This stanza from a beloved traditional hymn (and one of my favorites) encourages us to find refuge in Him—Jesus is mine! It sustains us because the goodness of God we experience on earth is only a small measure of what awaits us—oh what a foretaste of glory divine! But this is only made possible by the love of the Father shown to us through His Son, in whom we must place our lives for our good and His glory—Heir of salvation, purchase of God, Born of his Spirit, washed in His blood!

Father God, not just in this season, but in all seasons, help us to focus our lives on you, that we might taste and see your goodness. And that by resting in you, we find comfort, strength, and encouragement as we celebrate the coming of your Son and wait patiently for His return.



ISAIAH 52:7

DECEMBER 11, 2022 // *Day 14*
Sunday

GO AND TELL

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.' – Isaiah 52:7

As followers of Christ, we know personally the King who brings good news of happiness, publishes salvation, and says to Zion, “Our God reigns.” Of course, this powerful passage is a messianic prophecy describing Jesus himself. It falls directly before my favorite messianic prophecy in all of Scripture, Isaiah 53, which describes Jesus as the “suffering servant” who will be pierced for our transgressions. While Isaiah 52:7 describes to us the results of the Messiah’s coming, Isaiah 53 provides us with the means by which Christ will accomplish our salvation and bring us this good news.

So what comes to mind when you think of the phrase “good news?” Maybe it’s getting that promotion that you had long been working towards. Perhaps it’s a medical report that brings tears of joy. For Isaiah, this good news was news of the victory of his King. In New Testament era, there was a similar term used to describe the victory of Kings and the ascension of emperors. This term consisted of the prefix “eu,” which means good, and “angelion” which means message or news. This term may sound familiar, as it translates to “Gospel” in our English Bibles!

How incredible is it that Isaiah foresaw the ascension of our eternal King Jesus hundreds of years before the events of Isaiah 53 ever took place? And how cool is it that Isaiah makes reference to the good news of the Gospel without fully grasping the entirety of Christ’s work? Isaiah 52:7 reminds us of the beauty of what Jesus accomplished on our behalf and shows us God’s faithfulness to fulfill His sovereign plans.

Interestingly enough, Paul quotes this passage in Romans 10:15, using it in a slightly different manner. He asks, “And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!’”

While the one with beautiful feet in Isaiah is Jesus Himself, the one with beautiful feet in Romans is the body of Christ! What an honor it is that we would share in the labors of Christ by proclaiming that our God reigns to the world around us.

While Isaiah foresaw Christ’s faithfulness to accomplish the good news, Paul beckons us to deliver the good news to a lost and dying world. At Redeemer, we desire to be a church that doesn’t take this calling lightly. Let us rejoice in the beauty of Christ’s work as we labor alongside Him to reach others with the message of His Kingship.

Father, help us to be people who go and share the Good News wherever we go, amen.



DECEMBER 12, 2022 // *Day 15*
Monday

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

THE HUMILITY OF CHRIST

As a senior in high school, I was awarded “Student of the Month” and asked to give a speech in front of an audience of bigwig local politicians at a banquet. I relished the opportunity to dazzle this crowd, and spent days writing my speech. I learned there would be other winners speaking before me—but no worries, save the best for last.

The first student told a daunting story of fleeing persecution and immigrating to the US. The next had conducted Alzheimer’s research since middle school and was graduating early to continue their award-winning research in college. Listening, my pride grew increasingly wounded. These were the most impressive humans I have ever had the privilege of being near, and my claim to fame was decent grades and some volunteer work. Yet I clung to my moral superiority compared to these overachieving nerds. The last student looked disheveled and pitiful—at least I was obviously smarter and more together than this poor soul. The speaker went on to give a moving oration on being born to and abandoned by drug addicted parents, fighting then overcoming addiction, and becoming the first in their family to be graduating high school.

It was beautiful, sincere, and poignant. And now I had to follow them. Nothing was in my head at that point but an intense awareness that I forgot all I wanted to say. It was a short speech—with “wow” and “uhh thank you” repeated often, and I evacuated the stage as quickly as possible. So often, God humbles us, showing us our sinful nature with nuance. This was not one of those subtle times for me. Thankfully, Philippians 2:5-11 shows us a God who personally understands the weakness of our prideful flesh and embodies a flawless, perfected humility.

In Philippians 2:5, Paul states the necessity of reflecting specific qualities in Christ’s nature: obedience and humility, and in verses 6-11 addresses the nature of Christ. This is not mere poetry on the unattainable perfection of our divine savior, but rather a call to action and humility. Paul makes clear the simultaneous humanity and divinity of Jesus, noting that Jesus does not wield his Godhood as a means of self-elevation; rather, he set aside the justified entitlement of divinity to be man.

Mark 10:45 says “The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”. Jesus, Son of God and Man, didn’t cling to his deity as a point of pride. He shows obedience to God’s will to the point of death, and makes his own servitude and modesty a point of emphasis. If God himself does not “consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage”, how pitiful is it when we hold in high esteem earthly titles, impressive job positions, our bank accounts, or even our good works?

Even when we intend to glorify God through our thoughts or actions, it is so easy to interject our importance into the equation. In our flesh, it is so easy feel as though we had a part to play in God’s goodness. It is easy to be so filled with self-importance and vanity that even as we approach Christ seeking his grace and mercies, we approach as equals, waiting for his everlasting goodness to be handed out as if it is deserved. Instead of imitating Christ, we lack all sense of humility, elevating ourselves even in our supposed subservience. How often do we actually approach God with the same humility Jesus exemplified on Earth? How often do we attempt to face our heavenly Father eye to eye as our equal instead of leaving behind our pride and recognizing our own innate weakness?



DECEMBER 13, 2022 // Day 16
Tuesday

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18–19

THE PROMISE OF RECONCILIATION

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.
– 2 Corinthians 5:18–19

Without Jesus, there is no reconciliation.

Reconciliation is accomplished when two parties, previously alienated or separated from each other, are reunited. The close relationship Adam and Eve experienced with God was destroyed when their disobedience resulted in sin entering the world. As a result of their disobedience, all mankind has inherited a sin nature. Our holy God hates sin and has declared that the just penalty for sin is death.

Because of our sin, we are separated from God with no hope of reconciliation in our own power. Our all-powerful, merciful God doesn't need us to accomplish what we see as impossible. It was God who initiated reconciliation with us through His Son Jesus Christ.

Jesus, who is fully God, was born fully man to die the death we deserve so that we could be reconciled to the Lord and have eternal life. The magnitude of this gift in our lives is overwhelming. Because Jesus paid the penalty for sin on the Cross, there is no longer anything preventing reconciliation with God except our failure to respond to this gift.

With the barrier of sin removed, we all fall into one of two groups. We believe that God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and have accepted Jesus as our Savior. Or we don't believe that God reconciled us to Himself through Christ and remain separated from God and subject to His wrath.

For those in the second group, what is preventing you from accepting God's gracious gift of reconciliation? What lingering questions do you need to have answered to be able to trust Jesus as your Savior?

For those in the first group, Paul says that God has given you a ministry of reconciliation and has committed you to its message. He has given you the great privilege of sharing this amazing gift with the second group! For some of you, this may seem like an overwhelming responsibility but for others, it may come as second nature to share God's promise of reconciliation. God has given all believers this ministry and He will go before you as you obediently share His promise with others.

Thank you, God, for making a way through Jesus for us to reconcile with You. Help us to obediently serve You in the ministry of reconciliation, giving us grace and wisdom to draw others to You.



DECEMBER 14, 2022 // Day 17
Wednesday

MATTHEW 25:37-40

ON SERVING OTHERS

For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me; I was in prison and you visited me.’ “Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and take you in, or without clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick, or in prison, and visit you?’ “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. – Matthew 25:37-40

“Hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, sick and in prison”—these people all have something in common. They have a need that only someone else can meet. We ALL have a need that only Jesus Christ can meet. We are ALL sinners and in need of a Savior. Matthew 20:28 says “Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Jesus’ whole reason for leaving His heavenly throne to come to earth as a baby to be born in a manger was to serve, and He served in the ultimate way—He gave His life so that we may have eternal life.

Serving others often involves suffering and sacrifice. It certainly did for Jesus Christ. He suffered tremendously on the cross and sacrificed everything to bring us salvation. As followers of Christ, we too are called to serve and with that comes sacrifice and suffering. We’re not necessarily all called to die for someone like Christ was, but we are called to die to our self, our agenda, and our desires to feed the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to be hospitable to a stranger, to clothe someone, to visit someone sick or in prison. In our Scripture for today Jesus says that when we are serving others it is as if we are serving Jesus Christ Himself. The rewards for serving others in need are worth giving up our time, our agenda and our desires as Jesus Christ did.

There are so many practical applications for serving and we must be intentional in serving others—not just during the holiday season but year-round. Be available and ready to serve when you hear of a need. Perhaps God is calling YOU to be the one to meet that person’s need.

Dear Jesus, thank you for paying the ultimate price by serving as a ransom for my life. You did not come to earth to be served but to serve and you did so on the cross. Thank you for your suffering and sacrifice for my sake. Lord Jesus, may I take up my cross daily and follow you. Please put people in need in my path and give me the courage to serve them as you would have me do so. May my eyes and heart be open to all those in need and may I respond to them as you would. Amen.



EPHESIANS 2:14

DECEMBER 15, 2022 // Day 18
Thursday

PRINCE OF PEACE

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility... – Ephesians 2:14

In John 14:27, Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

There is nothing sweeter in all the world than to be at peace with God. Isn't that the best gift? But we find ourselves in and out of it all of the time. We are anxious, troubled and riddled with fear. We long for peace and yet...knowing Jesus is having peace. I'm convinced this is something we should remind ourselves of often.

He doesn't give peace like the world gives—how does the world give peace? Retirement accounts, health insurance, vaccines and mandates, police, security systems...all things that are good but all things that don't last and can easily come crashing down. All of these are based on life's circumstances. What happens when your secure society starts unraveling around you? This is where peace that Jesus gives trumps all circumstances. It's peace FOR the difficult circumstances because he promised we would have trouble in this world. Peace that only comes from God's understanding. When the health insurance doesn't cover—God's peace does. When the retirement account isn't adequate—God's peace is. You understand what I'm getting at. This is a soul-quenching eternal peace that only comes from knowing the Prince of Peace.

How do we truly know this peace? We have to know Jesus. We have to accept the beautiful, wonderful gift of peace from THE ultimate beautiful, wonderful gift—Christ our Savior. Knowing him is loving him. Loving him is knowing peace when nothing makes sense in this world. Believers know the truth. The truth is that Jesus came to save us, set us right with our Father (bringing peace to our souls) and with one another (unity with believers) (Ephesians 2:14). What a precious gift of truth!

Peace was always on the forefront of Jesus' mind and so it should be on ours. Some of His last words were about peace. “Let not your heart be troubled”. At the end of his life he sees us in our humanity and loves us and has compassion for us. He doesn't want us to be troubled in our hearts. He reminds us of his peace and that He is bigger than all things. His last words are not, let not the globe be troubled... it's about our hearts. Jesus is personal with us, concerned over the individual even tending to our troubled hearts in difficult moments. Isn't that the sweetest gift? A Savior who desires peace in our hearts above all. Listen to his precious words. Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have his peace. It's the best gift you can receive.



DECEMBER 16, 2022 // Day 19
Friday

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST

This passage always challenges me. It's never enough to just read it—it demands so much more. On the one hand, I want to read the whole thing, to soak up all of its richness and truth, to cheer Paul on as he summons every phrase and metaphor he can muster to convince the reader of the supremacy of Christ. "He is the image of..., he is the firstborn over..., he is before all ...he is the head of...he is the beginning..." "Keep going, Paul, this is great stuff!"

However, I tend to stop and hover over verse 17: "...and in him all things hold together." This isn't a trite phrase, a cliché, or a simple filler clause to maintain the rhythm of the paragraph. It is a seven-word commentary on how the universe operates: Jesus is holding all things together, has been doing so since the Creation, and will continue to do so for as long as...we don't know.

As a chemistry teacher I teach students about atomic structure: protons, neutrons, and electrons. Then in physics they learn about forces, the attractions that hold things together or push them apart. Sometimes an alert student will reach a point of cognitive dissonance and raise an insightful question: "If the protons are all mashed together in the nucleus, but their positive charges are pushing them apart, shouldn't the nucleus be exploding? How does it all hold together?"

My answer is usually from our passage: "Colossians 1:17," Or, on occasion, "Heb 1:3", where we also read that the Son is "...sustaining all things by his powerful word." The same Word that spoke the universe into existence in Gen 1:1 (and John 1:1) is holding it together, is sustaining it today.

But it won't be so forever. We are warned of an approaching Day of the Lord, when His holding together will end, when the Word will cease to sustain all things. At the command of His Word, the protons will be released, and the universe as we understand it will be gone.

That Day is coming, but it waits for the signal of a future advent, the Advent of His return. The Advent we celebrate in this season is what we regard (in the silliness of our man-centered perception of the universe) as His first visit to Earth, the arrival in Bethlehem long ago.

Our Christmas Advent isn't a prominent feature of this Colossians passage, but there's a hint of it in verses 19 and 20, where "...God was pleased...to reconcile to himself...things on earth...by making peace..."

Reconciliation and peace are the essence of God's purpose in this Advent, so we greet the babe in the manger with jubilation. But we're also aware that it's a short journey from Bethlehem to Calvary, and then somewhere beyond our horizon is the point when the One who is holding all things together will determine that it's time to let go.

Dear Lord, what are we, that you are mindful of us? You are the Ancient of Days, and we are but specks of dust, yet you have set in motion a plan that reaches across the centuries to provide for our reconciliation. We have no capacity to understand your love; our highest hope is to be able to acknowledge it, receive it, and share it with an otherwise dark and hopeless world. We ask that each day we be reminded of the part we have to play in your grand plan, and that we might be found faithful in finishing our part. Amen



DECEMBER 17, 2022 // Day 20
Saturday

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

COMFORT OF CHRIST

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. – 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

Humbly, I confess I have always read this passage with focus on what I am instructed to do in my Christian walk. I've believed myself instructed to take my experiences of specific troubles, my knowledge of what helped me through, and pass it forward. You know, loving one another! "I've been there, let me be a guide to you, as you enter in, maybe I can lighten your load? I've become lost on my path too, I've suffered the job loss too, I've lost touch with my teenager too, I've lost my Dad too... I will share with you how God stepped into my trouble and offered comfort, hope." I ended with God, but I think I was also a little off, focused on details of my own life, hoping to offer a view of a solution to "the same" trouble in someone else's life. While matching troubles may be useful and practical in some measure... I think this passage is not that limited. Of course it isn't. Our God has no limits!

Lord, help me grow. Let my understanding expand with more depth and with more breadth. Humbly, I will tell you I read this passage differently now. Lord, I see and hear a troubled soul and my heart goes out... it's the mother in tears, the husband without resources, the teenager wandering, the child losing a parent, it's illness, it's broken relationships... it's any number of all the things that go wrong in our fallen world... it's life on this earth. There is one solution that meets any trouble. God's comfort. Accessible always. This passage in 2 Corinthians tells me that God IS comfort. Praise be to the God of ALL comfort. I must start with God, then in noticing a troubled soul on this earth, I can offer that God. "Go to Him. He loves you." All I need to do is turn the focus on God, for ANY trouble we experience, and offer my faith in that comfort to someone else. For God so loved the world, that he gave us his only son, who walked this earth in human form, who experienced our human troubles, who sighed, who wept, and who was placed upon a cross. Jesus died on the cross, to stand in our place, so that we may access the Father, God, and be with Comfort.

As we enter the period of preparation for the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ at Christmas, let us invite others to the celebration. Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the God of ALL comfort, for ANY trouble. As we are in the period of preparation for the Second Coming of Christ, don't we have an urgency to share that hope for eternal comfort that lies in Christ?

God, I praise you for each and every moment you offer comfort in my troubles. I confess I sometimes try to solve troubles on my own or solve the troubles of others. I pray for the right heart, the right focus and the strength to believe in your promises of comfort, so I can share that same message with others, by the Holy Spirit that dwells in me, In your power, not mine. Amen



1 JOHN 4:7-11

DECEMBER 18, 2022 // Day 21
Sunday

GOD'S LOVE

Dear friends, let us love one another for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends since God so loved us we also ought to love one another. – 1 John 4:7-11

In numerous songs, both sacred and secular, we hear, in the literature we read, and in the media we view, the most powerful force we know is the power of love. It may be in the form of romantic love, of a superhero, or of love of family. But such love pales in comparison to the Divine Love that God has for us. Love is the true power of God's universe, for love itself is the nature and purpose of God. And the ultimate and perfect example of God's love is his gift of his Son, Christ, to fallen man. We celebrate Christ's earthly birth this Advent season.

When pressed for the most important law, Jesus replied, "Love God with all your heart, soul and mind..., and the second command is to love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:36-40). The author of 1 John reflects these decrees in the above passage. This is God's number one edict, a simple directive, not debatable or subject to innuendo, coming from the ultimate power in the universe. We should be everlasting grateful that God follows the spirit of his command with presenting man with the greatest gift of His love, everlasting life with the loving Father. We are told to love, and we are shown the ultimate gift of Divine Love. What more can God do? What should we do with God's love?

Christmas is the season of giving, and we need to play the role of the giver and not receiver of gifts. God tells us that gift we give should be that of love. Even God desires our gift of love, a gift that arises in our hearts and cannot be created without a sincerity and genuineness that lie within each of us. A passionate gift that can arise only with a true love for God. A love for God and others that Jesus says is our purpose.

This Christmas let's use love in the context of the four main parts of the English we speak. As a verb, let us love God and others. As an adverb, let our actions all be done in a loving matter. As an adjective, let our words and thoughts be lovely. And as a noun, make it our gift to God and to all, family, friends and strangers, that share this earth with us.

Father God, Thank you for your gift of Divine Love, your son Christ, and may we share that gift with others, both believers and non-believers, during Christmas. May all see you in the love we give. Amen



JOHN 1:14

DECEMBER 19, 2022 // Day 22
Monday

THE WORD MADE FLESH

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. – John 1:14

This verse explains just how much Christ loves us. When someone we care about is in desperate need, our first reaction is to go directly to them. This is what Christ did for us. Jesus, who was one with the Father since the before there was time, chose to leave his place in heaven, become a man, and dwell among us. By becoming flesh, Jesus took on a human body that would feel hunger, temptation, loss, pain, and ultimately death. Jesus was tempted by Satan. Jesus felt the pain of losing a loved one and being betrayed by a close friend. Finally, Jesus was beaten, crucified, and killed on the cross—choosing to take our place as his own. When we pray to Jesus, we pray to a Savior who has felt the same heartache, troubles, and persecution that we may be going through... and he is ready and willing to take those burdens from us.

The disciples saw his glory firsthand. They saw the miracles—the healing, the mastery of nature, the authority over evil. They saw the transfiguration. They watched as Jesus was rejected by the world and killed. Then, they saw the stone that had been rolled away and came face to face with the resurrected Jesus! One of the final instructions that Jesus gave his disciples before returning to the Father was “to be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth”. This is exactly what the disciples did, and they were so effective in spreading the Good News because they had seen Christ’s glory in person. We can be confident in the truth of the Good News found in the Bible because these are eyewitness accounts!

Jesus came to earth full of grace and truth. He dwelt among us to be a servant. He came to show mercy to the weak and the sick. Jesus came to pay the price for our sins and tell us how to have eternal life with Him. Jesus said, “I am the way and the truth and the life No one comes to the Father except through me”. We simply need to believe in him and turn away from a life that is focused on the world.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. – John 3:17

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of our Savior, let’s stay amazed at the love the Father has for us. That he sent his Son to save the world!

Lord Jesus, thank you for being our Good Shepherd. Thank you for coming to us, to show us the way and the truth. Thank you for loving us first. Amen.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come!



JAMES 2:12-13

DECEMBER 20, 2022 // *Day 23*
Tuesday

GOD'S MERCY

Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment. – James 2:12-13

When the 1980 U.S. Olympic hockey team won their game against the Soviet Union, it was called the Miracle on Ice. The American team entered the Olympics as a definite underdog, while the Soviets were seeded number 1. Between 1960 and 1980, the Soviets had played the American team 12 times, winning all 12 games, by a combined score of 117-26. The Soviet team was older and more experienced. Going into the game on February 22, 1980, no one expected the Americans to win. Yet the Americans won 4-3 in what is considered to be one of the greatest sports upsets of all time. We love upset victories (especially when we are pulling for the underdog).

In James 2:12-13, we find an amazing upset victory... Mercy triumphs over judgment!

Because Jesus came to earth as a man (Christmas!), lived a sinless life, and then died and rose again so that my sins can be forgiven... I can live a life that is saturated with Christ's love. My obedience to Him—my words and actions—they are not demanded by a crushing list of rules and regulations. Rather, my obedience to Him means daily living with His love in me and His Spirit guiding me.

I could choose to live my life handing out judgment and condemnation toward others. But Jesus did not appoint me to be a critic. He called me to show love and mercy. And who doesn't love an upset victory? Mercy always wins over judgment. I want to be known as a person who shows great mercy... because the greatest mercy of all has already been showered on me.

Thank you God for the great mercy you have shown toward me in sending your Son. Help me to always be generous in showing that mercy toward others.



DECEMBER 21, 2022 // Day 24
Wednesday

LUKE 2:11-14

GOD'S GLORY REVEALED

For today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths, and lying in a manger. And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." – Luke 2:11-14

The birth of our Savior, who is Christ the Lord, opens our eyes to see the glory of God. It is the magnificent, hard to grasp reality of God's nature through His Son. "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being." (Hebrews 1:3). This baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger will show us with His life the character, lordship, and wonder of God.

Throughout Scripture we see that God is about His glory and we see Him reveal it perfectly and completely through His Son, Jesus. Jesus shows us the Father's love for the world, and how He desires all of his creation to know who He is. The birth of Jesus shines light into our dark hearts, revealing our need for him to be our Savior. "For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ." (2 Corinthians 4:6)

Those who have placed their faith in Jesus can praise God, giving him all the glory, just as the multitude of angels did on the night of His birth in Bethlehem. We rejoice that God has "made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—to bring unity to all things in the heaven and on earth under Christ." (Ephesians 1:9-10)

We expectantly wait for the second coming of Christ, our Prince of Peace, who will reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords over his faithful kingdom. May we give praise, glory, and honor to God who has revealed himself to us through his precious Son, Jesus.

Dear God, Thank you for your Son, Jesus, who reveals to us your love, mercy, and forgiveness. Thank you for showing us your glorious plan of redemption through your Son.



DECEMBER 22, 2022 // Day 25
Thursday

TITUS 3:4-7

THE KINDNESS OF GOD

But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. – Titus 3:4-7

At Christmas, I was reminded (to the point of bribery) to be good and Santa would bring wonderful gifts but be bad and Santa would deliver a lump of coal. I tried hard to be good but was never confident I had done enough to avoid the lump of coal. Humans are just not capable of consistently being good or doing the right thing even on the days leading up to Christmas.

In Titus 3:3, Paul describes humans as “foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our day in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” Humans break God’s laws and as result have to be separated from a righteous God—our bad choices prevent us from being near his holiness.

BUT when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy.... Titus 3:4-5

Our God reached down from heaven as an infant to provide a way for us to be reconciled to Him. We could never earn His favor or be good enough to be reconciled to our Creator. And what we gain is unimaginable: salvation, renewal by the Holy Spirit, Jesus Christ our Savior, justification, and the hope (assurance) of eternal life. All that is given to us out of God’s great goodness, kindness, mercy and love.

Using this text in a Christmas sermon, Martin Luther explained, “How could God have shown his goodness in a more sublime manner than by humbling himself to partake of flesh and blood?”* How indeed?

Dear Father, We thank you for your goodness and kindness so powerfully demonstrated when you provided a way through the birth of your Son to save, renew, justify, and provide us with the hope of eternal life. Amen

*A sermon by Martin Luther, from his Wartburg Church Postil, 1521-1522. From The Sermons of Martin Luther, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1983) 141.



DECEMBER 23, 2022 // Day 26
Friday

MATTHEW 28:18-20

SHARING THE GIFT

Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age." – Matthew 28:18-20

What's the most meaningful gift you have ever given?

My wife's birthday is December 28. I learned early in our marriage the wisdom of separating her birthday from Christmas. In our home, there's no combining of the two! Her birthday is always a special, stand-alone event!

Several years ago I planned a surprise birthday party for her. The boys were much younger, so I arranged for a sitter. I also invited 30 other people. After the sitter arrived, Jenny and I headed to a restaurant for dinner. Once we were gone, everyone arrived and got ready for the party. When we reached the restaurant, I told Jenny I left my wallet at home. So, we headed back. I apologized for forgetting my wallet while doing my best not to smile.

When we got home, everything looked normal. We walked to the house, and she went in first. It was then the party got started. Everyone yelled, "Surprise!" She had no idea. That evening, celebrating her birthday with family and friends, was great fun. And giving her this gift was one of the most memorable things I have ever done for her. Just writing the story makes me feel good and brings a smile to my face.

One of the questions often asked after Christmas is, "What did you get for Christmas?" Ever been asked that question? Sure you have. But when was the last time someone asked you, "What did you give for Christmas?" If never, you're like me. The focus tends to be on what we got for Christmas rather than what we gave.

On Christmas, we celebrate the greatest gift of all. God gave His one and only Son. We've heard the Christmas story about a baby, a manger, angels, and shepherds. It's all about Jesus. It's all about the amazing gift from God for you and me.

During the Christmas season, people are open to hearing about Jesus. Let's take advantage of the opportunities to share the gift of God's love and grace given through His Son, Jesus. Let's share the gift of Jesus with others.



JOHN 3:16-17

DECEMBER 24, 2022 // Day 27
Saturday

THE GREATEST GIFT

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. – John 3:16–17

John 3:16 is the first verse of the Bible that I ever remember hearing. Odds are, you can say the same thing. John 3:16 is one of the most widely known verses of Scripture across the planet. It is so simple of a truth, that even a child can understand it... so let us take a moment to do just that.

Earlier this year I had the joy of spending a whole week in the hills of NC with a bunch of elementary aged kids at camp. We did all sorts of outdoors activities, sang worship songs, and ate “delicious” camp food... but my favorite time all week was having the opportunity to teach these little ones how to study their bibles. We learned an extremely easy-to-remember method. Read a passage and ask 3 questions. It was that simple.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about me?
3. What does this passage teach me about the world?

Take a second to read John 3:16 and answer those questions. Let that childlike wonder spring to new life in your heart. Soak up the richness of this single verse.

Here is some of what stands out to me on this Christmas Eve of Advent:

God did not have to love us, sinners destined to perish.

He could have obliterated us without a second thought and would have been right in doing so... but He didn't. Thank God He didn't! He sent a child. Not just any child, but His very own Son. In a manger in Bethlehem, God did the unthinkable. He loved the unlovable. He gave grace to the least gracious. He showed mercy on the unworthy. His love is unfathomably deep towards you and me. His love is unimaginably wide enough to reach anyone who calls on Him. That is who God is. The God who loves.

The background of the entire graphic is a warm, bokeh-style photograph of a Christmas scene. It features several lit white candles in the foreground, a small evergreen tree on the right, and a bright star in the upper left. A line drawing of a manger with a star above it is positioned on the left side.

CHRISTMAS DAY SERVICE

DECEMBER 25 • 11 AM
Family Worship





R	D
M	R