

We are thrilled to present our 2024 Advent devotional. It is a collection of insights written by people at Discover Christian Church. Thank you to each person who contributed to make this book possible. It is a beautiful reflection of the body of Christ, each part having a unique role to play.

As we embark on this season of Advent, we are reminded of the profound significance of waiting and preparing for the coming of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This devotional is a labor of love, created to guide us through these weeks with intentionality and reflection.

Advent is a time of anticipation and hope, a season where we look forward to celebrating Christ's birth while also yearning for His return. Each day's entry is a unique offering, a piece of our collective story, providing spiritual nourishment, encouragement, and challenges. Through scripture, personal stories, and heartfelt prayers, these devotions are meant to deepen our connection with God and with each other.

As we read these pages, may we find ourselves drawn closer to the heart of God. Let this be a time of renewal and rediscovery of the true meaning of Christmas. Together, let us embrace the hope, peace, joy, and love that come with the Advent season.

May this devotional be a blessing to you and your family, and may it inspire us all to live out the message of Christ in our daily lives.

In Christ's Love,

Discover Christian Church

A thrill of
HOPE

DECEMBER 1-7

GOD WITH US

Diane League & Elaine Young

Read Isaiah 7:14 NIV

It is an exciting time of anticipation and hope as the Advent Season starts. Today's verse reveals that God is always looking forward too. Long ago, God called Isaiah to be a messenger to the people of Judah. It was a time of upheaval and rumors of war between Israel and Judah. Isaiah told king Ahaz of Judah, to stand firm and trust in God, but Ahaz panicked and turned away from God. He looked to the neighboring country for help. This situation was not according to God's will, but he still loved the Jewish people. God had something to say to both, Judah and Israel that would change their future. God foretells a time in the future that something wonderful will happen to not only the Jewish people but all people.

Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call Him Immanuel. Isaiah 7:14. Immanuel means God with us, Jesus Christ. God has given us reason for hope. God has sent a savior. He sent God to us.

Hope is the confident expectation of what God has promised us: His strength and faithfulness.

In the Hallmark movie *Royally Wrapped for Christmas*, the charity starts a new tradition of giving two gifts, one for the person to keep and one to give to bless someone else. As you enjoy this Advent season, think of ways to bless others with the gift of hope in God by sharing your faith, putting faith in action with service, and sharing about Jesus: The reason for the Season. A gift for them, with the hope that they would share the gift you gave with someone else.

Today's Prayer:

Heavenly Father, Sovereign God,

There is always hope in trusting you. God, I appreciate all the ways you have expressed your love for me. Thank you for your son, Immanuel who showed us the character of God.

HOPE | DECEMBER 1

DO NOT SWERVE

Jenna Smith

Read Hebrews 10:23 NIV

It happens in the blink of an eye. One moment, you are driving down the road on a beautiful, calm, sunny day, and in a split second, a squirrel decisively dashes across the road in an effort to win the race against your vehicle. Within that moment, it's decision time. Do you brake, speed up, veer, or swerve?

My grandpa was an insurance salesman, and in a roundabout way, his profession changed the way I drive. He taught my mom, and my parents taught me, "Never swerve to miss an animal." Often, more damage and loss of human life occur because people swerve. I love animals, so I was taught early and often to "never swerve." To this day, when I see that little squirrel dart across the road, I consciously tell myself, "Do not swerve, do not swerve, do not swerve," while white-knuckling the steering wheel and hoping the little guy makes it across the road before my tires cross his path. It's an internal battle to fight the external urge to swerve. The world encourages us to swerve, but we are not of this world. *"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."* – John 17:16 CSB

We must practice daily, holding unswervingly to the steering wheel of life. We must be unshakeable and steadfast in our hope in Jesus. *"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the Lord's work, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."* – 1 Corinthians 15:58 CSB

"I always let the LORD guide me. Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken." – Psalm 16:8 CSB

We have hope that came in a tiny baby named Jesus. His promises are true, and He is faithful. We hold onto that hope, without gripping the steering wheel, unswerving in our faith or veering in our love and trust in the One who came to earth to save us. *"Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel."* – Isaiah 7:14 NIV

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it." – John 1:1-5 CSB

HOPE | DECEMBER 2

GOD'S PROVISION OF POWER

George & Kathy Fisher

Read Isaiah 40:28-31 NIV

In the midst of the despair over a country which was decaying on the inside and being threatened from the outside, God (through the prophet Isaiah), points to hope. He reminds the people that “those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.” The Hebrew word there is variously translated as “hope” (NIV), “wait” (ESV, NASB), or “trust” (CSB, NLT). Actually, all of those translations are appropriate, because all of these ideas are contained in that word.

Where are you placing your hope? Too often we place our hope in people. Or we wait for our circumstances to change. But people fail us. Change doesn't happen in the way or at the speed which we want. So instead, our hope needs to be in the unchanging God. We need to wait for God to act, not for things around us to change.

We need to remember that God has no equal (cf. v. 25), and that He is the Creator (cf. v. 28). We need to remember in our weariness that God does not grow weary and that He is able to give us strength (vv. 28 & 29).

As we trust in God, we might desire to soar like eagles (and sometimes we do), but maybe we are doing well (by God's power) merely to run, or maybe even simply to walk. But with God's power, when we have no power of our own, we can keep going! Rely on His power today!



HOPE | DECEMBER 3

SHARE WHAT YOU'VE WITNESSED

Emiline Ellis

Read 1 Peter 3:15 NIV

During this first week of Advent, we celebrate hope in the midst of waiting. The prophets who foretold Jesus' birth spoke of the hope of salvation for Israel as they awaited the Messiah. As we now await Christ's final return, we too, as Christians, should be a people of hope. Not a “wishful thinking,” worldly kind of hope, but a deep-seated, joyful assurance that Christ has redeemed us, and that He will one day restore God's perfect intention for Creation.

This verse tells us that we should be ready to give an answer for this hope. The fact that we are to have an answer ready assumes that people should notice that there is something different about our lives—something intriguing...hopeful. The way we live should invite questions. We're called to simply give an “answer,” not a sermon, defense, argument, or grand speech. When people ask, it is not our job to preach or convert, but rather to simply be a witness, sharing from our experiences how Jesus has transformed our lives. Like a witness in a trial, it's not our job to be the lawyer arguing for the defense or prosecution, nor the jury debating guilt vs. innocence, nor the judge handing out a verdict; we are simply called to share what we've witnessed.

This verse concludes with a charge to be careful how we answer people when we give this “eyewitness testimony.” As culture shifts around us, Christians can often feel attacked and put on the defensive. It's easy to look around and feel hopeless about events, issues, situations, and people who offend us and our faith. But remember, our lives should invite questions, not shut people down. Our conversations, social media posts, and every interaction should be gentle and respectful. We should engage in relationships with people, loving and serving them where they are—even (or maybe especially) if they believe, act, talk, look, or vote differently than we do. The hope that we have is not founded on political parties, a moral code, checklists of righteous living, going to church every Sunday, or following man-made rules.

Culture will change, but Jesus does not. The church will always be counter-cultural if we're truly living lives that bear witness to Jesus. So, rest in His sure hope, and do not be afraid to engage with people who are seeking, but always with gentleness and respect.

HOPE | DECEMBER 4

FINISH THE RACE

The Potts Family



Read 1 Thessalonians 1:3 NIV

Last year, our family set a goal to run a half marathon together. Julie had previously run several half marathons. Brady and Andrew were experienced cross-country runners but had never competed in a half marathon. Jason was the least experienced runner; he had run nothing more than a 5k and had no real training. Julie and Jason found and followed a training plan to prepare them, while the boys used their cross-country practice mileage to put them on a path for success. We all had faith that if we were devoted to our training, we would accomplish our family goal. Some days were harder to train than others, and as individuals, it would have been easy to quit. The support, encouragement, and love we showed each other pushed us all as we got closer and closer to race day. As race day arrived, we were ready. We felt inspired by the hope, given to us by God, that we would have the endurance to finish the race as a family.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonian Christians, he spread the message that hope, faith, and love would give them strength to continue their good works. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 shows us that FAITH gets us heading in the right direction, LOVE gets us moving, and HOPE keeps us moving when things get tough. It is this hope in God that gives each one of us the strength we need to run any race or meet any challenge.



HOPE | DECEMBER 5

HOPE FOR THE BROKEN HEARTED AND CRUSHED IN SPIRIT

Jim Brechtbuhler

Read Psalm 34:18 NIV

One of my favorite Bible verses is Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." On its own, it's a very comforting verse and brings hope. But as we dive into the context of this psalm, we find that three things are necessary for us to experience this hope.

David wrote this psalm after his escape from Abimelech. He immediately calls Israel to join him in praising the Lord and being glad in Him. David was no stranger to suffering, yet he rejoiced. The apostle Paul, also no stranger to suffering, tells us to "rejoice always." How could they rejoice in the face of suffering? Because they were in a right relationship with the Lord. He saved them for eternity, something believers need to remember and celebrate daily, regardless of our circumstances!

Then, in verse 7, David paints a beautifully rich picture of the Lord encamping around us when we are under siege. How comforting to know that Jesus has our back in times of trouble. When all we can see are troubles, Jesus is facing out toward our enemies, while at the same time comforting us.

Lastly, David notes that this promise of hope is for the righteous, for those who fear the Lord. This doesn't mean we're to be scared of Him. Fear of God means having reverence and awe for Him. It's a promise to sincere worshippers of God. David goes on to note that we need to learn about God, keep our tongues from evil, speak truthfully, be obedient to God's commands, do good, and pursue peace. The expectations of obedience and corresponding hope are simply common sense. To live contrary to what God calls us to, to rebel against Him, is an affront to Him. Yet, in our culture today, expecting God to rescue us while living in opposition to Him is all too common.

Many times, it is our disobedience that puts us in soul-crushing circumstances. Does that mean God will not hear or rescue us due to our misdeeds? Not at all! His pattern is to hear the cries of His repentant believers and then come alongside them. If our disobedience has landed us in a soul-crushing situation, we need to repent and move forward, seeking wisdom and holiness. Know that Jesus is encircling you and hearing your prayers. He knows what the future holds for you!

HOPE | DECEMBER 6

WARM, FUZZY, & CONTENT

Levi Rhodes

Read Romans 15:13 NIV

Think of your favorite donut. My favorite doughnut is a raspberry-filled one from Krispy Kreme. As I enter the store, I'm hit with the warmth and the smell of the donuts baking. I always seem to get the raspberry-filled one. Once I have it in my hand, I feel the warmth and smell how good the donut is. The first bite I take is warm, and it has this sweet cake flavor. Then, I start getting the raspberry jelly, which gives it a sweet tartness. After this first bite, I feel warm, fuzzy, content, and at peace.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

—Romans 15:13

The way you feel after eating a doughnut—the contentment, the fuzzy feeling, and the peace—is similar to the feeling that God wants us to experience when we spend time with him. Reading the Word and praying, the trust that we have in him allows us to feel joyful and peaceful. These feelings overflow into everything we do.

I'm always sad when I finish eating the doughnut, but I'm hopeful and I feel at peace.

REFLECT ON *hope*

Who is someone that God is calling you to share the hope of Jesus with?

What are some practical ways you can do that this week?

HOPE | DECEMBER 7



MAKE A ROOM AVAILABLE

Jill Lance

Read Luke 2:1-7 NIV

Read Luke 2:2-7, John 7:42 John 14:27 Matthew 25:40 Psalms 121:1

Reading this important passage in Luke makes me wonder why the people of Bethlehem did not provide a warm, safe place for this couple and their soon-to-be-born son. This was the town where Joseph's family line originated. Mary wrapped Him in blankets and laid Him in the manger. Did she pack those for the trip in case she gave birth, or were they donated by people in Bethlehem? Were these same people willing to donate, but not give up their warm beds for someone in great need?

There was a church in a rural community that was asked to open its doors to a few homeless people when the city shelters were full. The mission's request was met with some resistance from the church committee. After all, the kitchen had just been remodeled... But goodness and mercy prevailed, and the church agreed to take in these guests. As the transporter pulled into the church parking lot, a little girl with her mother got out of the car. The little girl was amazed when she saw this enormous building with its Victorian gables and spires. She looked at her mom and said, "Look, Mommy, we're staying in a castle tonight."

During this season, we see so many opportunities and ways to give to those in need. We come together as a church, Life Group, family, or community to give. This is a time of giving, and we want to share so others have toys, food, and clothes. The thought of a child going without at Christmas breaks our hearts. Certainly, we are called to give and give generously.

As Christians, we are also called to share the peace we have in Jesus. When physical needs are met and an example of what it means to be like Jesus is revealed to a person, this is the perfect time to share the gospel. Words and actions together are more compelling than either one alone.

Dear God,

During this season of giving, help me see the full needs of the person You place in my path. From the peace You have given me, give me opportunities and courage to share this with others.

In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

PEACE | DECEMBER 8

BREAK DOWN A WALL

Rachel Griffith

Read Romans 12:18 NIV

Before his unlikely conversion, Saul viciously persecuted Christians, clinging to his beliefs. Filled with murderous anger, Saul began his journey to Damascus, where he encountered Jesus and was blinded (Acts 9).

The Lord came to a man named Ananias in a vision and told him to go to Saul, laying his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias was hesitant, saying, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem." (Acts 9:13).

Ananias had every reason to dismiss Saul, leaving him helpless. What sweet revenge that would have been! But the Lord commanded, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings, and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16).

Where Ananias saw a violent religious zealot, God saw potential. Where Ananias saw only the present, God saw the whole picture. Ananias trusted God, obeyed His command, and crossed a doorframe to break down a wall.

I have struggled for years with a difficult relationship. I clung tightly to my anger, but by the grace of God, the scales have fallen away. When I look up, I can see how my actions were hurting me and, worse, several of the people I love most. While I was busy pointing my finger at this other person, I failed to recognize the role I was playing in stirring up disorder. While my anger may have been justified, my actions were not. They certainly did not reflect Jesus.

I've only just begun the long, hard process of reparation. I still get caught up in my natural instinct to retaliate. I still mourn this broken relationship. But God is still good. I am learning to lean on the peace of Jesus and trust in the redemptive power of His love. God is merciful and patient, willing to repeat Himself over and over...and over again, until we unclench our hands, letting go of what *we think we know* to receive the message *He knows we need*. I celebrate the opportunity to drop to my hands and knees and pick up the pieces, knowing that He's right there helping me.

PEACE | DECEMBER 9



PEACE AMBASSADORS

Amy Douglas

Read John 16:33 NIV

Jesus tells us in Scripture that we will experience troubles in this world—it's a given, part of the journey. Yet, He consistently reminds us to place our worries in His hands so that we can experience peace. It seems so simple, but I know I'm not alone in stating that it is one of the most challenging things to do.

Considering recent events, coupled with political storms and tropical storms, our hearts may feel heavy more often than not. And that's not even taking into account personal battles, family woes, health matters, and unforeseen struggles that continuously creep into our lives. In John 16:33, Jesus offers a solution—His peace. He spoke these words to His disciples shortly before His crucifixion, knowing they would face immense turmoil in the near future.

Jesus doesn't sugarcoat the reality of our lives. He nearly promises us pain and despair. However, He reminds us to shift our focus from our difficult circumstances to His victory. Our problems are temporary in His light. And, as we experience His comfort, we can become a source of peace for others. Think of yourself as a Peace Ambassador when things are going well in your own life. When life seems particularly stressful and unfair, I always think of the Book of Job. Poor Job with all his adversities and misery! That's what many typically remember about this particular Scripture. But we must not forget the ending: Job's family and fortunes were restored, and he gained a deeper understanding of what it means to trust in God—even when faced with the unimaginable.

Have faith in Jesus during the toughest storms. Lean on the Lord through prayer and reach out to your church community when it's too tough to stand alone. We are all connected as brothers and sisters through Christ. Continue to support one another in love and strength as we navigate life's challenges together. And lastly, trust in God that peace will follow.

PEACE | DECEMBER 10

JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

Valeri Daniel

Read Romans 5:1-2 NIV

Paul begins his letter to the Romans by pointing out that we must first have faith. The path towards being a better person is to be justified by faith. To be justified is to be made right with God. How do we do this? Paul answers, by faith. God wants us to not only believe but to also trust Him. When we believe in Jesus and the resurrection, we have peace with God. We are no longer blocked by sin. God clothes us with His righteousness. He gives us grace because of our faith.

We have God's promise for a life of peace. This does not mean that we will not experience suffering or trials, however, He gives us peace to surpass all understanding while we are going through our journey. We rejoice in His glory.

Longing for peace
Amongst all chaos
Hostility is so high
It feels as if we're all lost.
We cry out to the Heavens
Our Maker, our Father
Is He the answer
Or will He bother?
He hears our cries
And comes in with force
We tell Him our sins
With hearts full of remorse
We believe in Jesus
And what He did on the cross
He took on the world's sins
So, we would not be lost.
The Peace God gives
Is like a petal of a flower
Unfolding in the morning sun
Growing closer to God, a strong tower.
Shout from the rooftops
Or whisper quietly to the wind
Boast in the glory of God
And newfound Peace within.

PEACE | DECEMBER 11

AT ALL TIMES AND IN EVERY WAY

Jim Rogers

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:16 NIV

Just before signing his second letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul included a prayer for that congregation:

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.” — 2 Thessalonians 3:16

Paul conveys a great deal of meaning in these two short sentences. Can you imagine experiencing peace at all times and in every way? As children of God, we should expect to live lives of peace—not just conveying peace through our actions, but experiencing peace in our lives as God the Father intended. The pieces are already in place. As Christians, we serve the Lord of peace, and we are filled with the Holy Spirit, who is inherently peaceful.

The circumstances of our world are constantly changing, bombarding our daily lives in countless ways. Our world has become a chaotic, often violent place, and we are reminded of this fact everywhere we look. This “noise” will become all-consuming if we allow it to—if we forget to live in constant communion with the Holy Spirit. We must open our hearts to the Holy Spirit within us, letting Him speak to us and guide us in every moment. Only then can we expect to live lives of true peace.

Jesus commands us not to let our hearts be troubled or afraid (John 14:27), which is often exceedingly difficult for us. However, it may be easier to fulfill His wish for us if we do not seek our sources of peace within the world around us. Instead, we should anchor our lives in our relationship with our Heavenly Father. By placing our lives completely in His capable hands, we can trust that His plans for us will be done and that we will experience His peace in our lives.



PEACE

Amber Petz

Read Matthew 5:9 NIV

Peace! Peace can be defined as “freedom from disturbance.” When I think of the word peace, I cannot help but think of the word chaos. Oftentimes, when I find myself praying for peace or wishing for peace, it is in the midst of chaos. As we enter the Christmas and holiday season, I am sure we all feel a little chaos at times and we all wish for more peace. There’s the Christmas shopping, trying to find the perfect gifts for people, baking Christmas cookies, running the kids to their Christmas parties, going to family gatherings, cooking family dinners, cleaning the house for those family dinners, wrapping gifts, work Christmas parties, traveling, and so on—all while trying to maintain the daily routines we had before this season. I can’t help but wonder if Mary and Joseph felt the same way leading up to that very first Christmas Day. They were in the middle of the census year. Fully pregnant with Jesus, Mary, along with Joseph, traveled a long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem to fulfill their census duties. I’m sure Mary was stressed. I am sure she was praying for some peace. Once in Bethlehem, Mary was ready to have the baby, but they had no place to stay in a crowded Bethlehem. Joseph, trying to find the perfect place for his baby’s arrival and trying to take care of Mary, was told there was no place at the inn. I bet he was praying for some peace. A stinky, dirty, animal-filled stable is where Mary and Joseph ended up that very first Christmas. Again, can you guess it? I’m sure they were wishing for some peace. Mary and Joseph were expectantly awaiting the birth of their son, God’s only Son. In the middle of the stable, they heard that first baby cry. Mary had the most perfect Son. She wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in the manger. I’m sure that is when Mary and Joseph found their peace—when they looked down into His eyes, the eyes of their soon-to-be Savior. All that now mattered was Jesus. The traveling, the stinky stable smell, where they were, how busy it was around them—it didn’t matter any longer. All that mattered was Jesus. Matthew 5:9 states, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” What if during this season we also looked at Jesus? What if we were so focused on Him that nothing else mattered? I cannot help but think if we did that—if we fully focused on Jesus and the meaning of Christmas—we would have peace and we would become peacemakers for those who do not know Him. A peacemaker is a person who brings about peace. There are many people around us who are feeling the chaos of Christmas and of life; they need the peace that only Jesus can give. Jesus was a peacemaker from the time He was born and He has called us to be peacemakers also. Because of Jesus’ birth, we can have peace. Because He lived a perfect life, we can have peace knowing that we have hope for the future in that we get to live with Jesus for eternity. How can we show peace this season to others? By fully focusing on Jesus Himself and what the birth of God’s only Son means.

RELINQUISH CONTROL

Ruth Rhodes

Read Philippians 4:6-7 NIV

Philippians 4:6-7 says, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Twelve years ago, our family moved from California to Ohio. On our second day of driving, we were involved in a car accident. An 18-wheeler lost control, and the trailer bounced three times off the car Joel was driving with our three younger children. I was following him in another car with our oldest, Joseph. We witnessed the accident, and it was terrifying to watch. In that situation, I had to send up a quick prayer for protection. Honestly, at that moment, I wasn't thinking of being thankful. In the aftermath, I did give thanks because no one was injured. Our car was banged up but still drivable. Joseph, who was eight at the time, said, “Mommy, it's like God reached down and put His hands around our cars and kept us safe.”

In our day-to-day life, we may not encounter major situations. When a problem arises, our reaction should not be panic and worry. Our go-to response should be “with prayer and petition, with thanksgiving.” While we are asking, we need to be thanking God for the answer beforehand. Honestly, it is hard to ask for something and be thankful for it before we have the answer. We have to truly trust that God has the best solution for the issue. Giving thanks ahead of time helps me relinquish control and hand over the problem and solution to God's capable hands. I feel God's peace, and oftentimes it doesn't make any sense. Once that peace begins to flow, it protects and guards, as if my heart and mind are in Christ's “protective custody.”

Praise God for answered prayer and His peace.

REFLECT ON *peace*

Set a timer and take at least five minutes to rest in God's peace, reflecting on His promises.

PEACE | DECEMBER 14



CHRISTMAS WISH

Preston Wilkin

Read Luke 2:8-20 NIV

Every year, my mom would ask me what I wanted for Christmas, and every year, I would say the same thing: a pet snake. Every year, my mom would reply, “Not gonna happen.” You see, I love animals, and my mom was afraid of snakes, so naturally, that’s what I wanted—but would never get. This went on for over 15 years. Then, one Christmas, after we had opened all the gifts, my mom said, “Hold on, I forgot one gift,” and went upstairs to get it.

This was really weird because my mom always made sure every person had the same number of gifts to open, even if that meant putting 12 items in one box—she made sure it was always the same number of boxes. So she came down with a massive gift bag and placed it in front of me. When I looked inside, all I could see was one piece of tissue paper covering something. As I reached in to see what it was, I felt it move in my hand and instantly knew what it was: the pet snake I had been asking for.

To say I was shocked and overjoyed at this pet I had been waiting for my entire life—and it was finally here—is an understatement. I even posted a picture of it on Facebook, and for those of you who know me, I don’t post anything, ever. Over the next couple of months, I basically told everyone about this snake because I was that excited about it. Even though my snake is nothing compared to the birth of Jesus, this is how I imagine the shepherds must have felt. They had been waiting for centuries for this exact day to come, and here it was. They were so happy and full of joy that they dropped everything they were doing and went to see Him. Afterward, they were filled with so much joy that it overflowed and spread to all those around them as they shared the news of the birth of the Savior. They didn’t care who was around, how that person felt about them, or if they were Jewish or Gentile—none of it mattered. All that mattered was letting everyone know the good news.

That good news should fill us up the same way. To the point where all we can do is tell others about the birth of Jesus and follow the example the shepherds set thousands of years ago. Just like the little boy who finally got his Christmas wish.

MAKE IT A HABIT

Angie Combs

Read Philippians 4:4-5 NIV

Joy is more than a happy feeling. It is a lasting emotion that comes from the choice to trust that God will fulfill His promises. Be joyful in all circumstances, the key word being all—something that is naturally hard for us to do. In order to have joy in all circumstances, we have to die to self and live fully and completely for God.

Rejoice in the Lord regardless of your circumstances. We serve a God who loves us and who is there for us in the good times and in the bad. In times of difficulty and in times of joy, He is with us on the mountaintop, and He is with us in the valleys. He is our ultimate source and the reason for our joy. We can experience peace through the power of God in all circumstances if we rejoice in the Lord always.

As I am faced with uncertainty all around me, I am reminded that God is good all the time. I have made it a habit to repeat these words over all my circumstances, and by doing so, I have found an indescribable peace and stillness that makes no sense and could only come from God.

Do you feel confident that God will always run to your rescue? Can you trust Him to relieve your pain and encourage your heart? Let your Heavenly Father show you that, through Him, even in your weakest moments, you are radiant and strong. Take courage in God’s love for you and be ready to conquer each day. When we focus on God and not our circumstances, we can find joy in life’s challenges!

REFLECT ON *joy*

What is a negative thought pattern or lie you believe? How can you plan to replace those with a habit of remembering God’s truth?



SAD XMAS

Heather Hines

Read James 1:2 NIV

A silent night. I know it's going to be joy to the world, but it's gonna be sad for me. — The Emotions, What Do The Lonely Do at Christmas

Over the past several years, I've noticed the term Sad Xmas popping up around the holidays. It shows up in Spotify playlists, on social networking forums, as relatable quote images, or in everyday conversations. It's a thing. It's real. And it's trending.

And it completely breaks my heart.

One, because I don't want to think about Christmas as something that's sad. And two, because, since I was never allowed to write the word "Xmas," I see the phrase Sad Xmas and automatically think, "Well, if we could just put Christ back in Christmas, then maybe things wouldn't be so sad."

But that's not fair, and it's definitely not true... because even when we do have Christ in our Christmas, the holidays can still be hard. For many of us, loneliness, loss, broken relationships, and unfulfilled dreams are part of our lives year-round. And in a season where happiness, cheer, and excitement are on full display, it can be hard to know what to do with feelings that are less than joyful.

This is okay. Fortunately, we don't have to figure this all out on our own. The good news of great joy to all people is that Jesus came to earth. And if we invite Him into our brokenness, He can help us navigate our emotions. God cares about our feelings. He designed us to be beautifully and emotionally complex.

When His Word tells us that we can "consider it pure joy... when [we] face trials of many kinds..." He is showing us that we can experience more than one emotion at a time. Joy can exist beside sorrow. Hope can exist beside grief. And as we work through all of them, He works to grow our faith.

If your Christmas is sad, stressful, lonely, or disappointing, I'm sorry. You are not alone. I pray that the messages of truth and the joy of Jesus' birth will speak louder to you than the world's messages of sadness, and that with God's help, you will be able to experience the joy of the Christmas season as you acknowledge and embrace the full spectrum of your emotions.

JOY | DECEMBER 17

CHILDLIKE, JESUS-LIKE JOY

Cindy Herpolsheimer

Read Hebrews 12:2 NIV

One Sunday morning after church a small, smiling boy came running toward me, waving something precious in the air. It was a squishy he had received from the treasure box – his reward for memorizing scripture. He excitedly showed me its details – it was his favorite color – placed it on my knee and made it do a happy little dance. I congratulated him on the hard work he had done to earn it and admired it with him. He turned suddenly serious, locked eyes with me, extended the treasure and without pause said, "He is for you."

I protested – this is yours! You are kind, but you can keep it, you deserve it! But with a big smile, he pressed it into my hand then turned and skipped joyfully away, glancing back once with a last happy wave.

When a child gives something uncoerced, he does it with visible joy. A perfect leaf, a colorful drawing, an intricate origami dragon – each gift received from a child is a picture of the joy that comes from giving. I keep them in a box to visit when my grown-up heart needs that reminder.

Jesus also gave me a joyful gift – He gave it to you, too! It's a gift He knew we could never deserve or repay, a painful, selfless and sacrificial gift. Jesus endured the cross, its pain and its shame, for the sake of joy! His joy was in doing the will of his Father, and in that, giving US a gift – in his worst moment, Jesus anticipated the joy of sharing eternal life and eternal joy with us! Hear that again – even in desperation, the thought of YOUR joy at receiving His gift gave JESUS joy! We cannot keep that gift in a box. Accept the gift he has pressed into your hand, then pass it on to others.

God's gift of Jesus changed everything – our every day and our eternity. What gift of love, selflessness and sacrifice will you in turn give this Christmas to change someone's day or holiday season or life? Will you sacrifice a tradition to serve dinner to those in need? Sacrifice the only free night on the calendar to babysit for a single parent? Sacrifice the allowance you've saved for a special purchase to give a gift to someone feeling unloved?

As you look for joy this Christmas season, look to Jesus – the author and perfecter of our faith – and his gift that we can never duplicate but should always imitate.

JOY | DECEMBER 18

SOURCE OF TRUE JOY

Tyler Bruney

Read Nehemiah 8:10 NIV

Every year, I look forward to going to my grandparents' house to celebrate Christmas with my extended family and eat delicious food that we only have this time of year. I always look forward to Grandma's homemade molasses cookies the most.

Many of us celebrate Christmas and the holiday season in a similar way: we get together with friends and family, and we enjoy delicious food and time spent together. These celebrations can bring us great joy, but we know that our joy is not from the food but from the relationships and time spent with those we care about most.

When Nehemiah is writing this, the Israelites have just returned from exile and worked tirelessly on rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem. The whole time, they were under threat from surrounding nations and people who did not want to see them restored to power. Despite the constant threat, the people of God found strength and courage in God to complete the work.

After they completed the wall, in the seventh month of the Jewish calendar (which is full of important holidays for the Jewish people, including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the Festival of Tabernacles), they gathered to hear readings from the Book of the Law of Moses. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are not exactly the books we turn to for holiday readings and celebrations today, but they were the books they read for this celebration. Ezra the priest read to them, and the Levites helped to explain to the people what the words they were hearing meant. This made the people weep and mourn because they realized they had been disobedient and rebellious. Nehemiah called the people to be joyful and to celebrate God's faithfulness and strength. That is the source of this joy and the sharing with all those around them.

This is the source of our joy today, too. As great as being with family, friends, and food is, they are not the source of our true joy. Jesus is our source of true joy and is the reason we celebrate this season. Like the people of Nehemiah's day, we should be sharing this joy with others. We should invite others in to celebrate and enjoy food and fellowship, while pointing them to Jesus, who is the reason for the season and the reason for true human joy.

JOY | DECEMBER 19

A DELIBERATE CHOICE

Megan Davenport

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NIV

The past few months have brought a great deal of heartache to my life and to my family. In truth, I have struggled to rejoice. I have felt stuck in the reality of sadness, tragedy, and loss in this world. My guess is that you have felt this way, or will feel this way, at some point in your life. Know that you are not alone in this experience. Know that God holds you every step of the way through this life. And know that God's will for you is something much more than staying stuck.

I truly believe that the chance to reflect on this verse was God reminding me of something very important: He knows that, because we live in a broken world, we will experience very difficult things in this life. He also knows that rejoicing, praying, and giving thanks will draw us closer to Him. He is the only one who can give us everlasting hope in this troubled world.

Rejoicing doesn't mean we discount our emotions or ignore the brokenness around us. Rather, it requires us to look outside our present circumstances and make the deliberate choice to change the attitude of our hearts to one of the hope that we have in Christ as believers—the hope of His return and of our salvation. Rejoicing requires a shift to a heart posture of gratefulness to God for what He has done and is doing in our lives. We can rejoice always, giving thanks in all circumstances, because we know that Christ has already overcome the world.

The best way I've found to have the fortitude to rejoice (especially amidst difficult circumstances) is to rely on and connect with God through prayer. When I'm experiencing sadness or heartache, reaching down deep for prayers of thankfulness makes me feel connected to our loving God, who has provided all that we have to be thankful for. Let's do that very thing right now. Let's pray.

Father,

Help me to rejoice today, no matter what else is going on around me. Help me choose to look outside myself and focus on the hope we have in Jesus, my gratefulness for Your faithfulness and love, and the joy that Christ has overcome the world! Thank You for the gift of Your Son and for Your everlasting love for us! Thank You for this letter from Paul to the Thessalonians, which describes Your will for us and reminds us of how we can draw close to You. Today, I choose to rejoice!

JOY | DECEMBER 20



EXPECTATION VS. REALITY

Kevin & Caleb Kerr

Read 1 Peter 1:8 NIV

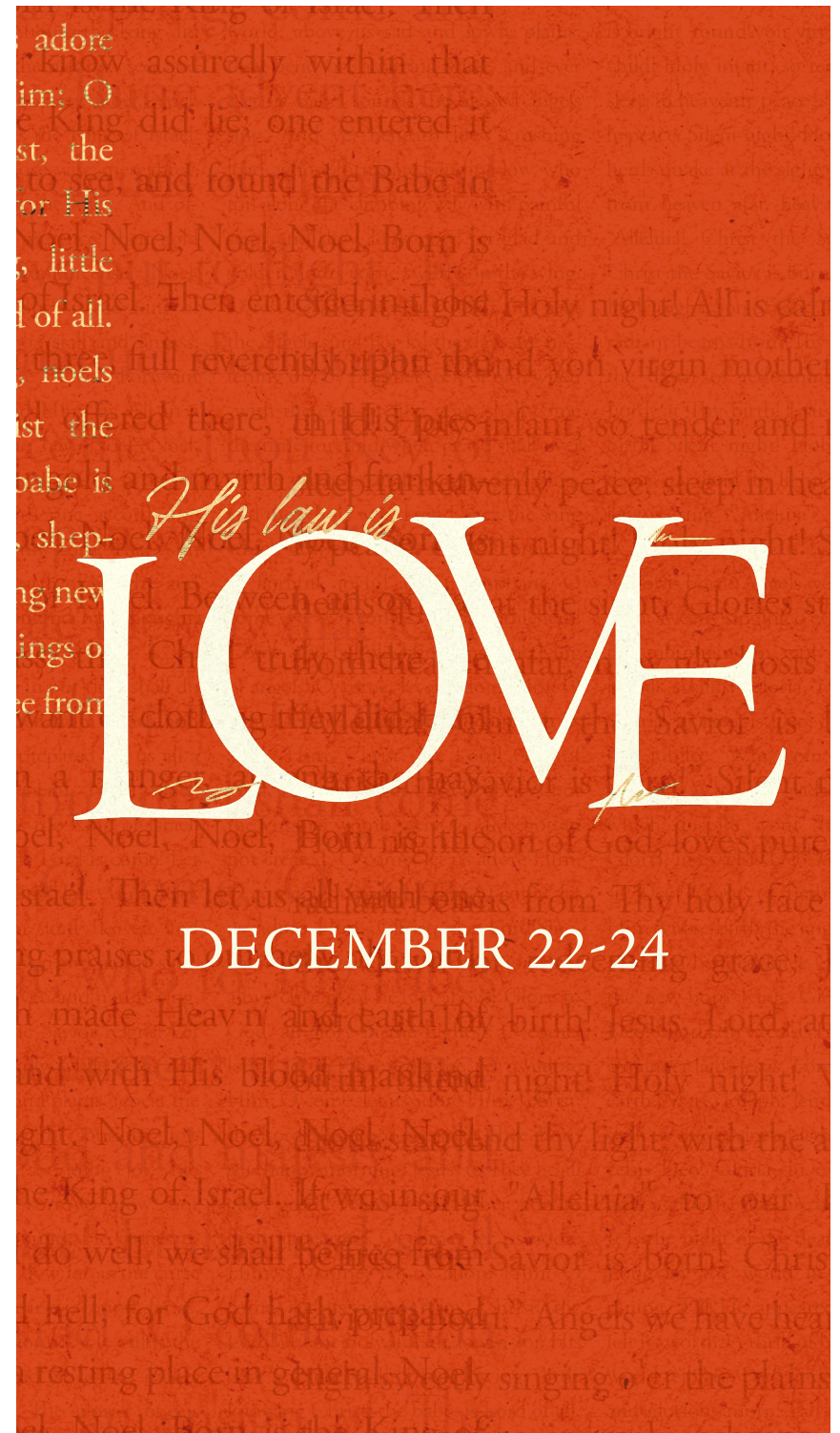
It is easy to feel despair and anxiety about the future. Watch the news, and we see people suffer and die. We see injustice and worry about a bleak future. Whether it's global warming, resource depletion, war, plague, unjust laws, or any number of natural disasters, it's easy to feel discouraged. There is a term for this: "doomscrolling," where one's mood gets progressively worse by reading bad news. It's the opposite of joy, and this bad news is the result of a world that has been broken since Genesis 3.

But there is something key here: bad news is not, well, not new. We've been broken for millennia. Over 2,000 years ago, the Jewish people also had reason to feel bad about their future. Their heyday, during the reigns of Kings David and Solomon, was a distant memory. They were now mere vassals of a cruel and unrelenting Roman Empire, led by a Caesar who would tax them to fund an army that would turn around and harass them. Their way of life, their freedoms, were always under threat—at one point, the temple where God's presence rested was less than a century from destruction at the hands of the Romans.

And yet, the Jewish people were full of hope and, as a result, joy. God promised them a Messiah who would restore them. This promise was nearly 1,000 years old, and they hadn't heard from God through His prophets for four centuries—that's longer than the lifetime of the U.S. And yet, they waited with anticipation and joy for a bright future. Simeon, in Luke 2:25, was overjoyed at the chance to see the Messiah after all this time. And yes, Jesus wasn't what many Jews expected. They envisioned David 2.0, a king who would conquer the Romans. But what they got... what we got... was so much better!

Today, we see bad news and can despair, worrying about what we may lose. But we know Jesus will come back again and restore all things. We haven't heard from God in so long, and that's fine. He has kept His promises before, and He will keep them once more. We don't know exactly how everything will look, but that's fine. We know it will be better than what we envision. In the meantime, while we are certainly called to work for justice, weep with the grieving, and serve others, we also need to find joy in the bright future ahead. We can rejoice in the past, knowing that Jesus has come, and in the present, knowing that the Holy Spirit is with us! Not only is it healthy for us, but our joy will shine in a world full of gloom and fear, and others will want to know why we have joy—and we can share it with them.

JOY | DECEMBER 21



BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US

Jean Roberts & Nickie Perez

Read 1 John 4:9-19 NIV

Jean:

Love. Volumes have been written on it: books, movies, plays, poems, song lyrics. We've all felt it, but sometimes it's the absence of it that can cause despair—whether from loss, abuse, abandonment, or neglect. The effects can be devastating. But we, as Christians, should never feel unloved. We have the one true God, who is love, and He gave His Son for us so that we can be with Him.

It was hard for me to quantify what God did for us—until I lost my own son. I didn't make the connection until I read the story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 again. I felt it was a parallel of God offering His Son for us. Isaac was spared, but Jesus was not. And in my grief, I could feel the overwhelming act of love from God. The hope in this story is that God raised Jesus to be with Him again, and He offers that hope to all of us. Until the day comes when we are reunited with Him, we have His Spirit in us so that we can love like He did, right now. We can love without fear, shame, or guilt. He has made us complete.

Nickie:

Heavenly Father,

We are in a new Advent season, a time of remembering what You did centuries ago on that first Christmas. You sent us a gift of love and a way of salvation through Your Son, Jesus.

Lord, You have shown us that love is an intentional act, that it can be a sacrifice, messy, and so painful when lost. But for some reason, You thought we were worth it.

Thank You, Lord, for sending Your Son to live among us, to set the example of what genuine love is. He gave it all for us, and it is hard to comprehend.

As we head into the holidays, I pray that we remember that precious gift of love that You shared with us. Through Your Holy Spirit, Lord, help us to love others the way You love us.

Amen.

LOVE | DECEMBER 22

JUST AS WE ARE

Jacey Nelson



Read Isaiah 1:18 NIV

Isaiah 1:18 is a powerful biblical verse that presents God's promise of forgiveness and purification to the people of Judah. The verse describes a metaphorical transformation where sins, symbolized by the enduring stain of scarlet or crimson, are turned as pure as snow or wool. This imagery emphasizes the profound change that only God can enact, a change that is beyond human ability. God extends an offer of reconciliation to those willing to repent, underscoring the importance of turning away from sin and embracing righteousness. It highlights that while humans cannot cleanse themselves of sin alone, divine intervention and atonement through Jesus Christ make such spiritual renewal possible.

The verse is a testament to God's mercy and readiness to forgive despite human imperfections. It serves as an invitation to approach God with honesty about one's sins, seeking His transformative grace. The promise of making sins as white as snow signifies complete forgiveness and the purity that comes from divine grace. Isaiah's message reassures believers that God's love is unconditional and that He willingly provides forgiveness to those who seek it with genuine repentance. We may often think God expects us to make ourselves clean first before going to Him, but He wants us to come just as we are, and through His mercy, grace, and forgiveness, we are made new again. This reflects God's deep love and the transformative power He offers, emphasizing that it is not human effort, but divine intervention that brings about true spiritual renewal.



LOVE | DECEMBER 23

DEVOTED

Emily Proffitt

Read Philippians 2:5-7 NIV

The definition of a servant is “a devoted and helpful follower or supporter.” The word I think really stands out is “devoted.” Being a servant of God and others isn’t just something we do on Sunday mornings. It isn’t just when it is convenient. Being a servant is a lifestyle.

This isn’t an optional part of following Jesus. If we want to be like Jesus, we must live like He did. We must become humble servants, just as He did. Jesus came to this earth not to enjoy the pleasures of this world, but to endure hardships for the sake of others.

The birth of Jesus is a time to celebrate, but it’s also a time to reflect. It’s a time to celebrate how amazing our God is— that He would do something so magnificent because He loves us more than we could ever imagine. Jesus, who is God, humbled Himself to be like one of us because He loves us. It’s the greatest act of humility and love ever. That’s something to celebrate! But it’s also a time to reflect on how we are showing His amazing love to others around us. Are we truly devoted servants of Christ, or do we only serve when it’s convenient for us? God has blessed us with so many good things, and I think the best way to show our gratitude is by giving them back.

So, this Christmas, give back your time by serving at church or with one of our Global Outreach Partners. Give back the talents that can be used to help build the Kingdom of God. As you celebrate with family and friends, think about how you can serve them. Think about how you can serve others who don’t have family and friends to celebrate with. Serve the people around you and show them the love Jesus displayed for us through your actions. Celebrate the birth of Christ and His humility and love for us, but show the same love and humility to the world.

REFLECT ON *love*

Who is someone that generously pours out the love of Jesus? Send them a message and let them know that you love them!

CHRIST
the Savior is born

DECEMBER 25-28

PRINCE OF PEACE

The Quiring Family

Read Isaiah 9:6 NIV

In Isaiah 9:6, the prophet speaks of the coming Messiah, a child born to Israel who will be the answer to the world's deepest longings. He is called by several majestic titles, each revealing a facet of His divine character and mission. Among them is the title "Prince of Peace." In a world filled with conflict and unrest, the promise of peace through the Messiah is both a profound comfort and a glorious hope.

When we think of peace, our minds often go to the absence of conflict or the end of war. And while the "Prince of Peace" does bring an end to spiritual warfare and conflict with God, His peace is much deeper than mere tranquility. The peace that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, brings is shalom—a Hebrew word that encompasses wholeness, completeness, harmony, and well-being. It's not just peace between nations or people; it's peace that touches every part of our lives. Shalom is peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with others.

Romans 5:1 says, "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus, the Prince of Peace, came to reconcile us to God. Through His sacrifice on the cross, He paid the penalty for our sin and made peace possible. This peace with God is the foundation for all other forms of peace. It is the peace that transcends circumstances, because no matter what happens around us, we can have a secure, unshakeable relationship with the Creator of the universe. This peace allows us to rest in God's love and promises, knowing that we are secure in His hands.

We can also look forward to the future, when the Prince of Peace will establish His eternal reign. In the coming Kingdom of God, there will be no more war, no more suffering, no more pain. As Isaiah 9:7 says, "Of the greatness of His government and peace there will be no end." The Prince of Peace will rule with justice and righteousness, bringing lasting peace to all of creation. This future peace is a source of encouragement as we face struggles and hardships in this world. We know that the Prince of Peace is coming again to set all things right. And in the meantime, we can live in the light of His peace, knowing that He is our Savior and King.

OUT OF THE WATER TO SAFETY

Brianne Cronenwett

Read John 3:17 NIV

We already know that the world is an imperfect place—a quick scroll through social media or a few minutes of watching the news will quickly remind us of this. Jesus didn't need to remind us of our imperfectness when He came down to earth. Instead, He came to show us love and to rescue us from our imperfection. Just as Jesus arrived humbly in a stable two thousand years ago, He can enter each of our lives to offer salvation.

When a lifeguard dives into a pool to save someone, they don't waste any time scolding the person drowning but instead quickly pull them out of the water to safety. Similarly, Jesus's arrival on earth was not so that He could point out our faults and pass judgment on an imperfect world. Jesus came to offer redemption, show true love, and provide a path to salvation.

The verse right before today's passage is probably the most recognized, quoted, or printed verse from the Bible. It shares the Gospel message in just one verse—that God loved us so much that Jesus came down to this earth, and now those who believe in Him will have eternal life. But John 3:17 further clarifies that Jesus wasn't sent to condemn or judge us but to do the saving Himself. It's a gift that is being offered and is far greater than anything we might receive wrapped under a tree this Christmas season. The gift of salvation isn't conditional on anything we have done or could do. God offers it freely to all because of His great love for us and His desire for us to be redeemed and reunited with Him. As we partake in the many festivities and busyness of this season, may we also consider that it wouldn't be possible without God's great love for us and Jesus' gift of salvation.

REFLECT ON *Christ*

How has Jesus saved you and brought you to safety?

AMAZING GRACE

Debbie Crouso

Read Ephesians 2:8 NIV

In February of this year, my sweet, godly mother went to be with the Lord. She was 91 years old, and for several years, her desire was to go home to heaven. God blessed her with a very sweet, peaceful passing. My mom never gave up, no matter the circumstances. She lived a very faithful life and was such a great example to many. We, as her children, arise and call her blessed, as Proverbs 31:28 says. She was a mighty prayer warrior, not only for our family, but for many others. We felt her prayers and miss them. What a legacy she left us all. Grace! How amazing!

Just a few months later, in July, my brother passed away rather suddenly. He loved Jesus, but sometimes struggled in life with not always making the best choices. When I went to the hospital to visit him before he passed away, he told me several times that all he wanted was to be with Jesus. He knew God's grace and knew he was forgiven. He was very weak and could hardly speak, but he gathered the strength to let it be known that he just wanted to be with Jesus! Grace! How amazing! *Ephesians 2:8: "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."*

Grace is God's gift to us. Grace is all that God has done and will do because of what Jesus did. Grace is received through faith, not earned by works. The older I get, the more I appreciate God's grace. I loved seeing clearly the grace of God displayed in my loved ones' lives as they lived and died. Because of their faith in Jesus, they depended on His grace. I depend on God's grace in my own life. I need His grace. I want His grace. I love His grace! I want to share the gift of grace with others more and more, as I have been given so much grace. How about you? Is there someone you need to show grace? Is that someone you? Grace! Isn't it amazing?

One of my favorite hymns is *Amazing Grace*:
Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now I am found;
Was blind, but now I see.



Prayer: Thank you, dear Father, for salvation through Your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Thank you for Your wonderful gift of grace. I pray that I will live a grace-filled life that is pleasing to You. In the name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.

CHRIST | DECEMBER 27

AMAZING GRACE

Steve Murphy

Read Isaiah 53:5 NIV

If your temperature is 104°, you shouldn't debate going to the ER. Maybe it was the fever talking, but more likely, it was my obstinance that argued against seeking medical help. I was confident I didn't need outside assistance; I'd get better myself, with a little more determination and time. Fortunately, my wise wife, Theresa, prevailed, and my parents met us at the hospital to take care of our three young kids. I was placed in the infectious disease unit, where everyone wore those full-body hazmat suits you see in pandemic movies. After two days, my potentially lethal staph infection was diagnosed, treatment was administered, and I was released. Between us and health insurance, the bill was paid.

We all suffer from a deadly spiritual disease. Some people don't believe it's a problem. Others are confident they can eventually get better on their own. Still, others try ineffective remedies. But wise people recognize the truth and seek the genuine source of healing.

Centuries before Jesus arrived on earth, Isaiah said He would be our cure. However, the remedy for our deadly spiritual disease requires much more than medicine: *"But he was pierced because of our rebellion, crushed because of our iniquities; punishment for our peace was on him, and we are healed by his wounds."* — *Isaiah 53:5 (CSB)*

Jesus is the only cure; He alone can pay the bill our sin has created. Through His sacrifice on the cross, we have access to never-ending life (John 3:16). The Bible teaches that the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are granted by God's grace through faith in Jesus. That faith is obediently lived out through belief, confession, repentance, baptism, and following Jesus (Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 10:9; Acts 2:38; Romans 6:1-4; Matthew 4:19). This is how we apply Jesus' perfect cure to our souls. If you haven't done this, please contact us very soon.

If you have placed your faith in Jesus, give thanks once again that He gave everything so you could experience peace and healing.

CHRIST | DECEMBER 28

WHERE HAVE WE LOOKED?

Matt Fermeir

Read Luke 24:5-8 NIV

Have you ever searched for something, and after a while, realized that you were looking in the wrong place completely? Maybe it was something simple like opening the fridge instead of the freezer, or getting turned around in the library, or wandering into the garage to find something that has always been in the basement. How long did it take you to come to your senses, and recognize that you were searching in vain in that place? And how did that realization feel?

Whatever you felt then, the women who discovered Jesus' empty tomb might have had those feelings. They came there looking for Jesus, but the angels' confrontational question "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" made them realize that they were looking for him in the one place he wouldn't be. They remembered then Jesus' words, and it clicked. They should have known that Jesus would rise - he had given them countless clues - and yet here they were, searching for him in a graveyard. Without understanding his teachings and his mission and his purpose, they expected him to be in a certain place, and that mistaken expectation led to three days of despair and grief and hopelessness.

Where are we expecting Jesus to be? Where have we looked for him, and not found him? Now of course, Jesus is everywhere and is always with us - but where have we sought his blessing and not received it? Where have we gone, waiting for Jesus to "show up" and satisfy our presumptions, but been disappointed? It is possible that our expectations of Jesus have been misguided, and that we have been guilty of trying to lead him, instead of submitting to his leadership.

Maybe we are as full of misunderstanding as the women at the tomb. Maybe we have missed something in Jesus, too. Maybe our expectations are more about our assumptions and less about Jesus' actual promises. Jesus tells us to be expectant, but we need to be careful - we are still the sheep, and he is still the shepherd. We can expect Jesus' wisdom, compassion, guidance, and grace. But we cannot expect him to simply do as we wish, or to bow to our desires and presumptions. We expect, and we rely upon, his authority, his power, and his kingship - all of which require our humble surrender and our eager expectation of the advance of his Kingdom.

EXPECTANT | DECEMBER 29

EXPECTANT
for what's to come

DECEMBER 29-31

THE PROMISE IS CLEAR

Scott & Carin Holahan

Read John 16:22 NIV

The season of Advent is one of waiting, looking forward with hope and anticipation to the birth of Christ. It's a season of expectation, reminding us that God's promises are sure. Like expectant parents preparing for the arrival of a child, Advent encourages us to prepare our hearts, knowing that God has something good in store.

In John 16:22, Jesus comforts His disciples, who are struggling with the thought of being separated from Him. He reassures them that their current grief will transform into a joy that no one can take away. This joy is not momentary or fragile but lasting and full, rooted in the presence of Jesus Himself.

Waiting with expectation can be challenging, especially during times of uncertainty or difficulty. We may wonder if joy will truly come. Yet Jesus' promise is clear: our pain will give way to joy because we are waiting on a living Savior who has overcome. Advent reminds us that we don't wait alone; we wait with a community of believers, sharing the hope of His return and the certainty of His presence in our lives.

Let this season be one where we rest in the hope that God will come through, even if we don't yet see it. Our waiting is not in vain. Just as God fulfilled His promise through Christ's birth, He will fulfill every promise He has made to us. During Advent, hold tightly to this expectant joy, looking forward with confidence to the day we will see Him face-to-face.

LOOK FORWARD *with expectation*

Look forward to 2025...How will you continue to wait expectantly?

EXPECTANT | DECEMBER 30

2024 IN THE BOOKS

Dane Alexander



Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NIV

Here we are—2024 is almost in the books! Take a moment to reflect on all that's happened this year. For some, it's a time to celebrate the goodness God has allowed us to experience: job opportunities, financial milestones, new relationships, or the healing of old wounds. For others, it's a time to celebrate moving forward from what held us back: leaving toxic relationships, breaking the chains of unforgiveness, overcoming unhealthy habits, or finally letting go of things we've tried to manage on our own.

One thing's for sure—we're all a year older as the calendar turns. When I looked in the mirror this morning, I noticed the small changes: a wrinkle that wasn't there before, a gray hair making its debut. These changes remind me of how easy it is to lose heart, especially when we feel we're losing so much with time.

Instead of focusing on what's lost, when I step up to that mirror, I've been remembering Paul's words in 2 Corinthians, reminding us that while outwardly we waste away, inwardly we are renewed "day by day." God doesn't ask us to fixate on the losses or the uncertainties of tomorrow. Instead, He calls us to focus on today, knowing He holds eternity in His hands. Our present troubles are shaping us for future glory as we fix our eyes on what is unseen—God's eternal promises.

The "unseen" can feel like a darkness that's difficult to bear, especially in a world that craves certainty. But as Richard Rohr once said, "Scriptures do not offer rational certitude. They offer us something much better: an intimate relationship, a dark journey, where grace, love, mercy, and forgiveness are essential for survival in an uncertain world."

Advent is a time of waiting—a reminder not only of Christ's birth but of His promise to continually renew us and the world. As we head into an unpredictable new year, let us live expectantly, trusting that God remains faithful now and forever.

"May I live for You even while I wait. Help me to obey and remain faithful, no matter how long I am in this place of waiting. Amen."

EXPECTANT | DECEMBER 31

Discover
CHRISTIAN CHURCH