

ADVENT

HOPE | PEACE | JOY | LOVE

**This Christmas at
NOVA Community Church**

Worship Service Every Sunday

9:30 a.m.

NovaKids and Nursery available

Choir Christmas Concert

Sunday, December 14th - 6:00 p.m.

Campfire Christmas

Sunday, December 21st - 6:00 p.m.

Candlelight and Carols

Wednesday, December 24th - 6:00 p.m.

For more information visit novachurch.org.

[Dedication](#)

HOPE

[Monday, December 1](#)

[Tuesday, December 2](#)

[Wednesday, December 3](#)

[Thursday, December 4](#)

[Friday, December 5](#)

[Saturday, December 6](#)

PEACE

[Monday, December 8](#)

[Tuesday, December 9](#)

[Wednesday, December 10](#)

[Thursday, December 11](#)

[Friday, December 12](#)

[Saturday, December 13](#)

JOY

[Monday, December 15](#)

[Tuesday, December 16](#)

[Wednesday, December 17](#)

[Thursday, December 18](#)

[Friday, December 19](#)

[Saturday, December 20](#)

LOVE

[Monday, December 22](#)

[Tuesday, December 23](#)

[Wednesday, December 24](#)

CHRISTMAS DAY

[Thursday, December 25](#)

The people of Nova Community Church present to you the 2025 Advent Devotional.

When I think of the Advent season, I look forward to singing, O Little Town of Bethlehem. This Christmas Hymn has a memorable line: “The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee...”

This reminds us of two realities and the ultimate resolution of both.

Our lives are intertwined with the experience of our deepest hopes and greatest fears.

In the first place, we are grateful that our only hope is in Jesus, not just that our specific life circumstances will get better. Even though we vacillate between minor victories and things not going the way we want, we still trust in the Lord.

Secondly, whether we are willing to admit it or not, we all have something we are fearful of. Our fears seem to be somewhere between “What if?” and “If only.” God knows us intimately – the depth of our heart and the craziness of our fears. We waste our time pretending to be brave before Almighty God.

The hopes and fears of all the years are met in you, Jesus, not merely by you. Jesus, you aren’t a means to our happiness. You, yourself, are our redemption, our joy, and our satisfaction.

This Advent season, read, reflect, pray, and meditate on the scriptures, and writing from the Nova Family. May we grow in the glories of His righteousness and the wonders of His love.

With love and blessings,

Pastor Dean Mayeda

Hope

Monday, December 1, 2025

by Denise Hellinga

Read Jeremiah 17:7-8

But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in Him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream.

It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

Jeremiah 17:7-8

GOING DEEPER IN THE HARD DAYS

There are moments when life feels frightening, and in those moments God gives us an invitation to remain steadfast. He is present in the rough days exactly the same way He is present in the easy ones. Like so many verses, this scripture is reassuring. God isn't asking us to be strong on our own. He is inviting us to plant our lives beside him to draw from his endless strength.

When I was first asked to write this devotional, life was going smoothly. It's easier to write when things are going smoothly—when family and friends are well. Then things changed. We now sit in the hospital while Paul faces brain surgery in 3 days. I felt I needed to rewrite this from my perception this week, a challenging week not an easy one.

I love these verses in Jeremiah! I want to be like the tree Jeremiah describes. Jeremiah paints a beautiful picture of a tree planted by water. When the heat rises and the rain doesn't come, the tree still stands firm. Its roots reach down to draw life from a deeper source. What a stunning picture of what God offers us. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from him" (James 1:17).

When we spend time in His Word, when we talk with Him honestly, He gives us what we need for whatever we're facing—peace, strength, endurance, and the quiet reassurance of His presence.

There have been many times in my life when I've been frightened. As we sit in the hospital and wait for Paul's surgery, I silently sing the words from a song I love:

"All my life you have been faithful, all my life you have been so, so good."

And it's true. Looking back, I can see how God has held us, guided us, and sustained us—even in moments we didn't understand at the time. I know, even when I don't feel it, that these days are the days when my roots grow deeper. I want to feel the strength that lives far beneath the surface—the strength God Himself gives.

REFLECT

1. What "fruit" (peace, patience, kindness) have you felt God give you in frightening times?
2. What does it look like for you to dig deep for His strength?

DISCUSS

How can we encourage each other to stay rooted for the challenging times in life?

PRAY

Lord, thank You that You see every fear we carry, and every burden we have. Thank You that You remain faithful in every season. Help us to sink our roots deep into You. When the heat rises and the drought stretches, remind us that You are our source of strength, peace, and hope. Let those who are waiting, hurting, or walking through uncertainty today feel your prescience. Thank you that you are always listening to us. In the saving name of Jesus.

BIO

I'm Denise Hellinga, married to my wonderfully strong husband who has survived five decades of my ideas and "suggestions." We have three amazing kids who married three equally wonderful people and now we have been promoted to the joy, sports schedules, food choices, and comedy of seven treasured grandkids. We love doing life with our Nova Church family!

Tuesday, December 2, 2025

by Enery Hsu

Read Romans 12:2

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Romans 12:2 (NIV)

ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

How do we find out what God wants us to do? What is God's will for our lives? I often pondered this question while growing up. Mainly, I wanted to know what career I was ultimately going to end up having, and also to know who I would marry (In hindsight, it's not like I had a plethora of potential mates to choose from anyway, so this probably wasn't something I needed to give much thought to). Once in a while, I would hear of people's testimonies of how they heard an audible voice of God telling them very specific things to do (You should marry this person, you should attend this college, you should accept this job, etc.), and found myself wishing that would happen to me, because it would make my life easier.

What confused me more was reading stories in the Bible, such as Gideon and the sign of the fleece (Judges 6:36-40), which seemed to prescribe methods of finding God's will. After all, if this happened in the Bible, is this what God wants me to do when I want to ask him a question? I'm embarrassed to admit that growing up I've more than once employed the "opening up my Bible to a random location" method of discerning God's will. I stopped after I heard an anecdote which intended to show how misguided this "method" was – A man sought guidance from God and decided to open a Bible to a random page and started reading to see what God wanted him to do. The verse his finger landed on was Matthew 27:5 "he went and hanged himself." The man thought "That can't be right, let me try again" so does the same thing, this time he lands on Luke 10:37: "And Jesus said to him 'You go, and do likewise.'" Again, the man thought it wasn't right and

so he tried one last time and landed on John 13:27 “What you are going to do, do quickly.”

As I grew in my faith, I came to understand that following Jesus is not primarily about seeking God’s answers for the specific questions about my life in order to “make the right choice,” but about being continually transformed as I trust in his word and his promises. As Romans 12:2 says, God’s desire for his people is to live lives that do not align to the pattern of this fallen and evil world, but one that is deeply transformed, aligning to His will, which is good, pleasing, and perfect.

Even though in this life we will still experience the effects of sin, in Jesus we have the hope of living a transformed life. In Jesus, we have the power to not conform to the pattern of this world, but conform ourselves to God’s will and his desires for us. Jesus came to reveal God (John 1:18) and through Jesus’ atoning death for our sins on the cross, God has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into Jesus’ eternal kingdom (Col 1:13). In addition to this hope we have in the present, we also have hope for the future – when Jesus returns again to achieve complete victory over sin and death, bring judgment, establish his kingdom, and redeem all of creation. When this happens, we will be transformed and fully redeemed, given new glorified bodies, and will experience complete victory over sin and death. The redemption of our bodies is the hope of our salvation (Rom 8:23-24). Our imperfect wills will be made perfect and aligned to God’s will, and we will experience the blessedness that comes from being in God’s presence eternally. Until that time comes, we can hope in the ongoing transforming renewal of our mind as we pray: “Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

REFLECT

We are constantly being shaped and molded by forces external to ourselves. In what areas of your life have you been conforming to the pattern of this world? How could being “transformed by the renewing of your mind” look like for you in this season of your life?

DISCUSS

What does it mean to “test and approve” God’s will?

PRAY

Father God, I humble myself before you and ask you to reveal in me any ways I have conformed to the pattern of this world. I ask for your forgiveness in my failings and trust in your forgiveness through Jesus' sacrifice. Please transform me and renew my mind to be more like Jesus. Help me to care about the things you care about, love the way you love, and hate the things that you hate. I pray that I would be humble enough to accept correction from others and repent and turn to you when I fail, and that I would also be able to speak grace and truth to others when I need to. Would your will be done in every area of my life. Help me to love and treasure Jesus so that I would look forward to and hope in his return, when everything in the world will be made right again. I pray these things in Jesus' name, amen.

BIO

Enery Hsu has served as a pastor at a church in the San Gabriel Valley. He is currently a stay-at-home dad and is seeking God's guidance for the next step in his ministerial career. He is married with three young children and enjoys photography and drinking boba.

Wednesday, December 3, 2025

by Lance Capel

Read Psalm 62:5-8

"Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from Him. Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will not be shaken. My salvation and my honor depend on God; He is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge."

Psalm 62:5-8

REST AND TRUST IN THE LORD AT ALL TIMES

When I read verses about rest, I understand their importance—at least conceptually. But then I look at the reality of my life and think, How am I supposed to rest with four kids (one of them a newborn!), a job, the desire to be a present and loving husband, exercise, eat healthy, and stay socially engaged? The same thing happens when I read verses about trusting God at all times. I want to trust Him—deep down, I believe that's the right thing to do. But when life gets hard or full, actually doing it becomes much more difficult.

In the traditional sense of the word, "rest" feels almost impossible in this season of life. On top of the amazing blessings and responsibilities I carry, I'm constantly being notified of everything happening in the world: bad news, sports scores (and as a Yankees fan, this wasn't exactly a restful season!), emails that trigger stress or frustration, and updates from friends or family who are struggling mentally, physically, emotionally, or financially. I list these things because I've found they can slowly chip away at my desire—and even my ability—to rest and trust in the Lord.

What I've realized is that rest and trust are deeply connected. The less I rest in the Lord, the harder it becomes to trust Him. At first glance, they might seem unrelated. But in my experience, when I intentionally make space to rest in God's presence—to seek Him, rely on His grace,

and remember His goodness—I naturally trust Him more. Conversely, when I’m anxious, unsettled, or stretched too thin, I not only lose rest—I begin to lose trust.

One daily practice that has helped me is listing out ways the Lord has blessed me. Each morning, I try to reflect on His goodness before I bring Him my requests. This helps me approach Him with confidence—believing that He hears me. That doesn’t mean I never wrestle with doubt. Sometimes I still ask, “Lord, did You hear this specific prayer? Why hasn’t that situation changed yet?” But time and time again, I’ve seen the Lord carry me through uncertainty, disappointment, fear, and anxiety. And if you’re reading this devotional, I believe the same is true for you. The Lord has brought you through your specific trials for a reason.

Matthew 11:28 says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.” The psalms remind us that God is trustworthy, faithful, unchanging—a solid rock and a refuge. The reason we can find rest in God is because He alone can truly satisfy us. Our bodies and minds find real rest only when our souls are satisfied—and only He can meet that need.

As we enter the Christmas season—a time that can feel rushed, busy, and full of distractions—I hope you’ll take time to slow down, to rest in His goodness, and to trust Him fully. He longs to give you rest. And as you learn to rest in Him, you’ll find your trust deepening—even in the most challenging seasons.

REFLECT

Is there something holding you back from trusting God fully? If so, what is that thing?

DISCUSS

Reflect on some of the ways that you can rest in God. Amidst all of the ups and downs of each week, discuss two practical ways that you can tangibly rest in God every day this week.

PRAY

Lord, remind me of your goodness and grace today. Help me to rest in You and trust you fully. If there is anything holding me back from loving and trusting you fully, reveal it to me today and help me to get rid of it. Give me the ability to show and teach others about Your faithfulness today. Amen.

BIO

Lance Capel is a husband, father to 4, business owner and youth sports coach.

Thursday, December 4, 2025

by Charlotte Newkirk

Read Hebrews 6:19

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary, behind the curtain"

Hebrews 6:19

JESUS, THE HOPE OF THE WORLD

Modern day usage of the word, "hope," is usually wishful thinking, and uncertainty. (I hope you feel better, I hope I get a pony for Christmas...) I admit, that's how I usually use it most of the time, too.

But this kind of hope in the Bible is completely different. Biblical hope is absolute certainty that God's promises will be fulfilled in the future.

The passage before this speaks of God's perfect character and past fulfillment of His promises. He always follows through, and cannot lie.

The rest of the verse, 6:20a describes Jesus as entering behind that curtain on our behalf, as our high priest forever.

Now let's look at our verse Hebrews 6:19 again:

"We have this hope," - Absolute fulfillment of God's promises.

"As an anchor for the soul," - God's hope holds us as a ship's anchor would hold a ship safely in harbor.

"Firm and secure." - Absolute certainty.

"It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain,..." - Even better than an earthly anchor, the Christian's anchor reaches up to heaven, God's inner sanctuary, to God Himself.

Wow. This is so very different than wishful thinking, isn't it?

Years ago, I became bedridden with a debilitating spine condition. Month after month we appealed the insurance company's refusal for surgery. As my condition worsened and the pain was nearly unbearable, life itself looked pretty hopeless. I was just barely able to hang on, just barely.

Except for Jesus.

In that seemingly hopeless situation, I felt God's presence in a way difficult to describe. It was if Jesus himself was holding my head above the water, not letting me sink. He was my hope, keeping me from sinking.

I was finally able to have the surgery, but most importantly, Jesus never let me go.

When times get tough, as they often do, my thoughts go back to when Jesus held me close, my hope and anchor. I know he is still there for me, ready to keep me from sinking.

REFLECT

"Oh holy night the stars are brightly shining
It is the night of our dear Savior's birth
Long lay the world in sin and error pining
Till He appeared and the soul felt its worth

A thrill of hope the weary world rejoices
For yonder breaks a new glorious morn"

These words from the Christmas carol, "Oh Holy Night," help us remember Christ's coming to fulfill God's promises. Jesus is the hope of the world!

DISCUSS

Think of any one of God's promises, (I am with you always (Mt 28:20); I will never leave you nor forsake you (He 13:5); Do not fear, for I am

with you, (Is 41:10a). How have those words given you comfort or courage in a situation?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to provide for the forgiveness of my sins. Please remind me often that you can always be counted on to fulfill your promises, and be the anchor for my soul.

BIO

Charlotte is a wife, mother, and grandmother of six. She loves supporting missions through Women's Mission Fellowship.

Friday, December 5, 2025

by Michelle Moore

Read Zephaniah 3:16-17

On that day they will say to Jerusalem, "Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing."

Zephaniah 3:16-17 NIV

HOPE IN A MIGHTY WARRIOR

Mark and I have a tradition every year around this time to make a day of watching the director's cut versions of the Lord of the Rings trilogy. We find a lot of comfort in Tolkien's epic as part escape from the stress and busyness of the season, and part restoration in the hope of good in the world amidst the turmoil of our society. There are so many examples of hope throughout the films - the Fellowship's hope in one another in their mission to destroy the Ring, the hope of better days to come as Sauron's armies rise up and each day seems bleaker than the last, the hope in Frodo and Sam with each step closer to Mount Doom, the hope in small acts of goodness conquering a seemingly unstoppable evil. There is courage in this depiction of hope - each character makes the choice to hope again and again, and they lean on one another to revive their hope. It is an active willing of their spirits, not a passive current that carries them along.

The book of Zephaniah is a terrifying glimpse into the Day of the Lord and God's judgement to be carried out across people of all nations. No one will escape God's wrath and fierce anger. "That day will be a day of wrath - a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness... 'I will bring such distress on all people that they will grope about like those who are blind, because they have sinned against the Lord' (1:15, 17)." But God addresses the people of Judah to repent: "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day

of the Lord's anger (2:3)." This is the hope He provides to his followers, and God promises to restore His people, "But I will leave within you the meek and the humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the Lord' (3:12)." And the hope we have in Jesus Christ's message of eternal life is how we persevere through the dark days. "The Lord your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing' (3:17)." Jesus is the Mighty Warrior, saving people of all nations with His ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

This is not a passive hope for the Day of the Lord to be a day of rejoicing and song. God calls upon His people to repent now and to seek Him. As Christians we know that the Day of the Lord is near (1:14) but of course we do not know God's plan. Therefore we stay vigilant in our faith in Jesus Christ, and we choose this hope again and again by following His teachings, loving our neighbors, living a life of discipleship, and always seeking repentance for our sins and humbling ourselves before God.

REFLECT

Zephaniah ends with another promise from God, "At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame (3:19)." How does this book compare to Nova's recent sermon series on the Beatitudes?

DISCUSS

What are some ways you restore your hope when you experience hard times?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for keeping your promise by sending your Son, our Mighty Warrior and Savior. I rejoice in the hope of eternal life, and I pray that I will be reminded in this Advent season of Jesus' sacrifice. Please help me slow down in this holiday season and keep this hope and joy in my heart always. Amen.

BIO

Michelle Moore is a music enthusiast who currently serves on Nova's sound board and broadcast team. She enjoys cooking, baking, and riding bikes on the Strand.

Saturday, December 6, 2025

by Ron Graff

Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

"We do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

OUTSIDE DOWN INSIDE UP

During the 1970's, I was serving as pastor of an Evangelical Free Church in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Each year during Christmas three groups of people had a white elephant gift party. Since I was the pastor, my wife and I were privileged to attend all three parties.

Each year at these parties, we observed something that was always a bit humorous to us. The younger group of adults would walk up to the Christmas tree, bend down and pick up a gift with no effort. The second group, in our age category at the time, would bend over, pick out a gift and let out a low grunt as they stood up. The older group never attempted to bend over; their gifts were placed on a table. It illustrates somewhat humorously, what the Apostle Paul was talking about when he said that "on the outside things are falling apart," (v. 16). I am now in my mid 80's. When I look in the mirror, I become very aware that the "ole bod" has gone south. Furthermore, many of the things I used to do with ease now are a struggle or I need help. To give you an example, I now need pliers to open a can of Progresso soup. That's the outside wasting away.

It's different with the inside; it "is being renewed day by day," (v. 16). The late gospel legend Andre Crouch captured this truth when he wrote the gospel song: "Through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus, I've learned to trust in God. Through it all, through it all, I've learned to depend upon his word." I wouldn't exchange what I

have in my relationship with Jesus today even if they found the "Fountain Of Youth." Inside I'm more alive than ever. "Though the outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day," (v. 16, NKJV).

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 presents two blueprints for holding up rather than folding up in the midst of difficulty and anxiety. (1) Know that *our momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory," (v. 16). (2) "Keep our eyes fixed not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal," (v. 17).

In the context of these verses, Paul writes in verse 7: "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." Several years ago, my wife Millie wrote a poem based upon this passage which she titled "Jars Of Clay." Her poem, I believe, captures the thought of our verses of study today.

JARS OF CLAY

"Our lives are shaped and molded,
In earthen jars of clay.
These jars receive God's treasures,
As we study and pray.

When we dig into the Bible,
And find the precious jewels,
They drop into our jars of clay,
Becoming mighty tools.

These tools have special meaning,
If they're used with love and care.
Each helps to build God's kingdom,
When we witness and we share.

Prayer is a precious jewel,
That can move the Father's hand,
Great mountains can be crumbled,
As we pray and take a stand.

We also water, with our prayers,
The seeds that others sow.
Different tools then come along,
To tend and help them grow.

Dig deep into the Word of God,
And find the precious treasure.
Then you will be equipped to live,
Above life's carnal pleasures.

When at the final trumpet call,
When our jars of clay go home,
We'll bow in humble worship,
Spilling jewels before his throne.

These jewels we'll offer up to God,
As they settle at His feet.
"Well done, my servant," He will say,
"By me, come take a seat."

And there forever,
We will stay,
Because we were faithful
Jars Of Clay."

"We never lose heart; we never give up." (2 Corinthians 4:16).

"Nothing is as wonderful as knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,"
(Philippians 3:8, CEV).

"You have everything when you have Christ," (Colossians 2:10, LB).

REFLECT

How does 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 help you cope with your present anxieties and difficulties?

DISCUSS

How does 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 challenge common ideas of what makes a person a success?

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for the promise of daily renewal. Help me to not lose heart, but to keep my eyes fixed on you and not on the temporary things of this life. I need help and ask that you give me the strength and grace to not lose heart when my life becomes difficult. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

BIO

Ron Graff is a great grandfather, retired, and active as an associate pastor at Nova Community Church. He has had the joy of dedicating three great granddaughters and baptizing four grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He and his wife Millie love family times; especially doting on the grand and great grandchildren.

Peace

Monday, December 8, 2025

by Garrett Koch

Read Isaiah 26:1-4

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah:

We have a strong city;

God makes salvation

its walls and ramparts.

Open the gates

that the righteous nation may enter,

the nation that keeps faith.

You will keep in perfect peace

those whose minds are steadfast,

because they trust in you.

Trust in the Lord forever

Isaiah 26:1-4

PERFECT PEACE

It may not seem like it, but Judah was in a very bad place when these words were written. Earlier in Isaiah, the prophet speaks about God's judgment on His people. For close to 200 years, society in Judah was filled with all sorts of horrific evils and terrible acts. Seriously, read through 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Samuel, or 1 and 2 Chronicles and you will see what I mean. It was brutal.

In essence, they had strayed from God and they needed to be stopped.

And so God used two different powerhouses of nations to enact his judgment. Assyria was lurking, ready to make their claim on the tiny nation of Judah. Eventually they would, and they would extort the people and rule over them for a little over a hundred years. And then would come Babylon, who conquered Assyria and in doing so not only conquered Judah, but destroyed it, pillaged it, took a large portion of its population into exile, among many other horrors.

At the time that Isaiah 26 was written this hadn't happened yet, but the threat of these outside nations was very present and the walls were beginning to close in. The consequences of their generational evil was inevitable.

And yet...

After a time of declaring (rightful) judgment on Judah, God does not leave them there. No, God does not simply enact judgment for its own sake. Sure, justice is an end in itself, but God's character is such that he is always seeking to restore his people. After judgment - correction, if you will - comes restoration.

In our passage, the prophet foretells of a time after Judah is delivered from these powerhouse nations, when they will be restored, rebuilt, and living in peace.

But beyond that... We know that evil persists in this world. Human beings are pretty terrible at following after God, and cycles of evil, justice, and restoration have been consistent throughout history. However, as followers of Jesus we know that this will not always be the case because we have been told the final score. Despite the evil of human beings, in the end God will win and on that day there truly will be perfect peace.

REFLECT

How does it make you feel that God continues to love you even in the midst of your failures? Judah was, by all accounts, a very wicked nation for about 200 years and even then God did not abandon them. Like Judah, there may be some consequences (corrections) for our failures, but that is never where God leaves us.

Most of us can recite John 3:16 off the top of our heads, but most of us don't know what comes immediately after. *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him* (John 3:17).

May the knowledge of God's continual pursuit of you and his promise of healing and restoration ultimately lead you to feel his perfect peace.

DISCUSS

Do you struggle to experience the peace that God offers? Why or why not?

PRAY

Father, I confess that oftentimes I stray from you. And I recognize that that may come with some natural consequences. But thank you that you are both just as well as full of grace and love for me. Thank you that you do not leave me in my guilt. Rather you saw it better to have your Son die on my behalf, because that is how much you love me. May I hold onto this truth in every aspect of my life, and may that lead me to peace.

BIO

Garrett serves as Director of Local Missions at NOVA. He enjoys all things sports, a good cup of coffee, and he has recently gotten into mountain biking!

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

By Mark Moore

Read James 3:13-18

*But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving,
considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.
Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.*

James 3:17-18

WISDOM THAT IS PEACE-LOVING

Out of High School my dream was to become a professional touring musician. I had been in several local rock bands at the time and one that had won back-to-back Battle of the Bands competitions at school. After graduation, and as we continued to grow and improve our musicianship we became more serious about our commitment to the band. Transforming our drummer's (mom's) garage into a fully soundproof recording studio, we began tracking our debut 12-song full length album. Having our own space to record and not having to pay an engineer for studio time meant that we were in there tracking at all hours of the day and night. Recording drum fill after drum fill, guitar track after guitar track, painstakingly crafting the sonic qualities that would define our sound. We practiced daily, tightening our setlist so that our live performance matched the impressive quality of our album. We converted a used Ford Club Wagon 12-passenger van into a fully functional tour bus that would transport us to tiny venues across the United States. We built and brought our own light show to ensure no other bands on the bill would be as flashy and noticeable as us. Everything about our band was DIY, from the merch to the album art, we wove the fabric of our identity every single day in the studio, on early social media, and late night at the clubs. During the recording process we worked hard to send out our demos and electronic press kits to all the major record labels. Eventually we actually did get picked up and signed a contract with an Indie Record Label, allowing us to immediately hit the road to promote the new album. This was it, we

were on the cusp of “making it.” Our relentless pursuit of industry knowledge, musical skill, and internet fame, combined with countless hours of work, steadfast commitment, and an unwavering passion was all going to pay off.

Spoiler alert, it did not.

At least not in the way we had expected. Time goes by, tours end, bands end, and then the music fades away.

In today’s passage, James contrasts two types of wisdom, the earthly wisdom, which is rooted in jealousy, arrogance, and selfish ambition, and the pure, peaceable wisdom that comes from God. This scripture warns that pursuing this type of worldly wisdom leads to envy, chaos, disorder, and even goes as far as saying it is unspiritual and demonic - not from God himself.

In the years following I found myself getting jealous of others who had progressed beyond the level that I had been so proud of achieving. Others with more musical talent and bands with bigger social media followings succeeded and now I was just a spectator. My achievements and abilities no longer seemed to be enough to live up to my unrealistic expectations. I didn’t want to listen to, much less celebrate, the music of others who continued to grow in their musical careers. I wanted to crawl in my own little corner and pout like a little kid.

Did this do me any good? Obviously not. Did this promote unity? Nope. Did this show meekness, humility, wisdom, love for God, or love for neighbor? Not at all.

I don’t think there’s anything wrong with feeling disappointed and taking a beat to be sad when something doesn’t pan out the way we’d hoped. But when left unchecked, that disappointment can easily turn into selfishness and bitterness.

The passage outlines the consequences of each type of wisdom: Earthly wisdom leads to “confusion and every evil thing,” while Godly wisdom yields a “harvest of righteousness.” When we seek Godly wisdom, He

provides wisdom that is pure, peace-loving, considerate, full of mercy, fruit-producing, unwavering, and sincere.

I needed to completely re-tune my attention to God, not only seeking His wisdom but acting it out daily with the same ferocity I had with the music. That's what stands out to me - true wisdom is not just intellectual, it is demonstrated through daily action: "Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom." Once I was able to move past the bitterness and disappointment through God's peace-giving wisdom, I found myself no longer pursuing fame and the earthly desires associated with that lifestyle, but building community through music. I feel at peace, still proud of what I accomplished, but now with a much deeper sense of purpose and drive to live Christ's example of Love.

REFLECT

In this time of advent, seek Godly wisdom instead of earthly wisdom for all your troubles. Only by God's grace and prayer can we pause to ask for His guidance and direction in every area of our lives. Are you at peace with God today? What areas in your life do you need peace and wisdom? Let's seek Jesus' peace and stillness in our lives together.

DISCUSS

Is there an area of disappointment or bitterness in your life that is preventing you from fully receiving true peace from God?

PRAY

Lord Heavenly Father, thank you so much for this Advent season, and for the peace you provide through your Son, Jesus. Please quiet our hearts so that we may receive your Holy wisdom. We desire to live lives that are pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, impartial, and sincere, so we ask that you replace the "us" with "You" completely. We love you. In Jesus' precious name I pray, Amen.

BIO

Mark Moore is a Creative Director and freelance Designer. He enjoys cooking, riding bikes with his wife, and live music, naturally.

Wednesday, December 10, 2025

By Rebecca Hester

Read 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.

Philippians 4:6-7

PEACE THAT TRANSCENDS

Recently, my husband and I took our son to college in Northern California. In the days leading up to moving him into his dorm, I struggled with a heavy sense of guilt and sadness. As parents, we want our children to grow up, become independent, and step into the adults they're meant to be—but letting go is never easy.

I found myself overwhelmed with worry that after four years he might not want to return to Torrance, that he might build a new life up north. Some of this fear came from my own story; when I left home to move to Los Angeles, I never moved back to the city I grew up in. Looking back, I realize I was projecting those feelings onto my son.

As the day drew closer, my anxiety only grew, and it continued even after we dropped him off. Eventually, I reached a breaking point and knew I needed to surrender it—so I gave it to God.

Each morning during my devotional time, I would read a Psalm and weave its words into my prayer for the day. Slowly, steadily, I began to feel that transcending peace described in Philippians. When my husband and I returned for Parents Weekend, God's peace flowed through me so clearly. The worry and guilt I once carried were replaced with God's love, goodness, and deep, calming peace. God had heard every prayer I whispered, and He met me with exactly what my heart needed.

As we walk through life's transitions, may we remember that God is faithful, present, and tender with our fears. His peace truly does surpass all understanding, and He is always ready to carry what we cannot.

REFLECT

In this season of Advent, let us intentionally seek God. It is only by His grace and through prayer that we can slow down long enough to ask for His guidance and direction in every area of our lives. Do you feel God's peace surrounding you today? Where in your life do you need His calming presence? Let's pursue the peace and stillness of Jesus together.

DISCUSS

Has there been a time when your mind was crowded with worry? Where did you find comfort? Did you reach out to God—and how did He meet you there?

PRAY

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your goodness and your pure, renewing spirit. Thank you for protecting our hearts and minds and for covering us with your transcending peace. In Jesus Christ's name I pray, Amen.

BIO

Rebecca enjoys reading, taking long walks on the beach, and spending time with her family and friends.

Thursday, December 11, 2025

By Laurie Griffin

Read John 14:25-27

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you."

John 14:27

PEACE ON EARTH OR WORLD AT WAR?

Advent is the celebration of Christ's coming and the season of anticipation and preparation for Christmas. How do you prepare for Christmas? Here come the parties; the decorations; the cards, the carols, the lines, the traffic, to-do lists, finding the perfect gifts, cooking, spending time with family, ugly sweaters, silver bells, roasted chestnuts, frosty snowmen, flying reindeer, and egg nog. What does it all have to do with the birth of Christ? I admit, I get caught up like Martha who "was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made." I mean, seriously ... there's a lot to do to have a Merry Christmas. All I really want to do is sit at the feet of Jesus, like Mary did. Being BUSY (Being Under Satan's Yoke) weighs me down and distracts me from the true meaning of Christmas. It's like a war on my soul.

In the beginning, God created a man and woman and placed them in a beautiful garden and had a perfect relationship with them. Everything was at peace: the relationships between God and people, between the man and woman, between the people and creation. But when the man and woman stopped trusting God, they essentially declared war. "We don't want your rule; we know better than you; we want to do things our way." There was an immediate transaction: peace was taken and fear, chaos, and confusion replaced it. The Bible tells us, "The LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was *afraid*.'" (Gen 3:9-10) The Bible also says, "You were alienated from God and were enemies, hostile in your minds, towards God because of your wicked works." (Col 1:21) This is not just about individual acts of evil, but an inherent hostility

that manifests through actions and a resistance to God's will, laws, and sovereignty. Sounds like war to me. We hated God, but he still loved and pursued us. Not for revenge or to destroy us. "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8). "Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved" (Eph 2:4-5). "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet 3:9).

"And so it came to pass... suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'" (Luke 2). Goodwill means God has shown favor and kindness to us. The angels declared peace; bringing wholeness and restoration to something that was broken. According to *Merriam-Webster*, "peace" can mean a state of freedom from war, conflict, or disturbance, or a state of mental and emotional tranquility. God declared "The War is Over."

Before Jesus went to the cross, he told his frightened, troubled disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." (John 14:27) The language here is like the writing of a will. In other words, "Here's your inheritance, sweet friends: peace unlike any you can find in the universe; the kind of peace that comes through perfect confidence that the Father is in control of everything that surrounds my life; the same inexplicable peace you see in me right now. God's in control" (Tim Keller).

In order for a will to take effect, the person to whom it belongs must die. The only way they could ever be different was for Jesus to die, to trade his perfect peace with their fear; for his relationship with God the Father to be broken so their relationship with God could be mended. This is the peace that God made. The Ancient Greek word for peace (eíró) is a verb with two main meanings: "to speak, say, or tell" and "to fasten together, join." Jesus prefaces his promise of peace with the assurance of the coming Advocate, the Holy Spirit, sent to teach (tell) and to assure the disciples. He will join us to the Father and the Son by dwelling in us. The peace that Jesus gives is rooted in connectedness, in

relationship, that precedes and endures through the circumstances of life.

REFLECT

Why did Jesus come? He came to die. “What shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came” (John 12:27). On the cross Jesus said, “It is Finished.” The war is over. Be like Mary, put the distractions aside, sit at His feet, worship him. Let His all surpassing peace fill your heart and mind and have yourself a “Mary” little Christmas.

DISCUSS

Does the hustle and bustle draw you closer to God or pull you away? Are you distracted by all the preparations? What can you remove from your “to-do” list to make time to sit at the feet of Jesus?

PRAY

Dear Prince of Peace, thank you for coming so we might have peace instead of fear. Help me not to lose sight of what is really important as I prepare for Christmas. Help us to set aside the distractions to make time to sit at your feet. In Jesus’ precious name I pray, Amen.

BIO

Laurie is a part-time teacher’s aide, part-time dog walker, part-time watercolor painter, full-time wife and servant of Jesus.

Friday, December 12, 2025

by Cheree Whorley

Read Ephesians 2:14-17

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, ¹⁵ by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

Ephesians 2:14-17

THE BUSINESS OF RESTORATION

In June of 1963, five months before President John F. Kennedy was killed, he went on national television to address racial unrest in Alabama. To set the scene, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had just written his famous Letter from Birmingham Jail and National Guardsmen were deployed to the University of Alabama in order to safely escort two black men to their classes. It was a time of chaos, violence, and tension as the Civil Rights Movement demanded an end to the treatment of African Americans as second class citizens. The president boldly took a stand to remind the nation of one of its foundational principles of democracy: All men are created equal. Here is what he said: “We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who will represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?”

One year later President Lyndon Johnson signed into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964, legally ending segregation in public places and outlawing discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin. This law was meant to reconcile or restore the nation to its original creed, uniting Americans and bringing peace where there had been division. So did it? History continually teaches us that there is nothing new under the sun. Humans long for dominance and power, not equality and peace. Society may advance technologically, but it doesn't show much improvement in peacemaking. Simply look at Russia's invasion of Ukraine or the almost eighty years of fighting between Israel and Palestine. Peace in this world is a dream deferred.

Our scripture today tells of a similar situation, where Jewish laws favored the Jewish people and excluded Gentiles, making them second class citizens. Paul informed the believers in Ephesus that Jesus' blood on the cross erased privileges for any group, because no one could be saved by the law or their good deeds; everyone needed salvation that Jesus alone provided. The Prince of Peace had come to bring equality and unity to all people, as Paul writes in Colossians 3:11, "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all." This world can never bring true peace between different groups of people, but Christ can and did on the cross. His kingdom offers much more than the world. One of my new favorite taglines that I learned this year came from hearing Garrett teach at youth group. He taught that "God is in the business of restoration." Everything Jesus does involves restoring us to Himself and one another, therefore providing peace that we could not achieve on our own.

While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a monumental success, achieving what so many Americans had been protesting, petitioning and laying down their lives for since the end of the Civil War, it did not change the hearts of Americans towards one another. It did not bring peace between them. Man made laws, treaties, or peace talks never truly do. The only one powerful enough to bridge the gap in our hearts and minds towards our enemies or those different from us is Jesus, His blood, and His Spirit within us. God is in the business of restoration.

He destroys barriers and makes two groups one. He is the peace humanity longs for.

REFLECT

Compare and contrast the peace that mankind speaks of and the peace offered by Jesus.

DISCUSS

Where do you long for Jesus' peace in your season of life?

PRAY

Thank you Jesus for destroying barriers and hostility between people. Thank you for doing what we could never do ourselves. Thank you for proving peace so that we can love one another as you have loved us. Thank you for being our peace.

BIO

Cheree Whorley is a Torrance native who was a Warrior, a Spartan, and is currently a Saxon. She loves being a Nova family member, a youth leader, an auntie, going on walks with friends, delighting in God's creation, and eating ice cream as often as possible.

Saturday, December 13, 2025

by Luke Hellinga

Read Psalm 34:11-14

Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Psalm 34:14

PURSUING PEACE

As a child, I grew up with several Aunts and Uncles, but it was my mom's sister's family that we were closest to. They lived in a small town in the Central Valley of California called Porterville. It was rural compared to Redondo Beach; they listened to country music (not cool in Redondo amongst my junior high friends, I learned), they drove trucks, they had ATVs, they had paintball guns and they knew how to have fun. Uncle Vic worked in the Orange Grove industry including owning a grove and crop dusting others' groves.

One summer when I was 17, I spent a week up in Porterville, this time without my parents or siblings. I brought my 1961 International Scout with me because my Uncle Vic was going to help me work on it. We only had a week, but I would go to work with Uncle Vic early in the mornings before the sunrise and the heat of the day. I remember being in his truck, driving on the highway in what felt like the middle of nowhere, as the sun would rise. He sipped his coffee and he told me this was the absolute best time of the day. It was peaceful, it was still, and a day of hard work was ahead of us.

It was just a country road, an old pick-up truck, and the sunrise, but his perspective was captivating. From then on, the early mornings got me hooked and 30 years later, I still love waking up early and feeling that peace and stillness. When we would arrive at his work, he would put me to work, doing various tasks. One of which was removing a heavy-duty front bumper from an old rusty spray rig. He was going to give it to me to put on my Scout, but I had to take it off. I spent what felt like hours cranking on rusty bolts as the summer day got into the

upper 90s. Uncle Vic gave me different tools, but then would leave me be. He was probably watching me struggle from his air conditioned shop and had a good laugh. Eventually, I came to him and admitted I wasn't strong enough to remove it. He grinned, came over with a blow torch, and had it disconnected in two minutes. Of course he knew the whole time how to make it easy on me, but he was teaching me how to pursue hard work, and it was something I will never forget. The next day, as we drove on that country road watching the sunrise, the peace I felt was even deeper and more appreciated.

REFLECT

Psalm 34:14 gives us four simple elements to follow:

1. Turn from evil
2. Do good
3. Seek Peace
4. Pursue it

The Hebrew word used here for “pursue” is “radaph.” A more thorough translation of radaph is “to run after (usually with hostile intent).” If we are to obtain peace, there will be hard work associated with it. The “pursuit” will often be working through the many types of hardships in life, and it will feel exhausting. You will feel tempted to give up, to turn to evil, and maybe even take a little revenge on the source of your conflict. Instead, reflect on this simple verse, and know that the stillness of tomorrow morning's sunrise is around the corner.

DISCUSS

What is a place you go to or the time of day in which you find the most peaceful? How can you use that time or place to pursue a deeper relationship with God?

PRAY

Holy Father, thank you so much for this Advent season, and for the peace you provide through your Son, Jesus. May I take the time to seek and pursue peace, trusting in your will through hardships. Remind me

that you are for me, not against me, and use me to be a peacemaker. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BIO

Luke Hellinga was born and raised in the South Bay. He is a proud husband and father of three and passionate about black coffee, early mornings and developing his relationship with Jesus so he is unshaken in times of trial.

Joy

Monday, December 15, 2025

by Brian Gilman

Read Luke 15:3-7

"Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

Luke 15:6-7

JOY

Have you ever been to a surprise birthday party? When I was young, I was invited to a surprise birthday party for a friend. The instructions were simple: arrive 30 minutes early and wait. When she arrives, be quiet and still until she opens the door. The waiting was difficult, especially just before she entered the home. At 8 years old the anticipation of what was to come was energetic. The expectation of the surprise and joy that was near was palpable and almost too much to bear for my younger self.

When my friend finally walked through the front door, the house erupted with "Surprise" and lots of cheering. My friend was in utter disbelief. She started crying with tears of joy. When asked about why she was crying, her response was simple. "I'm so happy." It wasn't just her. Everyone that was there was full of joy.

In our scripture reading for today, we read about how Heaven will rejoice over one sinner turning away from evil, repenting of their sin and being brought back home by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This utter joy that my friend felt pales in comparison to the joy that Heaven has when we repent, turn away from sin, and live for Christ.

REFLECT

The joy in Heaven when we repent is so much greater than any amount of joy we have here on Earth. What brings you joy today? What areas of your life do you need to repent? Not just asking for forgiveness from sin, but true repentance and giving it to Him.

DISCUSS

When was the last time you felt immeasurable joy? Describe in detail that experience.

PRAY

Heavenly Father, thank you for celebrating when I repent and turn my life over to you. Especially during this Advent season, may I be focused on the joy that is to come and not get caught up in the business of the season. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

BIO

Brian Gilman is a husband, and father of two. He enjoys being active, especially going on long walks and playing pickleball.

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

by Dorothy Landico

Read Luke 2:8-15

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An Angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:8-11

GOOD NEWS OF GREAT JOY

I have experienced many moments of great joy. In my marriage - meeting Jim and knowing in my heart that he was the person that God had chosen for my life partner so we could raise our children and serve the Lord together. There was nothing more that I wanted to do but raise a family and be a mom - and God gave us the birth of our sons! Then came the unspeakable joy in my heart of both sons growing and accepting the Lord as their personal Savior. The Lord only continued to increase our joy when they met their wives and became parents themselves, followed by years of watching our 9 grandkids grow up and go out into the world. On a recent weekend we were in the mountains celebrating together with all our family and I can truly say nothing brings me more joy and thankfulness. For each and every one of them, this is joy I have no trouble sharing.

Luke gives us the fullest account of the Christmas story. We never get tired of reading the gospel accounts of the humble birth of God's son Jesus. The story never grows old and it's a joy we should have no trouble sharing.

How can we even compare our joy with the joy the shepherds must have experienced with the news of Jesus? After they went to Bethlehem and saw Him for themselves, they went and spread the good news of great joy, telling people what the angel had told them, and then they returned to their fields praising and glorifying God.

Picture the lowly and humble shepherds out in the fields - they were unnoticed outsiders - doing their commonplace duty far from the

public eye. Yet these shepherds - ordinary men - became the first to hear the greatest news: God's Messiah was born! After going to Bethlehem and seeing the baby in a manger they couldn't keep the news to themselves. They told everyone. They became God's unexpected messengers of the birth of His Son.

Just like the shepherds, we have a story to share! God can use our voice in ways beyond anything that we could expect.

Let's think about what a joyful response they had. What an example to us to share the wondrous story of Jesus Christ with others the way the shepherds did. He uses ordinary people like them and like us. Do we take that joy in our hearts and share it with those around us? He delights in those of us who are ordinary.

REFLECT

Throughout the Bible, God works through unlikely people. We often don't see the big picture but choose to trust in him anyway. The shepherds became God's unexpected messengers to proclaim the birth of His Son. They had no idea of the big picture.

In similar fashion, let us follow their example by letting God work through us, our personal stories, and our everyday moments.

DISCUSS

When was the last time you were asked to share the joy of the Lord with those around you?

What was your response?

PRAY

Lord, thank you for the everyday joy that you surround us with. Help us to be aware of the areas that we can share with others.

Help us celebrate Christ's joy in our everyday life with others and share the story of Jesus' birth - the greatest story ever told bringing hope and joy to all. Amen

BIO

Dorothy Landino is a wife, mom, grandma, and lover of golden retrievers who loves reading and traveling.

Wednesday, December 17, 2025

by Kent Edmonds

Read Psalm 30:1-5

"Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning."

Psalm 30:4-5

A SONG OF PRAISE

A number of years ago I was working for my friend Don, who was a Lead Systems Engineer. He had asked me for my support since I had designed part of the system hardware and was the only remaining person who was familiar with the original product details and development. Fred also supported the project and was part of Don's section. Fred's work ethic was to promote himself as fast as possible and to do whatever he could - right or wrong - to make that happen. At customer meetings, Fred made false statements so Don would look bad so that he could take over his role. This went on for a long time.

One day as I was heading back to my office I was waiting for the elevator. When the doors opened, my heart skipped a beat and I was breathless because Don was on a gurney with two paramedics navigating him to an ambulance. His face was frozen and eyes almost closed. I shouted out, "Don, what happened? Are you ok?" He was silent. I learned that Don had had a stroke during a meeting with Fred and the customer.

Later that same day I was asked to take over Don's role until he returned. Now Fred attacked me using the same strategy as he did with Don. I always countered his false statements, but he was aggressive. Fred really made work life tough, not only for me but for the whole team. We went through trials and tribulations I'd never seen before due to his actions. It felt like Satan was using and working through Fred.

During this oppressive time, I prayed every day for God to bless our program team with success and that everyone's mental and physical health would remain intact. Along with many others, I also prayed every day for Don to recover from his stroke and for his family to be assured that God would heal him so that they would be able to enjoy a lifetime together.

God answered our prayers. Although Don was away from work for many months, he fully recovered from his stroke. Fred's unethical daily conduct was addressed by Human Resources, and he was fired. Our program successfully delivered the upgraded system ahead of schedule and received lots of customer praise.

I believe this experience shows that God is always there for us. He hears our prayers and, as we live by His word, He lifts us out of the depths. God brings joy after a long and dark night.

REFLECT

Think of those times in your life where you've experienced deep challenges, loss, and heartache. These are times in our lives when God's presence becomes more real. They remind us that our life isn't about avoiding challenges but about finding and drawing closer to God in the midst of it. The period of weeping during the night may seem long and intolerable, but we have hope for a joyous dawn. The joy we experience comes from the transformation that occurs within us. Our faith is strengthened as we see God by our side during these challenges. This gives us a deeper understanding of how God works in our lives and the joy that He brings. As we live our daily lives, let us have the hope, faith, and knowledge that our challenges, no matter how long lasting through the night, joy comes in the morning.

DISCUSS

How can the promise of joy in Psalm 30:5 bring light to your current challenges? In what ways can maintaining a hopeful outlook shape your experience during tough times?

PRAY

Our Heavenly Father, I'm reminded of the words in Psalm 30:5, about joy coming after hardship. Life can be tough, and sometimes it feels like hard times just won't end. But I hold on to Your promise that these moments are temporary and that joy is on the horizon. In times of worry or sadness, help me to remember to turn to You to guide me on the right path. Thank you for being with me through every difficult time and for the joy that You bring after the darkest nights.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

BIO

Kent Edmonds is a retired aerospace engineer, a husband, a father, and grandfather. He enjoys cycling (especially Biking Across Kansas), traveling the world, and black and white fine-art photography.

Thursday, December 18, 2025

by Jeff Cook

Read Acts 16:16-34 (NIV)

²⁵ About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶ Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. ²⁷ The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. ²⁸ But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" ²⁹ The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰ He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" ³¹ They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³² Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³ At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. ³⁴ The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household."

Acts 16:25-34 (NIV)

JOY IN THE MIDNIGHT HOUR

How do we find joy in dark places? Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? How do we get joy and peace from tragedy? I've given much thought to these questions for most of my adult life, especially as a follower of Christ. I'm sure we all can relate to Paul in some way in our lives. We all have our battles, our prisons. For most, this is metaphorical, for others it's as real as the air we breathe. Each year, no matter the circumstances, we as followers of Jesus often find joy as we round the corner into December. We remember the joy of the birth of our beloved savior. We remember family, delicious food, Christmas, and the hope of a new year and new beginnings.

In the book of Acts, there is so much we can draw from to answer the questions above. These are questions we as Christ followers wrestle with day in and day out. Specifically in Acts 16, Paul and Silas were doing good work – healing, teaching and helping the vulnerable. And what did they receive? False accusations, a violent beating, and ultimately chains and imprisonment. If our joy is dependent on

comfort, safety or fairness, this story would end here. However, for followers of Jesus, joy is not the absence of hardship. Joy is the presence of Christ right in the middle of it with us.

Paul and Silas chose to focus on the goodness of God rather than their circumstances and the injustice around them. Sure, their bodies bore physical wounds, but their spirits and faith were alive with hope! Advent reminds us that Jesus came into a hurting and fallen world, not a perfect one. Joy does not wait on everything to be fixed or “all better.” Joy arrives in the middle of the mess, sometimes in the middle of the night.

Midnight is the darkest and quietest moment of the night. Acts 16:25 tells us that about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God. Think about that! In their pain, they sang. In their fear, they prayed. In their uncertainty, they were filled with joy as they lifted their voices to God. And what else happened? *The other prisoners listened.* Joy in the Lord has a powerful voice, and it's loud enough to echo in a prison.

In this moment, something remarkable happens. The ground shakes. Chains snap open. Doors fly wide. The miracle didn't come before their worship; it came during it. Worship doesn't end our persecution or earn God's intervention, but it opens our hearts to see his power and presence. Instead of escaping, Paul and Silas chose compassion. They stayed to save a jailer's life! *Their joy is not self-centered, it's Kingdom centered.*

Advent joy is like that – it's not just for us to feel good or better. It is for us to share, to embody, to live out in ways that help others encounter God. It is a joy that transforms lives! The jailer asks Paul. “what must I do to be saved?” And Paul simply answers: “Believe in the Lord Jesus.” And the scripture says he was filled with joy because he had come to believe!

This advent joy – joy that sings even when life is heavy. Joy that looks toward the promised Messiah and says, “The light is coming, even if I can't see it yet.”

REFLECT

How do you respond when you find yourself in the darkest-quietest moments of midnight? Can you see or feel the joy in such places? In what ways have you experienced God's presence in difficult circumstances or situations? The joy of Advent is strong enough to fill a prison and gentle enough to enter a manger.

DISCUSS

Paul and Silas's joy made an impact upon the prisoners and even the jailer and his entire family. How might your own expressions of joy influence the people around you?

PRAY

Lord, thank you for bringing joy into our world. A joy that shines in the darkness, sings in suffering, and transforms lives. Give us hearts like Paul and Silas, filled with worship in difficult moments. Help us to see your presence, trust your power, and share your joy with others, Amen.

BIO

Jeff is a devoted husband and father of two, working in public safety technology. He loves the outdoors and shares a strong bond with his wife, and together they cherish the joy of raising their kids and traveling as a family.

Friday, December 19, 2025

by Lori Hall

Read James 1:2-4

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

James 1:2-4

TRIALS CAN BE A GOOD THING!

I must admit when I saw this verse for the week of Joy, I thought someone had made a mistake. After all, it's Christmas time and who wants to include *“trials of many kinds”* in your wish list? But as I started thinking about it, it seemed God was reminding me of some important lessons he's been teaching me this year, and how he's using hard times to do it. There's no better time than the birth of Jesus to help us understand how trials can lead to joy.

Obviously, the Father considered his Son to be the greatest Joy gift he could ever give us. Scripture contains many verses that talk about real joy being a relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and here are some examples. Psalm 16:11 says ‘You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.’ John 15:11 - ‘These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.’ Romans 14:17 - ‘For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.’ And John 16:22 - ‘So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.’ But how do trials fit into this....??

We all know our human tendency, when hard times come, is to try and fix it. As quickly as possible. We want control. We don't want to hurt. Our brains are wired to keep us safe and alive. And happy. But our safe and happy often do not cause us to seek out Jesus. In fact, our safe and

happy can cause us to skip Jesus and do life on our own, forgetting that we need him for everything.

On the other hand, hard times often cause us to admit we need Jesus. Paul Miller, in his book **'A Praying Life'** says, *"God often permits suffering in people's lives. If Satan's basic game plan is pride, seeking to draw us into his life of arrogance, then God's basic game plan is humility, drawing us into the life of his Son. Suffering invites us to join his Son's life, death, and resurrection."* I take this to mean if we are continually talking to and leaning on Jesus, then we are sharing our life with him, and in return he is sharing his life with us. We die to our own ways, and we are raised into Jesus's ways. Our ways bring anxiety, fear, and frustration, but if we learn to persevere in waiting on Jesus, then his Joy will become ours.

But what is Jesus's joy? When Jesus was born, the angel announced, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy" (Luke 2:10). The joy of the Lord is the gladness of heart that comes from knowing God, abiding in Christ, and being filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus, when he walked on earth as a man, knew his Father, abided in Him and was filled with the Spirit, which gave him great joy. It is an amazing thought that we too, because of what Jesus did for us, can have the same intimate, abiding relationship and love from God that Jesus does, which helps us persevere through our trials.

When James says, in 1:2-4, that we are to let perseverance (ESV says steadfastness) finish its work so we are mature and complete, he is telling us to stop trying to fix our own hard things and go to God instead. Lament, cry, ask for help... share your heart with Him. This is not always easy, and honestly, I often fail. *My autopilot is set to 'do it myself' mode.* But I'm so thankful that God is patient, and He's happy when I give up and go to Him. It is comforting to remember that God is always there with open arms for us no matter how long it takes us, and He is ready to listen and help. And as we spend more time communicating what is in our head and on our heart, we grow in our relationship with God.

So in this Advent season, as we look forward to the birth of Jesus, we can know that our trials will be used to bring us closer to the Father and the Son as we, like Jesus, abide and are filled with the Holy Spirit, which in turn, fills us with great Joy.

REFLECT

God did not intend for us to face the trials of this life on our own. He gave us Jesus so we could find comfort, help, and joy every day - in all situations. Think of your most recent trial/hard time... if you were able to let God use it to grow you, what did you learn? Did it cause you to grow closer to Him?

DISCUSS

In what ways have you experienced joy while suffering through your trials in life? Do you think the trials were worth it for the positives that came out of them?

PRAY

Father, it is often so hard for us to 'consider it all joy when we face trials of many kinds'. We are programmed to prefer safe, easy, and happy. But we know that you use hard times to bring us close, and we know being close to you brings joy. Please help us to persevere in our trials by coming to you quickly instead of struggling on our own.

BIO

Lori Hall is a wife, mother of 2, and a grandmother of 2 awesome grandkids (who have 2 awesome parents!). Lori loves to cook, quilt, hike in the Sierras, and write dog training blogs for the website of a dog trainer/rescue organization.

Saturday, December 20, 2025

by Rick D'Amico

Read Psalm 146 and 1 Chronicles 16:7-36

*"Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!
I will praise the LORD while I live!
I will sing praises to my God while I have my being!"*
Psalm 146:1-2

DO YOU HEAR THE BELLS?

America's Poet-Laureate, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, penned the words to one of my favorite Christmas carols, *"I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."* I had no idea the poem was Henry's response to personal tragedy.

His wife was attempting to preserve a few locks of their daughter's hair using sealing wax. A breeze caused a few drops of the hot wax to fall and ignite her dress, and she ran screaming into Henry's study! He held her close to smother the flames but was unable to save her. Henry was so severely burned, he could not attend her funeral service. From that day on, he grew a long beard to conceal his scars from the world. However, not all scars are visible.

Not only was Longfellow's personal life in ruins, but our nation also faced a moral and political divide that nearly destroyed America! The Civil War claimed almost 750,000 lives. Amid the deadliest war in American history, Henry received a letter. His son, Charles, had been gravely wounded and was not expected to survive.

That first Christmas Henry wrote, "The little children say, 'A merry Christmas to you,' but that is no more for me." The following Christmas, he made a few journal entries but produced nothing for publication. That third December Henry's pen was silent. He wrote nothing.

Drowning in despair, Henry was awakened on Christmas morning by church bells proclaiming God's joyful message once sung to humble shepherds, "Peace on earth! Good will to men!" Something stirred within him, and he rushed to his desk to compose the poem, "*Christmas Bells*." Phrases and imagery spilled out onto the page like a waterfall!

*"And in despair I bowed my head,
'There is no peace on earth,' I said,
For Hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men."*

Henry commented later that the whole poem took less than five minutes to create, adding, "I felt as if someone was dictating the poem to me."

*"Then rang the bells more loud and deep,
God is not dead, nor doth He sleep!
The Wrong shall fail; the Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good will to men!"*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow renewed his faith in the God who is always faithful! He reconnected with the love of the God who had always loved him! In a twist of irony, the acclaimed author stands beside the illiterate shepherds, overflowing with the Joy of Jesus' coming!

As a finale, Longfellow ends this epic poem with a searching question and a desperate plea from the very heart of God for every one of us.

*"Do you hear the Bells; they're ringing ~
Like the angels singing!
Open up your heart and hear them!"*

REFLECT

Each of us has scars from recent wounds, old injuries, and current struggles. How are you dealing with all that? Do you have other believers who listen, who pray, who sit quietly, or who share their lives with you? Do you bury your pain and loss? Consider how you can lean into the goodness of God and find real Joy this Christmas!

DISCUSS

What is the best advice you have ever given someone? What is the best advice you have received? Where do you find joy at Christmastime?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father and loving King,

I know that your Son, Jesus, is my only *Hope*. Thank you for the *Peace* purchased through your sacrifice, Lord. I choose to open my heart to receive and experience authentic *Joy*. Help me hear the Christmas Bells calling me to lean into your *Love* and share that same love with those I meet. In Jesus' precious name I pray, Amen.

BIO

Rick D'Amico is the husband of Donna, the father of three, and "Grandpa" to six small people aged 12 to 2 years old. He loved teaching grades 3–6 for 36 years. Now retired, he travels often, enjoys the arts, sports, singing, and making new friends.

Love

Monday, December 22, 2025

by Bob Giampaoli

Read Romans 8:31-39

^{31b} “If God is for us, who can be against us? ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:31b, 35, 37-38

THAT’S A BIG “NO”!

No one likes to hear “No!”

“Mommy, can I have a candy bar?” --- “No!”

“Would you like to go to the dance with me? --- “Nooo, Ewuu!”

“Could you please loan me some money?” --- “Sorry Pal, No!”

“Fluffy! No! Stay out of Mrs. Zimmerman’s flowers!”

It is often hard for us to accept that hearing a “no” is often out of love and concern for us. A father says “no!” when his child approaches a hot fire. An inspector says “no” when a job is not done correctly. A judge says “no” when an unlawful or unfair request is made by one party. These days, many people desire so badly to be loved and accepted they often refuse to say the word “no” out of fear of rejection or fear of missing out even if a “no” is warranted by the situation.

In today’s passage from Romans, Paul screams “NO!” at the top of his lungs. So, what’s got Paul so fired up in verse 37? Look back at verse 35 – the suggestion that we can be separated from the love of Jesus. And isn’t that so typical of us? When we experience hardship, sickness, loss of a job, persecution for our faith, rejection of a loved one, grave danger, loneliness, anxiety, death; how quick we are to question if God is present or if He is punishing us.

Paul's response to these thoughts is emphatic. We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. There is NOTHING that can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

I cherish Paul's reminder as we reflect this advent season. My God loves me so much that he came to Earth as a man to provide a way for me to know his eternal perfect love for me. He made his point so emphatically that he died on a cross for me so that I would never forget how much he loves me.

Paul screams "NO!" when we begin to lose focus on the truth of God's love for us. Let's shout "YES!" to God by praising and worshiping him with all our heart, mind, and soul this Christmas season!

REFLECT

Romans 8:38-39 is a passage that all Christians should memorize and meditate on. Try reading the passage over many times during your daily devotion and allow the Holy Spirit to speak these precious words directly into your soul. Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord!

DISCUSS

When have you heard God tell you 'no'? Share how you felt in the moment and how you felt after reflecting on God's reason for his answer. How did God's answer show his inseparable love for you?

PRAY

Father, fill me with confidence that your love for me is permanent. There is *nothing* that can separate me from your love. Thank you for coming as my Savior and Lord. Grant me the serenity of knowing that I am your precious child as I celebrate the Christmas miracle this year. Amen.

BIO

Bob Giampaoli teaches STEM classes at a local Christian high school. He and his wife Alesia love to travel, play games, and dance – most any style!

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

by Jenn Hoffmeyer

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

“If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels...if I had the gift of prophecy...if I understood all of God’s secret plans and possessed all knowledge...if I had such faith that I could move mountains...if I gave everything I have to the poor and even sacrificed my body, I could boast about it, but if I didn’t love others, I would have gained nothing. Three things will last forever — faith, hope, and love — and the greatest of these is love.”

1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 13

WITHOUT LOVE, IT’S WORTHLESS

Writing a devotion about love is hard. So much has already been said about it. It has been written about, put to music, made into movies, analyzed, discussed, and studied since the beginning of history! We humans love all sorts of different things – a delicious meal, a beautiful landscape, a fun hobby, a thrilling experience, a meaningful conversation – all of which typically generate very positive feelings, which we then call “love.” We also experience different types of love with different people – platonic love with friends (philia), affectionate love with family members (storge), and passionate romantic love with a significant other (eros). Though these person-to-person types of love are generally deeper than love of things or experiences, our relationships also tend to ebb and flow depending on our feelings. But then there is the love of God (agape, chesed), which falls into a totally separate category.

Even though we have an entire Bible filled with descriptions and examples of God’s love, we still struggle to comprehend and experience it. John tells us that God IS love and that we love because He first loved us (check out 1 John 4). We also know that God doesn’t just feel love; he demonstrates it — to all of humanity (Romans 5:8 and John 3:16). But probably the most explicit, thorough, and best-known writing on love comes from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, affectionately known as the “Love Chapter.” In it, he details out the qualities and characteristics of God’s love:

Love *emanates* patience, kindness, truth, resilience, faith, hope, endurance, and perseverance.

Love *rejects* envy, boasting, arrogance (pride), rudeness, selfishness, anger, resentment (keeping a record of wrongs), and evil.

Most of us have heard or read this passage numerous times. It is often used in wedding ceremonies because we desire to experience that kind of love in our marriages! But Paul wasn't writing to the Corinthians about marriage. He wasn't even trying to describe the love of God. Actually, if you read the chapter before, he was writing to remind the church that God has given different gifts to each member of the body, that all are needed and valuable, and that we are to minister to each other (and the world) with those gifts. But if we fail to love the people we're serving, our work will be annoying at best and worthless at worst.

For our ministry to be effective, it must stem from and all be done with God's love: an unselfish, enduring, sacrificial love expressed through action. Of course, it's hard to nail down exactly what that looks like in every situation. Sometimes the loving thing might be painful; other times it may be misinterpreted as unloving. But thanks to Paul's practical list, we have some ways to know what real love looks like.

I think today's passage is an important reminder for all of us, especially as we get close to Christmas. There is a LOT going on – ministry and otherwise. Most of us will be seeing, spending time with, and serving a lot of different people over the next couple weeks, and we are carrying around lengthy to-do lists, full calendars, and high expectations. But let's not forget that no matter how much we do or how well we do it, it will all be useless without the love of God. May we take time each day to ask the Holy Spirit to fill us with God's perfect, selfless love and show us how to make that central in our families, friendships, and ministry, as we head into Christmas and throughout the year.

REFLECT

Loving other people can sometimes be quite tricky. How can we know whether we're loving people well or just wanting to feel good (or not make someone else feel bad)? Which characteristic of God's love do you find comes easiest for you? Which one feels the hardest? How can you integrate more love into your ministry to others?

DISCUSS

Would you define love as more of a feeling or an action?

PRAY

Lord, we are in awe of your love. It's so deep and rich and beyond our full understanding. We know it is your will for us to love you and love others, but on our own we are unable. Holy Spirit, enable us to love like you. Fill us up with your love, that we might overflow and incorporate it in all we do, so that our ministry is effective and long-lasting. Thank you for loving us first and giving us the example of your perfect son, Jesus. Amen.

BIO

Jenn Hoffmeyer is a wife and mom to 2 kids. She is a self-proclaimed math nerd who snacks on dark chocolate, loves to sing, and feels closest to God climbing on rocks in the Sierra Nevada's.

Wednesday, December 24, 2025

By Rebecca Reeves

Read Lamentations 3:22-26

*"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions
never fail. They are new every morning..."*

Lamentations 3:22-23a

ABIDING LOVE

Christmas is a season filled with so many feelings and emotions. It has always been my favorite season. It was my grandpa's favorite holiday too; he and I both had Christmas birthdays, and he always knew how to make it extra special. But for the last 25 years, my favorite holiday has come mixed with grief. December 23, 2000, was my grandpa's 72nd birthday. We lost him the very next day on Christmas Eve.

Grief is a heavy thing, leaving us feeling uncertain and uneasy. I'll never forget that first Christmas without him, sitting in my aunt's living room surrounded by my grieving family. My grandma (Grammy) decided that we all needed to sing hymns together, something that was not one of our usual Christmas traditions, and so she pulled out the Hymnal and my brother played "Abide With Me" on the piano. We all sang and Grammy quietly taught us to look for God's love in our grief:

"Abide with me; fast falls the eventide.
The darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide.
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, oh abide with me."

There are seasons in life when everything feels heavy; when grief, disappointment or uncertainty sit like a weight on the heart. We've all been through some hard seasons, and none of us are immune to pain. Yet right in the middle of our struggle, a quiet but radiant truth is there: God's love remains. We can sit in our devastation and look within at our sorrow and declare "Because of the Lord's great love, we are not consumed" (v. 22). God's love doesn't erase pain, but it

supports us through it. His love does not prevent all the storms we face in life, but it becomes the shelter that we can return to again and again.

“Oh, thou who changest not, abide with me.”

Every morning, His compassion starts fresh. We don't have to rely on yesterday's strength or last week's optimism. His love renews its welcome at each sunrise. It meets us where we are, not where we think we should be. His love is the kind of love that doesn't grow tired, run out, or reconsider its commitment to us. It's ours, and it's enough for today, for tomorrow, and for the waiting season when answers don't come quickly. “The Lord is my portion, therefore I will wait for him” (v. 24).

Christmas is always hard for me; that Christmas 25 years ago was especially hard. This coming Christmas will be another one that will be especially hard. Grammy passed this August at 94 years old, and this will be our first Christmas without her. Just before she passed, my family and I gathered around her bedside, and she insisted once again that we sing hymns. As we sang “Abide With Me” over and over, we were reminded how to look for God's love in our grief.

“I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.”

This is the promise in these verses from Lamentations: that God's love stands with us in the waiting, in the quiet, in the longing; His love holds us steady when nothing else makes sense. These verses invite us to rest in love that never leaves, trust in compassion that never fails, and wait with hope for Him whose faithfulness rises with every dawn. Christmas might be a hard time of year for some of us, but let us find comfort in the beauty that God's love for us prevails against the darkness.

“Heaven's morning breaks and Earth's vain shadows flee
In life, in death, Oh Lord abide with me.”

REFLECT

In this advent season, ask yourself what part of your life feels consuming or overwhelming. How might God's unfailing love be meeting you there? Where have you recently experienced God's love sustaining you through a difficult or uncertain moment?

DISCUSS

What does it look like for you to "wait quietly" on God in this season of your life?

PRAY

Lord, thank you for your steadfast love and the new mercies you give each day. Help me to rest in your faithfulness, even when I cannot see what comes next. Teach me to wait on you with trust and a hopeful heart.

BIO

Rebecca Reeves is a wife and mother of three. She bleeds Dodger Blue and enjoys needlecrafts such as sewing (especially quilting), knitting, crochet, and embroidery.

Read Luke 2:1-20

"And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'"

Luke 2:8-12

WHAT IS CHRISTMAS?

Our culture says that Christmas is just another holiday. In fact, "Merry Christmas" is replaced by "Happy Holidays" to avoid offending others. This season is celebrated by some time off work or school, as a terrific marketing opportunity, as an excuse to party. It is heralded by the appearance of Christmas decorations, toys, trees, lights, and more at Costco even before summer is over. Will stores have enough of this year's must have children's gifts? Will Christmas season sales make for a profitable year for retailers? Will my house's decorations impress passersby? Will any of this reflect the reason that we celebrate Christmas? Sadly, no.

The shepherds in today's passage didn't see advertisements for trees, decorations, or gifts. What they received was a Heavenly message from angels of the Lord. That message was not to spend money. It was a message of good news, testifying to the perfect love of God, that our Savior had been born.

We may say we love something or someone, and we are sincere when we do. We may even be willing to die to save a loved one. But the strongest love that we can express has no comparison to the extravagant love demonstrated by the Lord our God, who set aside His Heavenly perquisites, took on the form of a helpless baby to experience being human, so that ultimately, although without sin Himself, He could

take on the sin of all of us and pay the price for our sins, embracing the punishment we deserve so that we might have eternal life with Him.

REFLECT

Take time this advent season to focus on the true meaning of Christmas. It is not about time off work, decorations, Santa, elves, gifts, fancy meals or parties. It is to honor the arrival of God in human form to show us how to live and to love. Perhaps watch “A Charlie Brown Christmas,” where all the hustle and bustle and commercialization of the season is replaced by remembering the true meaning of Christmas.

DISCUSS

What makes someone “unlovable?” How can we learn to love even the “unlovable?”

PRAY

Heavenly Father, help us to remember the true meaning of Christmas. Open our hearts to your message of love and encourage us to love others as you love us.

BIO

Dale Mooney is a retired electrical engineer, a husband, father of three, and grandfather of four. He enjoys traveling the world, bicycling, and spending time with his wife, children and grandchildren.

Thanks for reading!

Merry Christmas!