



CHRISTMAS DEVOTIONAL 2021

The background of the entire page is a dark, textured blue-green color. In the center, there is a stylized illustration of a nativity scene. A bright yellow star with eight points is positioned above the scene. Below the star, a yellow sun or moon is visible behind a dark silhouette of a manger. Two figures, likely Joseph and Mary, are shown in silhouette, one on the left holding a staff and one on the right. The overall style is reminiscent of a chalkboard or a textured wall.

Keep Christ in
CHRISTMAS

HOPE

The First Week of Advent

Traditionally, the themes of Advent weeks have been HOPE, PEACE, JOY and LOVE. The term "advent" literally means, "the coming," or "the arrival," in an anticipated sense. From the earliest record of God's people in the Old Testament, there has existed a pattern of God's rescue and provision for a lost and broken population that has proclaimed their love and devotion for God, only to fall short of both. Advent takes on a penitent theme as we, God's people, use this season to reflect on how God is still willing and ready to rescue His people when they will call upon Him and it takes on a celebratory theme as we contemplate God's track record of always keeping His promises. God is still the God of grace and mercy and Christmas is the very proof of both.

This side of the cross, the celebration of Advent as an historical Christian tradition stems from the study and understanding of God's Word. In it, we are promised a coming Messiah, a Savior, Who will set right all the wrongs of a sin-ridden and fallen world. The focus of the entire Christmas season becomes the coming of Jesus Christ, born in human flesh, in His First Advent and also the future coming of Jesus, the King of Heaven Who will reign and rule in His Second Advent.

Our first week of the Advent season is focused on HOPE as our state of mind. Just as the Israelites eagerly awaited a Messiah, a Savior, to deliver them from political and social oppression, we too, seek His deliverance from oppression. The struggle from oppression to freedom has become the focus of a world that tries to explain its woes by pointing to something other than the inconvenient truth of God's Word. Oppression as an evil may take different forms, but its root is the same and that is the sin within and the bent of our own human hearts. Since the Garden, sin has been our world's greatest pandemic. Sin has made our world, even our own lives, sick with its disease of strife, decay and rebellion toward God.

Will God rescue us once again this day, not only from the world, but from ourselves? We hope in Him, we wait on Him to act on our behalf. As we hope together, let's make our devotional time in His Word and in prayer a daily priority for our lives. We begin...

Sunday, November 28

TODAY'S TEXT: ISAIAH 7:14

*H*ave you ever considered how many promises are made every day? It's got to be billions upon billions, and that's not counting for election years. Promises made with in a business, some are contractual promise to the employees, and vice versa, or to its customers. Each and every time we use our credit cards to purchase something online or in person, we make a promise to pay it later to a financial institute. I think it's safe to say not all of these are kept. One might say, "Well, it's just the way it is and cost of doing business, it's not personal." What about those promises that are made within relationships? For whatever reasons, intentional or unintentional, broken promises can help us to become calloused and cynical when we're promised something. Maybe you've thought it or said, "I'll believe it when I see it." I know I have. Don't hear me wrong, not all promises are broken. Many are kept, but far too many aren't.

In this chapter, King Ahaz's kingdom (Judah) was being attacked by two kingdoms one of which is the kingdom of Israel—his own kinsmen. I imagined he felt betrayed as well as afraid. Verse 2 describes how afraid he and his people were. And verse 4 details what God told Isaiah to say to him, "Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not loose heart for God has promised that Judah will not fall to them." How easily would you have believed this message from Isaiah with two invading armies still at your gate?

Okay, so maybe you're not facing an army, but this year has had its own difficulties as most years do. It could be you find yourself with financial problems, or relationship issues, health, or a spiritual battle with sin and its stronghold on you, or unchecked fear. The challenge for us is the same as it was for King Ahaz—to stand firm in his faith in God and trust in His attributes of being Holy and trustworthy. God does not lie. He always keeps His promises. God offered a sign of promise to King Ahaz and his people. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel, which means God with us.

Two thousand and twenty one years ago God fulfilled His promise by the birth of Jesus, born from a young virgin girl named Mary. No longer only a sign to us but a demonstration of God's love to us. Born and destined to die on a cross to give us hope by restoring mankind's relationship to his Creator, Jesus paid all the wages of our sins with His body and life so we can finally be set free. Where does you hope lie? Is it in Christ Jesus our only real assurance, and source of HOPE?

Don Rapp

Monday, November 29

TODAY'S TEXT: ISAIAH 9:6-7

I am so excited to be writing for the week of hope, because just like all of you, I hope for the coming of Christ.

In today's passage from the book of Isaiah, I believe this is saying that God gives us hope through Christ that He will keep His promises. Jesus was born on Christmas Day humbly, but eventually will reign over the earth. His coming humbly and quietly gives us a reason to hope. If we put our faith in Him, even if we might be going through difficult times during the holidays, we have hope knowing that Christ is walking with us through it.

When I think about hope, I think of the song, "Raise a Hallelujah" that says, "I'm gonna sing in the middle of the storm, louder and louder your gonna hear my praises roar. Up from the ashes hope will arise, death is defeated the King is alive." I love this song and the message it gives.

I believe that hope also brings peace and joy as it says in Romans 15:13, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

We can find hope through the little things because God is always with us even in the most difficult times. When my family and I moved here, I was really upset to have to move, but God gave me hope by showing me everything that He had in store for my life. He gave me something to be hopeful for and now I help serve in the church by singing on the praise team every Sunday. I have been a part of the youth group and have been able to be involved in several mission trips, all because of the hope I have in Jesus. Christmas time reminds me of the reason for my hope. I pray that you will look to Jesus this year and find hope too.

Caleb McDaris

Tuesday, November 30

TODAY'S TEXT: PSALM 119:114

*S*ometimes we live our lives going through the same daily routine over and over, pondering to ourselves, "What else is there? Is this it?"

No matter how old we are, it's never too late to reinvent yourself. You can start a new career at 40, fall in love at 50, learn to dance at 60, or start a new life at 70. We can do all things through Christ Who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

Christmas is a month of HOPE, hope for a job due to a lay off, hope for love after a divorce, hope to reunite with estranged family members, or for a cure. Long ago, God proclaimed that a Savior will be born to save us from our sins. The angels were the messengers and the people living in that time became hopeful and grateful for this little baby that was born in Bethlehem; the greatest gift that one day would be sacrificed for us.

Due to His sacrifice we are able to HOPE. This is a new HOPE for our everyday lives, here and now. Live life to the fullest and look at every opportunity as a way for new possibilities. Learn to love others every day as the Lord loves you. Live like it is your last day and embrace the beauty of His creations. Be the light of the World as your Father wants you to be. Desire to please Him first and live a life worthy of Him choosing you to be part of His royal family.

This is the season for us to be the light of the world. With everything that is happening in the world today, we need to lean on hope more and more. Be there for one another; be the helping hand that picks someone up; and be the hope that someone needs. Your Lord will protect you out in this world. Believe in Him, praise Him, and thank Him as you continue this beautiful life He gave you.

Diane Groves

Wednesday, December 1

TODAY'S TEXT: JEREMIAH 17:7

Today, I am reminded of Psalm 16:11 that says to God, "In your presence is fullness of joy and at your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Only in the presence of God do we find true fullness of joy that our hearts search for. Everyone is searching for what only God can give and we often stop too short to find it. We need to seek God even more. C. S. Lewis said, "It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased." This is true. We often stop short of pursuing God and following His way because we think that we can find joy and pleasure in things offered by this world.

Our scripture today, Isaiah 51:11, reminds us again that true joy is not found in this world, but is found in Christ. It is an everlasting joy that is given to those who are called the "ransomed of the Lord." This means it is for those who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ. This simply means all who believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for their sins and that He rose from the dead for their salvation will be saved. They will spend eternity with God. This joy is complete all because Jesus stepped out of heaven to come to earth for us. This is what we celebrate at Christmas time. This is why I love Christmas. It is not only a time to celebrate the birth of Christ, but also to remember all that God has done, is doing, and will do for us. Isaiah 51 and Psalm 16 both refer to a future time. A time that right now we are still waiting for with hope. This hope is real today because of the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

This year let me encourage you to place your faith in Jesus. He is the place of joy for now and everlasting joy in the future. This year when you say or see the words "Merry Christmas" may you be reminded of the coming joy that is found only in Christ and share that hope with your family, friends, and people who intersect your life each day. Merry Christmas!

Randy McDavis

Thursday, December 2

TODAY'S TEXT: ROMANS 15:4 & 13

I want to talk about how we can gain hope from the "Blessed Words" of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having been a teacher for many years and a student for many more years, (we all should be lifelong learners,) I found Romans 15:4 very significant. Though not a history teacher, most of my courses involved learning what was discovered and taught in the past, and this information, really did explain why we do what we do now, teaching us much. "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope." So, not only have these words been proven to be true through time, but they also continue to be valuable and beneficial to us as we go through our "life travels." I can understand why the Lord had appointed people write the scriptures for us, and why they took such lengths to preserve them so that we could read them today. Knowing what it cost many Christians to safeguard these words we should be thankful to the Lord for ensuring these words of wisdom were preserved for us.

That leads us to Romans 15:13, which puts it all together it seems. We must have knowledge of the Lord, based on the scriptures He taught us, and then demonstrated to us, by the actions of the saints who came before us, and by many today, that it would take endurance, to find encouragement to have the hope we need to join His Kingdom or "Team." (a term younger folks might identify with) Since I have been a member of several teams/organizations through the years, I made reference to that to illustrate my thoughts about Romans 15:13. Usually it takes much study, effort, and training to make a team worth being on. Once we make the "Lord's Team" then we have that feeling of accomplishment,; one, that we made the team, and two, we will have the support of our teammates, and "coach," and that will fill us with joy and peace. Also, we will overflow with hope for things to come because we trust in the Lord and have seen the great things He has done through the scriptures and testimonies of other Christians. This gives me great hope for the future and provides me great peace that only the Lord can give as I continue through my "life travels."

Cathy Dowling

Friday, December 3

TODAY'S TEXT: EPHESIANS 1:18

Here we are in the year of our Lord, 2021 and we now live in a world in which the news media tells us there's a new idea of being "woke." Google defines this terminology "woke" as an adjective used to describe someone who is alert and sensitive to injustice in our society. The concept is that if only we could all be "woke," then all the ills of our society will melt away.

For those willing to buy into it, or those who earnestly want to be part of the solution of injustice, this might seem like being "woke" is the new "hope" that will bring peace among all the people in the world. However, as Solomon so eloquently stated, "There is nothing new under the sun..." The apostle Paul prayed in Ephesians 1:17-18, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of Glory, may give to you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened that you may know what is the Hope of His calling, and what is the riches of His Glory." The phrase "the eyes of your understanding" is referring to spiritual understanding. It can also be rendered, "the eyes of your heart." Which reminds me of a song by Paul Baloche entitled, "Open the Eyes of My Heart."

I submit to you, that it is better to be spiritually woke. God, the Father wants each of us to know and experience the Hope that we have in our Lord Jesus Christ. Christmas reminds us of the secure Hope we have which came in the form of a little baby born in Bethlehem.

FRIDAY CONTINUED...

God left heaven, came to earth, took on flesh and lived a life that was worthy to be the sacrifice for all the sins of the world. May we all be spiritually "woke" of this very fact! Christmas is not just a sweet little story, but a historical fact that cannot be erased or torn down.

Tearing down statues, changing pronouns and rewriting history will not bring the eternal hope we all desire. Instead, we should focus on the eyes of your understanding that Jesus Christ is who He says He is, and through His salvation we can illuminate the light of Hope in the darkest regions of our heart. Be spiritually alert and sensitive to the Holy Spirit as he guides and comforts us through this life. Pray that God will open the eyes of your heart and the heart of your loved ones this Christmas. Be spiritually Woke! Merry Christmas,

John Clarke



Saturday, December 4

TODAY'S TEXT: TITUS 1:2, 2:11-13

Just Testin' The Sleigh

It's Christmas time in Texas and there's a halo around the moon
The melody driftin' from the bunkhouse is a jolly holiday tune

It rained some today and a blue Norther blew in over the hills
Temperature dropped like a rock, and did it without many frills

It's goin' to get colder, there'll be a frost on the punkin' tonight
Put on your long johns boys, winter time is defiantly in sight

The one I love is bakin' cookies and such, oh what a great smell
But I have a book and a fire, and in the distance I hear a cowbell

Come mornin', when I rolled out of bed, it was down right cold
Grabbed my clothes, shivered and shook, 'til the fire it took hold

George and Randy inquired about the ruckus down by the barn
I had not heard a thing, my head was covered tryin' to stay warm

George allowed it was a tree, likely caused by the cold and wind
Randy couldn't go with that idea, said that he respectfully declined

We had our biscuits and gravy and headed down towards the barn
Lo and behold what did appear, a big red sleigh restin' in our corn

Randy felt vindicated, said, "Told you so, but now what do we do"
Someone must be pullin' a joke, this just didn't fall from the blue

'Bout then I heard a moan comin' from somewhere in the hay pile
George stepped back, grabbed a pitch fork, then broke into a smile

Buried in the hay was a jolly old man who seemed to be bumfuzzled
We inquired how he got in our hay and he looked at us much puzzled

Said he was testing out his sleigh for an important trip in a few days
His reindeer had got hungry and decided they would stop and graze

They came to a sudden stop, he ended up being tossed from the sleigh
The next thing he remembered was three cowboys, much to his dismay

Checked him out, all seemed good, just a knot 'neath his hair so wavy
So we took him to the house to warm him up and feed him some gravy

He was most anxious to check out his sleigh and locate his reindeer
We were quite curious about this man and ask if he lived close to here

His eyes twinkled and he let out a laugh that shook him to his boots
He answered, "No, I live North of here with a bunch of other cahoots"

The sleigh bent a runner where it came to rest against the hitchin' post
George, a fine blacksmith, said it would be fixed, in a hour, at most

Sure 'nuff the reindeer were out back munchin' hay with the cows
So if anybody had come by, it would have certainly raised eyebrows

All this time Randy had followed us and had never uttered a sound
He looked, he listened, he nodded, but he became totally spellbound

It was if he either could not comprehend or he did not believe his eyes
This man is known throughout the world, still he's just one of the guys

George came through, with ten minutes to spare, fixed as good as new
We hitched the reindeer to the sleigh and they were off into the blue

"Merry Christmas boys, see ya'll tomorrow night!"

Then gave the reins a flick

And that's how three cowboys spent the day

Helping out old St. Nick

—Jim Owen

PEACE

The Second Week of Advent

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "God cannot give us happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." And so He did. The solution to Man's enmity with God arrived, right on time, in a stable in Bethlehem. God the Son was revealed, packaged in human flesh, tightly bound and tiny, in the swaddling cloths His mother had wrapped around His fresh, but frail, human body.

According to the scriptures, God announced "Peace on Earth" a long time ago. We ask ourselves, "How? Where?" Especially this past couple of years, in which our country has seen more strife and chaos than many of us can remember for decades. What has been international news from other countries in turmoil has now shown up in our very streets and we are shocked. But should we be? When Jesus came into the world with angels announcing "Peace On Earth," they were neither ushering in the Kingdom that the Jews of the first century were expectantly hoping for, nor the one we want. Jesus told His disciples that His Kingdom was not of this world. No, the peace He was bringing was to be a treaty between God and mankind, to reconcile the original relationship.

Once again, we enter into the second week of the Advent season longing for the peace we so desperately need in our homes, our work, our own hearts. We need look no further than the cross of Calvary to understand that He made peace with Humanity, once and for all on that eternal day. He also extends peace to us in relationship to Him—over and over. His mercies are new every morning. This truth is reflected in the beauty and power of His resurrection as we realize He resurrects us daily. Just as He bids us to "Come and die," taking up our crosses and following Him, He will crucify and bury the strife, and warring of the flesh, and will resurrect more of Himself in us through the power of the Holy Spirit. As you wrestle with the headlines of the week and the chaos that surrounds you in your corner of the world, breathe a whisper of praise for the PEACE which HE has already brought us!

Father, may we seek You in our quest for peace. For apart from You, we will ever be warring within and without. Thank you for the peace Your Son has purchased for us!

Sunday, December 5

TODAY'S TEXT: PROVERBS 16:7

What does "peace with my enemies" really mean? According to this scripture verse, it means that if I am walking with Christ and living right I will have peace with even my enemies.

Peace doesn't come to us like a Hallmark movie, although some may wish it did. Doing in our strength means we have to work hard for it to be a reality. But when I delve into the "pool of peace" of God's Word every day during my devotion and prayer time, it's more of Him working through me. I need that and a boatload of patience every day as I work with and interact with the kids as a bus monitor.

It also pertains to how I interact with others. When I do my devotional and pray I am more patient and kind than when I fail to do so. My coworkers and managers seem nicer as well. Why is that? Because when I put His Word into my mind and heart, I have just dived into His thinking. When I rush out of my house and forget to do my devotions and pray for my day it really gets off to a bad start and I have a bad day. This isn't to say that when I do my devotions and pray it's all sunshine and rainbows and unicorns. However, I do think that starting my day off on the right track with God's Word is the best way to start my day. His thinking brings me peace that I will in fact have a GOOD day.

All my life there has been war or skirmishes in the middle east, or Africa or terrorism right here at home. There hasn't really ever been any peace globally speaking. However, I hope that we will have peace soon because the kids I work with deserve a better future that doesn't include terrorist attacks and the tragedy of war that they will someday see in their history books. However, we know that there really won't be any peace until Christ returns.

I pray we will not see any more attacks on our country. Every day I pray for those who were left behind in the mass Afghan evacuation. For 20 of my 33 years, we have been at war in Afghanistan. It was a landmark day after so long when a retreat was ordered, but the reality is, it doesn't mean peace in the region. Dad is a military veteran and we were stationed on military bases all around the US. He retired just *months* before 9/11. I am grateful for that because otherwise he would have gotten orders to go back to the Middle East. Dad made it through Desert Storm, but I remember the letters from him and how we were so worried because where he was, there surely wasn't any peace.

Will anyone be able to answer the question posed here today or will this be a constant question? Is it possible to have peace now presently amid our day to day and in the world? The question might remain unanswered, except that scripture tells us that it is possible if we live in a way that pleases the Lord, work to follow Him daily and obey His Word.

Emma Cortez

Monday, December 6

TODAY'S TEXT: ISAIAH 26:3

In this verse, the restored remnant of Israel celebrates the life of faith and dependence. Because they are now leaning hard on Jehovah, they are experiencing perfect peace.

As we are ending the year 2021, many of us have experienced anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness, and uncertainty. Many of us have experienced loss of a job, financial burdens, loss of friends and loved ones from COVID-19, cancer and other illnesses, drug overdoses or accidents. These life changing situations can overwhelm and distract us from focusing on Jesus. Today's verse reminds us that God cares about our worries, pain, grief, and suffering. He holds our hands throughout our troubles and strengthens us when we lean on Him alone. I am reminded that when life overwhelms me, the Lord is with me, just waiting for me to lean on Him alone so that I, too, may experience that perfect peace.



Cathleen Chidester

Tuesday, December 7

TODAY'S TEXT: PSALM 4:8, 37:11

I was late and very dark, 2:15 am to be exact. I was lying in bed still awake. My heart rapidly pounding in my chest. My ears were on high alert listening for any noise the night might bring. What is wrong? This has been going on for weeks. Ever since my husband left, I could not sleep. I had two boys in the house, ages 2 and 14, and now I was responsible for protecting them. These sleepless nights can't continue. Why was I afraid of the dark? I've never been afraid before. How do I overcome this irrational fear?

The real question is why I didn't seek the Lord's help when this started. It took time for me to realize there's only one way to peace, through my relationship with God. Psalm 4:8 would have been the perfect verse to contemplate that night. Only the Lord can bring peace and protect me. Only God can cause me to sleep in peace without worry. When I came to this realization, I was finally able to sleep.

From then on, at bedtime I would begin the night by reaching out to God for a peaceful night's sleep. I had faith that He would protect my children, me, and the house through the night. No longer did I need to lie awake worrying about our safety. As a single mom for many years, whenever I felt these irrational fears begin to resurface, I would close my eyes and pray myself to sleep.

I am so grateful for the peace God bestows on me. Psalm 37:11 taught me that maintaining a strong relationship with God would relieve me of my anxieties no matter what the circumstance. That is my belief today and it has served me well.

I pray that you will find peace through your relationship with our Lord. Sometimes the circumstances are so overwhelming we need a little reminder of placing our trust in the Lord. May this be a little reminder.

Blessings to all,

Debby Brewington

Wednesday, December 8

TODAY'S TEXT: NUMBERS 6:26

The Priestly Blessing

"The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace."

The Scripture passage above is part of the Priestly Blessing (vs. 24-26) that the Lord told Moses to instruct Aaron and his sons to bless the people of Israel with. This special blessing was one way of asking for God's divine favor upon the people. The full text of the Priestly Blessing is as follows:

"The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace."

The simple words of this blessing reflect God's desire for all His people. He is the source of all blessings, grace, and peace in life. The blessing seems to build to its final word – peace (shalom). The Hebrew word for peace means more than just absence of conflict. It implies a complete sense of well-being, health, and contentment. God offers this to anyone who is willing to follow Him.

A couple of days ago I was reading in my daily devotional and the writer shared a story about he and his wife's early morning drive down a country road. They passed a field covered with thousands of sunflowers in the early morning hours. What was unusual about this is that all were facing the east waiting for the sun to come up. The writer did some research later and found out that the sunflowers follow the path of the sun throughout the day. By evening, they are all facing west. During the night, they turn to center before resetting east to face the sunrise again the next morning.

What a wonderful picture of what our Lord wants us to do each day as we turn our faces to Him and seek Him and His blessings anew each day. God loves to bless His people and show us His grace, favor, and peace. God also wants to bless each of us with the gift of peace that can only come from a personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. Would you take time to receive the greatest blessing of peace with inviting His very presence into your life. He is our Prince of Peace.

Harold Scroggins

Thursday, December 9

TODAY'S TEXT: LUKE 1:76-79

Isaiah who lived about 700 years before Christ, spoke about John the Baptist (Isaiah 40:3) and also predicted that the Messiah would not only be a reigning King, but that He would be a suffering Savior Who paid for the sins of mankind. In the passage today, Zachariah is prophesying about His son John the Baptist and how that prophecy spoken many years ago, will now be fulfilled. In verse 78, he writes, "To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and guide us to a path of peace." In Isaiah 9:2, it states that "The people who walk in darkness will see a great light." Sound familiar? At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus Christ Himself read from the book of Isaiah and announced that He was fulfilling this prophecy. I find it remarkable that God always fulfills what He says He is going to do, and the scriptures are filled with this truth.

Deep into history, we can see that people have talked, written, sang, and have dreamt about Peace. "What" can bring them peace? "Who" can bring them peace? Always trying to fulfill what they believe is "peace." In my personal walk with the Lord, there are moments where I would be asking Him for peace and clarity during certain situations. One example is when my mom was battling cancer. I couldn't understand why any of that was happening to her. I couldn't see the purpose for it all. There have also been times where I have asked God about the choices I've made and If I have made the right one. The same ingredient in all these scenarios is God. The only way for anyone to find peace and to experience peace is to first know and accept Christ. Isaiah 9 calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. In Isaiah 53, it says "He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed." Ephesians 15 proclaims that "For He Himself is our peace."

This year has been crazy for most of us (if you've noticed, crazy is all around us) and we can get lost in our situations, emotions, and events of our lives and we can feel overwhelmed. Instead of running to Christ, we turn away. Let us hold fast and consistently remember that He is our Hope, Joy, Peace, and Love every second of everyday. To truly know Him, is to know peace

Sarah Trumbull

Friday, December 10

TODAY'S TEXT: ROMANS 5:1, 16:20

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.

Paul is telling us that we are not putting our faith and trust in a God Who might, or maybe, or could possibly deliver on His promise of heaven and salvation from the angry wrath of God. But we can rest assured that these promises of peace and hope can be fulfilled because God has already delivered or fulfilled His promise to save us from the death of sin in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Our peace and hope are based on the love God has already expressed to us and has for us in that Jesus has already died for our sins that we would be able to choose to be reconciled to the Father through this selfless act of grace. Words taken from a devotion by: Daniel Lewis

Albert and I, have experienced all kinds of feelings and emotions, with all the death and illnesses in our family this past year. When Bell's Palsy hit me just months ago, we went through so many emotions, but hopelessness was not one of them! Even with all the heartaches of this past year. God has been so good to us! He has blessed us with a church family who has been a real support to us in these trying times. The many prayers of the church during this rough time for the most part kept us calm and there was a peace that all would be fine no matter how it turned out.

Della Et Albert Ular

Saturday, December 11

TODAY'S TEXT: COLOSSIANS 3:15

A few weeks ago Brother Dennis said that there are many Christians in the world right now who have given up hope. I knew I had been one of those. Since 2020, we've all been hit with many unpredictable obstacles and tragic events. It can weigh heavily on a person, but through Christ we can always have peace and hope.

A key portion of today's verse is being called by God as one Body. We, as the Body of Christ, we need each other. We bear one another's burdens and lift one another up. We rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We strengthen and sharpen one another. We lift each other up in prayer. The last portion of this verse is about giving thanks. Being grateful day by day, remembering all the blessings and the ways the Lord has come through for us in the past, has given us so much to be thankful for. We know He is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and because of that, we can find peace in Christ.

When Gramma (Billie Doring) was laying in bed, waiting to go home to be with the Lord, even amidst the pain she was in, she quoted the lyrics to this song:

*He gives us hope
When hope is gone
He gives us strength
When we can't go on
He gives us shelter
In the storms of life
When there's no
Peace on earth
There is peace in Christ*

Sharon Et Mattian Doring

JOY

The Third Week of Advent

In Hebrews 12, we are told that Christ endured the shame and indignity of the cross because of the “joy that was set before Him.” (NKJV) The New Living Translation says, “...the joy that awaited Him.” Have you ever had great joy set before you or awaiting you? Have you ever had something so joyous to look forward to that the means of getting there had to be overlooked, even though painful and difficult? Childbirth is probably the closest analogy. The pain and sorrow of labor, which would otherwise be unbearable, is made bearable simply because what awaits a mother at the end of that trial is so joyous, it’s simply worth it.

So then, what joy awaited Christ, what was set before Him that was so joyous that He would bear the agony, the cruelty and the fatality of the cross and deem it worthwhile? Again, we look to scripture, which describes Him “despising the shame” (NKJV) or disregarding the shame (NLT) for this joy.

As we look at JOY this week, challenge yourself to see a new facet of Christ’s suffering on our behalf as you consider the joy to which He looked forward. Do you know this joy personally? Would you like to? Let’s dig into our devotionals for the week with resolve to endure what is needed so that we too might attain what joys may be set before us.

“Joy is the serious business of Heaven.” ~ C.S. Lewis

“The only lasting and fully satisfying joys for any man lie on the other side of a cross.” ~ Walter J. Chantry

Sunday, December 12

TODAY'S TEXT: PSALM 126:5-6

I am so thankful the Bible is the Living Word of God. The Word speaks to us and is full of His promises.

Psalm 126:5-6 reminds us of the promise of the JOY that will come after any storm we walk through when we hold on to God. We read, "Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them."

Troubles will come and seem overwhelming but we can endure and continue to trust and lean on God with the assurance that even through the darkest of nights, we have the promise of a peaceful and joyful sunrise in the morning.

In studying this verse, I was reminded of Hebrew 12:2, "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." Wow. What an amazing verse. Jesus endured the cross by choosing to focus on the Joy that was to come because of his love for us.

How can we, during difficult times, find JOY? Here are a few verses that may help answer that question.

- ◆ *1 Chronicles 16:27—Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in His dwelling place.*
- ◆ *Psalms 16:11— You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.*
- ◆ *1 Thessalonians 1:6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.*
- ◆ *Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.*

Have a Joyful Christmas and a wonderful new year!

Julie Villarreal

Monday, December 13

TODAY'S TEXT: PSALM 30:5

*I*n the Philippines, Christmas celebration starts in September. Christmas trees and decorations will be up till January 7th, with the visit of the Wise Men to the baby Jesus. Homes, store fronts and malls will be decorated. Christmas music will be heard everywhere. Christmas trees will be made from all kinds of materials: cans, boxes, plastic bottles, cards, etc. In the Philippines, we are ahead of the game when it comes to recycling.

I remember the year my mother made our Christmas tree out of coconut leaf grass broom sticks. (Please feel free to Google it if this material is foreign to you). It turned out great. That Christmas tree is stamped in my coconut head forever. You know how sometimes our pets can attack our decorations? Well, back home, even cats and dogs don't mind the Christmas trees and decorations, and have become used to them because they are part of everyday life and are not an alien invasion.

In the Philippines, Christmas is a national religious, and cultural celebration. This may be a joyous celebration to Filipinos but millions are still in the dark when it comes to the true meaning of Christmas. National holidays do lift our spirits and bring us joy. The Christmas season brings us joy as we celebrate with family and friends. However, unless Christ is in the center of that celebration, real joy is not realized in people's lives.

To many, celebrating Christmas from September to January can be an overkill. As Christians, I believe Christmas should be an everyday celebration in our hearts. When we have the joy of Christmas in our hearts, it's easy to spread good tidings of great joy to others every day. During this time of the pandemic, many feel isolated and are lonely. What an opportunity for us Christians to be a light and witness to this dark and needy world.

Ruth Rice

Tuesday, December 14

TODAY'S TEXT: ZEPHANIAH 3:17

The Joy of The Lord

Mountains ahead of me and valleys behind
The road may be narrow but Your mercy is wide
Sorrow may linger and last for the night
But I am never alone
Sorrow may linger and last for the night
But I am never alone

The Joy of the Lord is my Strength
The Joy of the Lord is my Strength
My Strength

I may be weak but I will cling to the Vine
I'm pressed but not crushed for
You are making new wine
Wounds may be opened and weakness revealed
But I will be healed in the fire
Wounds may be opened and weakness revealed
But I will be healed in the fire

The Joy of the Lord is my Strength
The Joy of the Lord is my Strength
My Strength

I've got a River of Life flowing out of me...

—Audrey Assad

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zL9nESKtNZM>

Wednesday, December 15

TODAY'S TEXT: I PETER 4:12-13

I often struggle understanding text when reading the Bible and I am the type of person that usually feels very inadequate when it comes to all things Biblical. So even though I always want to be a part of this devotional, when it comes to actually writing this, I revert back to my inner child and ask myself..."What was I thinking?" But the desire to do it is always strong and have chosen to listen to it.

When I read this passage, it swiftly thought about the years I kept asking God for an administrative position in the school district. I wanted "out" of my teaching position because I knew I could reach more students and help them in an administrative role. Each time I applied I just knew that I had the position. And each rejection email was received in shock and disappointment.

At the same time I accepted a counseling position only because I knew it was a step closer to the administrative realm. I kept applying for the Assistant Principal positions and eventually started questioning why God was keeping me from getting the positions. I knew I was meant for that position. After a couple of years of getting rejected, I finally accepted the fact that I was in the counseling position for a reason. God had a plan for me and I needed to just accept that plan.

I decided to, as Bro. Dennis likes to say...."trust in, rely on, and cling to" HIM and believe that HE had my best interest for me. As soon as I decided to accept being a counselor and put my all into my job, my life changed. I was no longer feeling stressed, upset or frustrated. I began to see the joy in what I was doing and how I was helping those around me. I began to see with clearer eyes that the students needed me in this current capacity as a listener, counselor, comforter and just someone who cared. I filled a need with my students that I never really understood until I accepted the role God wanted me to fulfill.

So I say all this because, although I thought I was "suffering" in a job I didn't want, it turned out to be the best thing to happen to me in my profession. There is a joy that comes with knowing I am providing a needed service to my students and staff, but also knowing that GOD put me in the place I needed to be to do HIS work. Through my "suffering" I was able to really see and feel the JOY of being in the place GOD wants me in. I am so grateful that HE loves me enough to make sure I am in the right place at this time in my life. He ALWAYS, ALWAYS has a plan, and it always is better than anything I could come up with myself. (Jer 29:11)

We have all gone through some form of "suffering" at one time or another and there is not a set time that we know of for how long we will go through it. Just know that GOD is walking with us and is setting us up to experience a JOY that will always supersede the suffering we go through. When have you gone through "suffering" and have experienced the "joy" afterwards?

Roxi Heisen

Thursday, December 16

TODAY'S TEXT: PSALM 70:4

*I*n many passages of the Bible we are told that Joy is a feeling of pride, comfort, peace of mind, and contentment. We are also told that Joy is a time of remembrance, memorials, and a time for us to be paying attention to God as to His plan of action for our lives.

One of the many joys that come anywhere close to knowing the Lord and His promise to us is in seeing our children and then grandchildren come to know the Lord and live their lives following Him, experiencing this great Joy for themselves.

Many of us have this great joy but do not have the ability to broadcast or orate the blessing as we should. However, through constant prayer we can hope others will see our actions, decisions, conversations, and ask, "Why are you so joyful all of the time?" And yes, there will be times when we are not this way, and those are the times we go to prayer for strength and guidance.

In Philippians 2:2, we are told that Joy can be made complete by being in fellowship with the Lord, being in the same state of mind, and united in fellowship of the Spirit with others you know and love, and being open to helping those in need.

This time of year we express Joy in watching or feeling the joy of our children and grandchildren as they unwrap their Christmas presents. We also find joy in knowing that through our annual Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes, we are helping spread Joy to others.

We know the real source of our JOY during Christmas time is the reason for the season, the birth of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Dick Et Sharon Critz

Friday, December 17

TODAY'S TEXT: ACTS 2:28

Otho and Santa

It was one of those days before Christmas
It rained, then turned Blue Norther cold
My personal thought "Santa's on his way"
Hope that statement is not to bold

Cause when that cold wet wind starts to blowin'
Well it chills you plumb to the bone
And makes you want to be most anyplace
'Cept out here pushin' cows all alone

Wouldn't be alone 'cept Shorty is sick as a dog
His hand is infected, he can't even walk
He's doin' good just to lay in bed
Fever makes up words, when he tries to talk

Built a big old fire and doctored him up best I could
If'n he's not better tomorrow I'll cart him to town
Just have to bundle him up real good
More than likely will have to tie him down

It's goin' to get colder, that's a fact,
Cause that North wind is startin' to blow
And it won't be too long from now
That those clouds will be droppin' their snow

That's why we're gittin' cows out of the hills
And pushin' them to lower ground
It keeps them from freezin' to death
And is easier when feedin' time comes around

Well I saw four cows half way up this hill
Then Red stumbled and I...
How did I get wedged between these rocks?
Where is Red, and isn't that a beautiful sky?

Tried to get up, much pain, one foot all askew
Tried again, but it was a hot summer day
Even tho it's kinda hot, and dusty and dry
It is really a fun thing to do, stackin' hay

Then I heard bells jinglin' somewhere near
And there was an old man with a beard
He helped me into his red wagon – no, a sleigh
This is where it gets weird

He said we needed to go help Shorty
And away we go quick as a flash
Seems like the next thing I was knowin'
We was flyin', and the old man's twirlin' his 'stach

Apparently the old man made a stop or so
Before we got to Doc Fred

Next thing I 'membered it was warm
And Doc's wife had a firm grip on my head

The old man gave me a sip from his jug
And the world slipped away, again
Next I 'membered was Doc talkin' to his wife
“Hadn't been for that old man, be two graves on that plain”

Needless to say that old man saved two cowboys
With his jinglin' bells and red sleigh and all
Told Doc he had more stops to make before first light
“Have a goodun', and Merry Christmas ya'll”

But the weather it's turnin' cold
And the water will freeze plum across the creek
And winter up here on the high ground
Well, it's not the time for the mild and the meek

So, boys you'd better find your long johns
And while you're at it that old woolen cap
Cause the bear's are goin' into their caves
To get ready for that long winter nap

—*Jim Owen*

Saturday, December 18

TODAY'S TEXT: JUDE 1:24-25

*A*nd now to Him who can keep you on your feet, standing tall in His bright presence, fresh and celebrating to our one God, our only Savior, through Jesus Christ, our Master, be glory, majesty, strength, and rule before all time, and now, and to the end of all time. Yes.

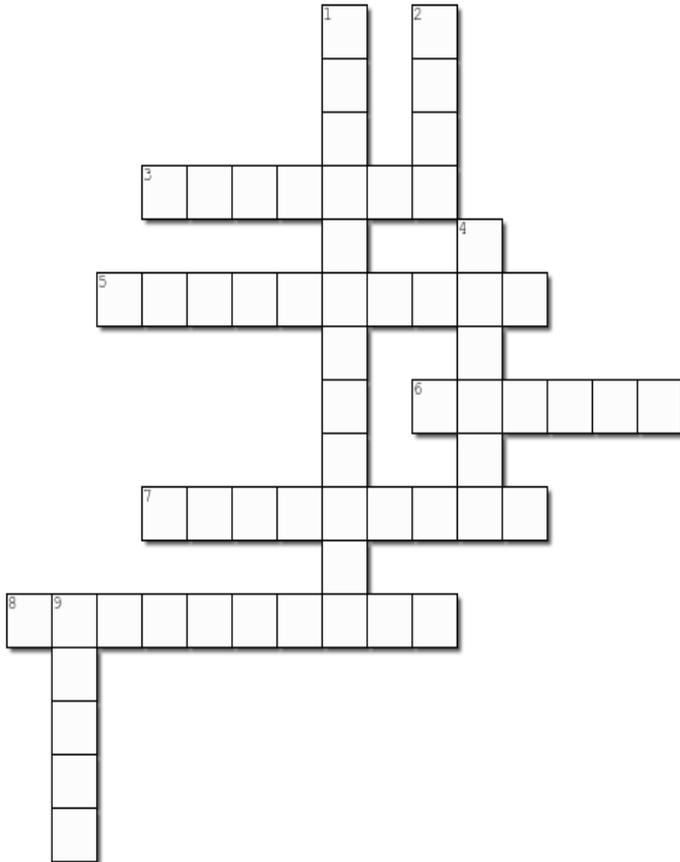
God is able, and as willing as able, to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the presence of His glory. Not as those who never have been faulty, but as those who, but for God's mercy, and a Savior's sufferings and merits, might most justly have been condemned long ago. All sincere believers were given Him of the Father; and of all so given Him He has lost none, nor will lose anyone. Now, our faults fill us with fears, doubts, and sorrows; but the Redeemer has undertaken for His people, that they shall be presented faultless. Where there is no sin, there will be no sorrow; where there is the perfection of holiness, there will be the perfection of joy. Let us more often look up to Him Who is able to keep us from falling, to improve as well as maintain the work He has wrought in us, till we shall be presented blameless before the presence of His glory. Then shall our hearts know a joy beyond what earth can afford; then shall God also rejoice over us, and the joy of our compassionate Savior be completed. To Him Who has so wisely formed the scheme, and will faithfully and perfectly accomplish it, be glory and majesty, dominion, and power, both now and forever. Amen. —Matthew Henry's Bible Commentary

I learn everyday the magnitude of resting in scriptures such as this one. They bring me comfort and peace knowing that He has everything in His control and in His timing. My home is not here, nor will it ever be here. This is a mortal, not immortal existence. When I said, "Yes, I believe in all that You are, Jesus," my life, my mortal presence, became a learning stage for what He needs me to become in the immortal and eternal. I see my existence here as Prep School. I see Jesus as my Example to follow, and it is only through Him, and by Him, that I will be like Him. Then, when He determines, I will transpire or be translated, and I will hear Him say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter in."

Cindy Carpenter

Joy

Use the clues to fill in these synonyms for "JOY."



Across

3. Paul's command to believers in Philippians 4:4
5. a feeling of extreme joy
6. Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy' put to hymn form says this...twice.
7. Finding two kinds of ice cream, finding your skate key, or leaning to whistle
8. quality of lively or exuberant expression

Down

1. According to Emily Dickinson, it's 'The breeze that lifts us from the ground.'
2. Popular TV show about a HS singing club
4. What kind of honor for the Jews mentioned in Esther 8:16
9. Sometimes, ignorance is this

LOVE

The Fourth Week of Advent

The word “love” is grossly misused in our culture. The word gets thrown around without much thought. We *love* this, we *love* that. The emotions is expressed as an emoji heart on most social media sites. It’s expressed as a term of approval for material things we want or desire. It can be easy to miss the depth and beauty of the true meaning that this word embodies. Do we understand what it is? Can we fathom its depths?

The Apostle Paul was skeptical about our human ability to do so and even penned a treatise on love to prove his point. I Corinthians 13 is considered by many to be one of Paul’s most eloquent and beautiful pieces of writing. Those of us in Christ know even more than that. Paul was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit Himself. Here we have God’s “take” on love. The Apostle John tells us later in his letter (I John 4:7) that “God is love.” So in Paul’s writing, we see that God explains what He isn’t and then what He is. He is the embodiment of love in character and in action as the Son, coming to earth to live as a Man and purchase us back as His own with His very own life.

This love, His love, is a far cry from our pop culture rantings, our television and film depictions, and even our very best poetry. This love exchanges royalty for ignobility, a throne room for the muck of a stable, a throne for a manger, a royal robe for swaddling clothes, and ultimately, gives His own life to purchase ours, paying the price we could not pay, even while we were and may be still rejecting it. It is continually offered even to those who have no desire to ever accept it. That is love. That is God’s love.

As we look into love this week, may we find ourselves contrasting what the world bombards us with concerning the concept of love with the truth of God’s Word on the subject.

Holy Spirit, we ask that You will implant the Word deeply in our hearts this week. May we be a people so laden with the truth about real love, that anything else is starkly contrasted. Thank You for loving us! - Amen.

Sunday, December 19

TODAY'S TEXT: DEUTERONOMY 6:5, ROMANS 13:8

Recently, some of my husband's old Marine Corp brothers and I surprised him with a reunion after twenty years of not seeing one another. The joy and the love that filled that room was indescribable and left most of us teary eyed. I can only imagine what it feels like to know that the person next to you, is willing to die for you; it must be a remarkable feeling of security and love.

In Romans 13:8, God tells us to "Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law." He goes on further to say, that if you love your neighbor as yourself, the other commandments are summed up in this one. Today, we seem to see less loving your neighbor, more unrest, distrust and insecurity. If only we would all yield ourselves to God's Word and follow it daily, how much more grace and hope we would see.

As Christmas approaches and we remember that God sent His Son down from glory to our fallen world, knowing His purpose was to die on our behalf should all make us hold on to each other a little tighter and work hard to love like He loves. Deuteronomy 6:5 tells us to Love the Lord God with all our heart, soul and strength. If we strive to do this, loving each other falls into place with much more ease.

"God proved His love on the Cross. When Christ hung, and bled, and died – it was God saying to the world, I love you." Billy Graham

Jodie Bryson

Monday, December 20

TODAY'S TEXT: EPHESIANS 3:16-17

Do we Really understand the Love of God? Love in the dictionary means a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person. There are different kinds of love:

- ◆ Motherly and Fatherly love
- ◆ Brotherly and Sisterly love
- ◆ Unselfish, loyal and benevolent concern for the good of another (such as the fatherly concern of God for humankind)
- ◆ Brotherly Concern for others

*May your unfailing love come to me, O Lord,
Your Salvation according to Your promise;
then I will answer
The one who taunts me, for I trust in Your word.
Psalm 119:41-42*

Our root is our foundation. It's what everything else is built on. Deep roots (knowing God's words, promises and His LOVE) will give us a strong foundation to withstand the elements, trials, and challenges of life.

I am so thankful for the Gift of Love that endures forever. I am grateful for the love I have for my son Ryan, whom God called home this year, and the Love of God Who has been right by my side and with me everyday along with friends and family!!

LOVE IS THE GREATEST GIFT

Chris Isaacks

Tuesday, December 21

TODAY'S TEXT: I JOHN 4:12, 19

Last February, we got a pocket beagle. Her name is Ezri. She is sooo cute! She is sooo hyper! She is obsessed with licking my face! My face!



When we come home she whines until she can see (and preferably lick) my face. And when she looks at me, the eyes of complete trust and love shine up at me. Occasionally, she gets out the front door and takes off down the street. I can't bear the thought of not seeing those loving eyes looking up at me. So we anxiously search for that wiggly little puppy dog, so she can.... Lick my face!

God loves us so much more than our sweet pets. His love shines through to us every day through the faces of our brothers and sisters in Christ. "If we love one another, God dwells in us, and His loved is perfected in us:" I John 4:12

Do we share and search out God's love in each other? Do we let God perfect His love in us?

Are we patient even in Austin traffic? Are we kind to the waitress who is trying to do twice her load because it's the holidays and the restaurant is understaffed? Do we envy our brother and sister going on a fancy vacation over the holidays? Or do we boast about our new vehicle? Are we too proud to help those struggling in their life? Does it feel good when we ask for prayers for a friend just so we can make it known that they are struggling with sin in their life? Do we help others just so we can be seen of men? Do we let ourselves get so overwhelmed with busyness that we are easily infuriated when things do not go as we had planned? Do we avoid others because ten years ago they hurt our feelings? How often do we rejoice when someone "gets their come-uppance? If your "enemy" was about to suffer, would you be willing to help them? Do we believe the best of each other, or are we "not quite sure about those people"? How often do we shake our heads and state, that there is absolutely nothing positive that can come from our situation? Have we quit trying to make it to worship, to show love, to be around our brothers and sisters in Christ?

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." I Corinthians 13:4-7

What makes this "the most wonderful time of the year"? Many people seem to enjoy showing love to everyone. "If we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us." Is this important to us? Wouldn't we all be much happier if we eagerly looked for and shared love like our beagle, Ezri? We can see and be the face of God every day of the year.

Dear God,

Please, help us be perfected in your love. Help us be eager to see Your love and show Your love during this Christmas time and throughout the coming year. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Kathy Turner

Wednesday, December 22

TODAY'S TEXT: ROMANS 12:9-10

The greatest fear that is most common throughout mankind is "not being loved." Christmas speaks about God's love for the entire world.

God's chief Characteristic we read in I John 4:16 that "IS Love!" Not He *has* but *is*. As you know, the New Testament was written in Koine Greek and this word is written as *agape*. This kind of love is different from the kind we have for a car, food, sports, siblings, parents, children, or a spouse. This kind of love *LOVES* even when the love is *NOT* returned.

Love is lived both vertically (up-down) & horizontally (side-to-side). Because of sin, we cannot love properly. This kind of love can only come from God according to I John 4:11-12, 19-20 - "Dear friends, if God loved us that much, then we should love each other. No person has ever seen God at any time. If we love each other, God lives in us. His love is made perfect in us." "We love God because God loved us first! If a person says, 'I love God,' but hates anyone, that person is a liar! If a person does not love everyone whom he has (already) seen, how can that person love God Whom he has not (yet) seen?"

Someone said, "Why go to church if you don't feel like loving?" Truth is, "Why, go anywhere with that attitude?"

The greatest problem facing the United States isn't Congress in its divisiveness, neither the Democrats nor the Republicans. The greatest problem facing Afghanistan, Russia, China, Mexico, ANYWHERE, is the same problem facing you & me. Yep, you & me right here, right now, in our daily life here in Central Texas. The EXACT same problem.

We read in *John 14:15, Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will obey Me!" That means in business, in homes, at work, on the playground, in the voting booth, at the grocery store. Everywhere, at all times! Can we honestly say that we obey God in everything we say, do, or go in our daily lives at all times? It is shocking to think that God loved Hitler as much as He loves you & me. Jesus died for him and everyone else, because He loves each of us all.

Larry Barnett

Thursday, December 23

TODAY'S TEXT: ROMANS 8:35, 38-39

*I*n Romans 8:35 Paul asks "Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" The world is constantly trying to distract us and lead us away from the perfect love of Christ. Since Christ came to earth, Satan's goal is to separate us from our Lord. Paul goes on to say in verse 38, "For I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, not anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

During times of uncertainty these two verses bring us so much peace and comfort. God promises us in His Word that NOTHING can separate us from His love. We are his treasured creation. He even came, Himself, to this broken world to show us love.

When we found out we were pregnant with William, we were so impatient and couldn't wait for him to be born. We just wanted to make sure he was ok, although we knew that he would need to have a heart surgery within a few months after his birth. There was a longing within us that just wanted to see him and hold him. When that long awaited time came we were overwhelmed with relief and love that he was finally with us.

This time of year we are reminded of the anticipation and excitement that a loving God sent His Son into the world to save us from our sins. What an amazing love story that is not yet complete as we anxiously await our Lord to call His church home. As we await the coming of the Lord, we worship Him and draw near to Him through His word. The Christmas hymn by Charles Wesley states our longing perfectly. "Come thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free, from our fears and sin release us, let us find our rest in thee."

Aimee Et Brad Doring

Friday, December 24

TODAY'S TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 13:2

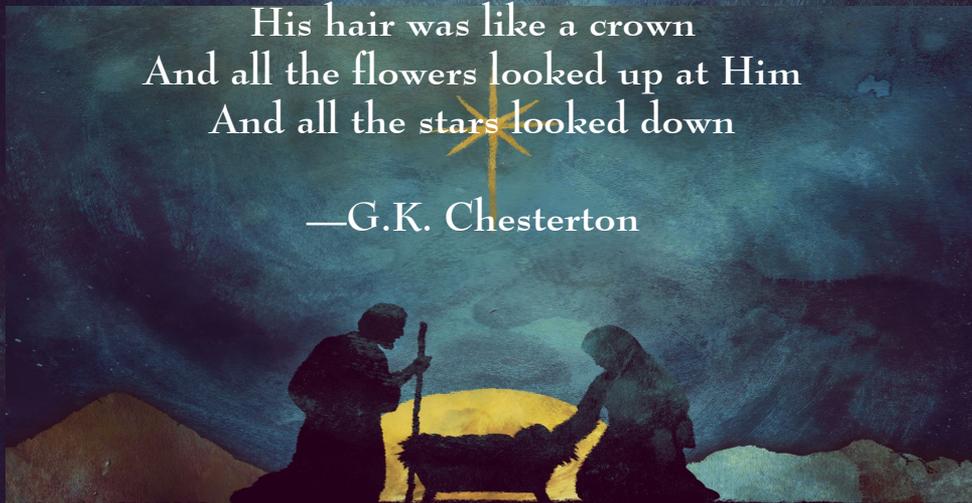
The Christ Child lay on Mary's lap
His hair was like a light
O weary, weary were the world
But here is all aright

The Christ Child lay on Mary's breast
His hair was like a star
O stern and cunning are the kings
But here the true hearts are

The Christ Child lay on Mary's heart
His hair was like a fire
O weary, weary is the world
But here the world's desire

The Christ Child stood on Mary's knee
His hair was like a crown
And all the flowers looked up at Him
And all the stars looked down

—G.K. Chesterton



Saturday, December 25

TODAY'S TEXT: MATTHEW 1 & LUKE 2

The night that changed the world is Christmas night. There is so much prophecy fulfilled that very night. The birth of Christ brought the promises of old to a visible sight that is captured in Matthew 1 and Luke 2. Your homework assignment today is read these two chapters. The promises of old were fulfilled in such a lowly way. If we had been in charge, we might have had Jesus arriving in the same fiery chariot that Elijah left in or had a whole mountain side as a burning bush un-like Moses had. We would have had Him being birthed at the nicest hospital on earth with news cameras the whole nine yards. We would have made it spectacular and a spectacle in many ways but, here came Jesus in such a way that just the common shepherds were made aware of this glorious event.

As humans we always like the spectacular and the best. In our world today we want the best for our lives and for our children. I remember when living in Kansas with three little rug rats, we scraped and scrimped to have a great Christmas for our kids. I mean I felt like we went way overboard, especially for the amount of money we were making. I didn't get much Brenda didn't get much but we felt like we had to have the spectacular for those kids. Well, we turned them loose and that night it lasted about 3 minutes they had it all open and displayed among a mountain of turn paper and ribbons. Then came the question: "Is this all?" I'll be honest I wasn't very Godly at that moment. I was ticked and kind of hurt, but they were just kids. Well, the next year came along, still the same three rug rats, but things were done differently. We sat down as a family and read the Christmas story and talked about the greatest gift at Christmas. I then made them, one at a time pick-up a present, shake it, guess what it was and then open it. Then it was the next one's turn and it just kept going till every present was opened. The madness of ripping and shredding had stopped, there was a different spirit from that Christmas on. Number one thing it took a lot longer than three minutes, but there seemingly was a little bit more appreciation about what they did get.

I just want to encourage you today! **STOP - OPEN THE BIBLE - READ THE STORY AS A FAMILY** and have a Merry "Christ" centered day!
Blessing on you all! Merry Christmas!

Pastor Dennis

Last Week of The Year

NEW BEGINNINGS

Last year, we counted ourselves lucky or blessed to have made it through 2020. I wonder how most of us feel this year? Does it seem like it's been year of regrouping or restructuring, or does it seem like things are reaching a level of equilibrium again? If we were to take a poll, it's likely it would be the former rather than the latter, and that seems reasonable and normal given the upheaval of 2020.

We long for normalcy. We desire routine and settledness. We ache for comfort. Well, that's been true of most average people in our culture in generations past. However, we see a trend of those who long for something more exciting. The mundanity of a relatively "normal" day to day existence is not enough for some. Blame Hollywood, blame young adult fiction, blame politics, blame youthful naivete. Whatever you want to say about art imitating life or life imitating art, there is no question of the rise in popularity of stories that reflect, exemplify, and even glorify a dystopic world.

If we're really paying attention to the larger story told in God's Word, we realize we are already living in a dystopic world. We know this world is sin sick and dysfunctional. And still it seems a contingency exists, those making much noise in our culture now, who are hungry for revolution. But the question must be asked, a revolution *from* what and *to* what? Some say, a revolution from oppression to freedom and *that* at all costs. This is the narrative that is most popular today. But what does God say about that?

Scripture shows us that our journey is not primarily one from oppression to freedom, but rather from darkness to light, from sin to salvation—creation, through the Fall, to regeneration and all things becoming new. Scripture points out that our "oppression" is rooted in the one thing only God Himself can free us from, and that is SIN. Our oppressors are three-fold. The world around us, the flesh in which we live, and the enemy of our souls, the devil. Apart from God, we will not gain freedom unless we seek freedom in Christ. He paid for our eternal freedom with His own blood and He tells us, "If the Son has made you free, you will be free indeed." Journey through this last week together and let's wrap this year up as a family of believers looking forward to what God will do next...

Sunday, December 26

TODAY'S TEXT: LAMENTATIONS 3:22-24

The Steadfast Love of the Lord

The Steadfast Love of the Lord never ceases
His mercies never come to an end
They are new every morning
New every morning
Great is Thy faithfulness, O God
Great is Thy faithfulness
—Edith McNeill

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Great is Thy faithfulness,
O God my Father
There is no shadow of turning with Thee
Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not
As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be

Great is Thy faithfulness
Great is Thy faithfulness
Morning by morning new mercies I see
All I have needed Thy hand hath provided
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me

—Thomas Obadiah Chisholm

Monday, December 27

TODAY'S TEXT: ISAIAH 42:9, 48:6

*B*oth of these verses are essentially stating the same or similar thoughts about the trustworthiness of God. They should be considered in conjunction with the surrounding chapters.

The former things which God had foretold, this is the evidence that God presents to the Hebrews as proof that He alone is God. This is the basis on which He calls them to believe what He has predicted as to future things that will also come to pass. God had His prophets foretell events which have now been fulfilled, and this should lead them to believe in Him alone as the one true God.

The Hebrews should recall prophecies concerning Abraham becoming a great nation, Egypt, the judgments against Damascus, Samaria, Nineveh, and Judah, 70 years in Babylon, and now the fulfillment of Cyrus and the coming of the return to Israel, the messianic kingdom, inclusion of the Gentiles, and the new heaven and earth.

The past two years have been two years that we all would like to forget, but that is not possible. For many, it has been a time of sadness, sickness, COVID19 and its after effects, the loss of individual freedoms, the loss of some friendships, property destroyed from different types of storms, and most sadly the loss of loved ones.

However, it has also been a time of rejoicing with the birth of new little ones, the making of new friendships, a closer walk with the Lord, seeing new converts, and being able to once again meet together. Let's make a real effort to join together as often as possible. We need the personal contact. If medical reasons prohibit you from attending, just remember, you are not forgotten and we pray for your recovery.

God has truly blessed us. We have a roof over our heads, food on the table, clothes on our backs, and access to medical services. Naturally, not all are the same. We must strive to help meet both the physical and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ and others as well. Let's make 2022 a great year in this regard.

I don't know what 2022 will bring, but I do know this: God is sovereign and he is control. Do not be anxious over things that you do not have any control. Look to God for strength and peace. Stay in the Word and do not neglect your prayer life. God is all powerful. Merry Christmas (two days late) and have a happy new year.

Dan Landrey

Tuesday, December 28

TODAY'S TEXT: ISALAH 43:18-19

*D*ecluttering is now a common word when organizing our homes or our lives. I agree with the premise that "less is more." After moving 2 times in the last few years, decluttering became a necessity for me.

When I prepared for my trip to UK in the fall of 2019, I was determined to travel light. I packed a carryon bag for my 3 week trip to Northern Ireland, Scotland and England. The day before my flight to London, a brilliant idea messed up that plan. I thought, "Wouldn't it be fun to teach the friends I am visiting on how to make enchiladas?" So, I bought 2 packages of 30 corn tortillas from HEB. I never imagined those innocent tortillas could spell trouble for me. In the first place, they were heavier than my carryon bag; thus they bogged me down. They made it through security at ABIA without a hitch. However, when I got to UK, tortillas are aliens to most British, Irish and Scots at security. I have never been asked so many questions about an item in my luggage on my past trips. Every time my tortillas went through a conveyor belt at security, I see the looks of surprise, interest or curiosity on people's faces.

After traveling by air, bus, taxi, ferry and train, my tortillas made it to Belfast and Pitlochry. When they were consumed, travel was a breeze. I don't regret taking those tortillas with me. Jocelyn Naquin said that they remember me every time she makes enchilada for the family. However, next time I travel, I will order my tortillas online at my destination.

In Philippians 3:13, Paul wrote, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." He must have had in mind the Lord's promise in Isaiah 43:18-19.

I am still on that journey of letting go of things, and sins that hinder my relationship with the Lord. I thank the Lord because He gives us a new day and a New Year so we can have new beginnings.

Ruth Rice

Wednesday, December 29

TODAY'S TEXT: EPHESIANS 4:21-24

*I*n Celebrate Recovery, which is a Christ-Centered 12-Step Program, we constantly work the 12 Steps. Step 1 says, "We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors, that our lives had become unmanageable." This is something we need to do on a constant basis, not just once, but over and over again.

Those of us that have worked through or around Celebrate Recovery declare Jesus Christ is our Higher Power. Through our trust and faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are able to put off our former conduct, our lusts, our hurts, hang-ups, and habits. Jesus enables us to become new, without our past ways.

As we are nearing the beginning of another new year, regardless of the issues or the stage of our recovery, we look back on the previous year and beyond. We examine our lives and our old ways. We release our sins and issues to Jesus, who has already forgiven us and cleansed us of those sins. He has made each of us new. In 2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul tells us, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

*"God, grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.
Living one day at a time,
enjoying one moment at a time;
accepting hardship as a pathway to peace;
taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is,
not as I would have it;
trusting that You will make all things right
if I surrender to Your will;
so that I may be reasonably happy in this life
and supremely happy
with You forever in the next. Amen."*

- Reinhold Niebuhr

Les Turner

Thursday, December 30

TODAY'S TEXT: REVELATION 21:4-5

*W*e live right now in the midst of a great change in our society. This pandemic has plagued our world in many ways. People have lost their sanity and hope in anything future. Now we are more concerned about our health than we ever were before. But the greatest of these tragedies has been the amount of lives that have been lost or dramatically changed. They said that 2021 was the year of a better vision for your life. But this year has been a year of confusion. A year of tears.

One thing that is very comforting still is the love of God. We can still see the grace of God in our lives today. In God's Word, our verse today tells part of a beautiful promise that can encourage us. John the apostle was on the Isle of Patmos when he wrote what he saw and what he saw was something so beautiful that he could hardly describe it. He saw a new Heaven and a new Earth. What a beautiful transition. It is sad when things pass away sometimes, but oh how beautiful is a new beginning—a fresh start!

But wait, it gets better. John also saw in Revelation 21: 2-3 KJV "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God,". John saw the city of God. The holy city of Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. The beauty of which was compared to a woman on her wedding day prepared to meet her husband. How beautiful must this city have been! Isn't that more beautiful than anything you've ever seen? Also, he heard a voice bringing tidings of joy. He was told that God would be with men, that we would be His people and that He would be our God. Wow! Man finally in God's presence again. Have you ever realized how wonderful it would be to be in God's presence? I think about this all the time and it fills my heart with so much joy.

One of the most amazing things that was revealed to John was in verse 4. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away". Honestly my mind can't even imagine a place with no death. No sickness. No sorrow. No more crying. Even the former things are passed away. No more remembrance of the mistakes that we have made. No more thoughts of all the painful losses and things that have happened to us. Since this pandemic there has been so many tragedies and brokenness. But I see something beautiful on the horizon. I see change coming. Jesus said behold I make all things new. Doesn't that put a smile on your face? If you have been feeling down lately. Or even if you have been feeling weighed down or far from the Lord meditate on this truth. God will wipe all tears away, not some tears, but scripture says "all." Amen!!

Calvin Belle

Friday, December 31

TODAY'S TEXT: ISAIAH 65:17, 2 PETER 3:11-13

This year has been a year of remarkable change for our family. One daughter graduated from college, another one started college, then our youngest daughter started high school, and our son graduated from high school. Our oldest daughter started a career and moved way from the comforts of home. On top of all that, we are preparing and celebrating the wonderful martial engagement of our middle daughter. Then sadly, we experienced the tragic loss of our most beloved family pet. The list goes on; however, amid all these life changes, I am ever grateful. I am grateful for the time God has allowed us to live, love, and spend time with one another.

In Isaiah 65:17 "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind." We are reminded that God has an ultimate plan for all of us. At times we may not understand but we can rejoice in the salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be comforted in knowing that the Lord loves us and seeks the very best for us in accordance with His will.

As stated in 2 Peter 3:11-13 "Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."

No matter the things of old, there is hope in God's holy presence. When one may be feeling dismayed, anxious, or nervous; turn to our heavenly Father and rejoice! Rejoice that He is with us always and will comfort us in the times of need and uncertainty of the future. He will walk beside us and take comfort in the peace that our Lord has freely given. All we must do is seek His guidance through prayer and to be an active member of His body. Bless you and your loved ones with this upcoming year. Though tough times may be ahead, God has promised us that He will never leave us.

Paul Castle

Saturday, January 1, 2022

TODAY'S TEXT: ROMANS 8:24-25, REVELATION 22:6

So I'll confess. Romans 8 is one of my very favorite chapters in scripture. Masterfully written by the Apostle Paul, it is one of the deepest and most complex chapters dealing with theology, soteriology, ontology, and every other "ology" and yet it is so easy to understand—anyone can receive the message of the gospel from this chapter. What I love most is the chapter's ending, which I have adopted as my "life verses," but since they've been written about in prior weeks, I thought we'd bookend our time together with the idea of HOPE. Paul delves into a word picture in verse 19 that describes the kind of hope that will deliver all of Creation. This hope, he states, is what we were saved in and now wait to see come to its fullness. The idea of "enlargement" is implied by the use of the original language, the same way an expectant mother is "enlarged" as she moves toward the realization of that for which she has been hoping and waiting. Although she cannot see the baby who is "enlarging" her, she knows as it grows, the joy of expectancy grows along with it. Because a mother knows her enlargement will result in a baby and that the time is limited, she waits with joy

and with patience or perseverance, as the NKJV puts it. It's not a big deal to wait, because she knows her waiting will be rewarded and that is assured.

He Walks With Me
by Sandra McCracken

Though now we have trials
We wait for salvation
Though tested by fire
We suffer with joy
By His great mercy
Our Hope has been born again
Faithful as the morning
We are raised up with Christ

And I cannot see Him
But oh how I love Him
I cannot see Him, but I believe
I know He walks with me
I believe, that He walks with me

Raised up with the priesthood
To witness His wondrous works
Called out from the darkness
To shimmering light

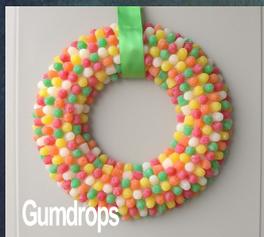
And I cannot see Him
But oh how I love Him
I cannot see Him, but I believe
I know He walks with me
I believe, that He walks with me

Tie this in with Revelation 22 where we are transported into John's vision of the last things in recorded history — things which have not come to fruition as of yet. But they are things that the Lord Jesus says are "Faithful and True." John records many strange and wondrous sights, events, and realms. It's hard for us to imagine with our color palette, with our dimensional understanding, with our time constraints much the same way a baby in utero cannot imagine what a tree might look like. Yet, we read that "He," the Lord, assures us that it is all true, it is all real and we can count on Him doing what He said He will do. Isn't our God good? He gives us assurance through Paul's writing that what we hope for will come to pass just as sure as He came to bring us salvation. We can count on it. That's something and SOMEONE worth putting our HOPE in. What do we do in the meantime? I'll let Sandra McCracken's song, "He Walks With Me" sum that up for us. There's another link at the bottom if you'd like to hear the song for yourself. Happy New Year everyone!

[LISTEN HERE](#)

Rosanna Haddock

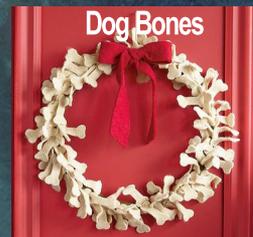
UNUSUAL AND UNIQUE CHRISTMAS WREATHS



Gumdrops



Popcorn



Dog Bones



Doilies



Caramel Candies



Brussel Sprouts



Balls of Yarn



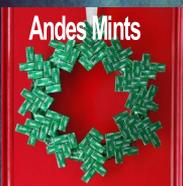
Wrapped Scarves



Vintage Light Strings



Crayons



Andes Mints



Vintage Jewelry



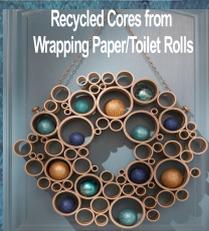
Seashells



Coffee Filters



Cookie Cutters



Recycled Cores from Wrapping Paper/Toilet Rolls



Old Buttons



Red Potatoes

The custom of bringing evergreens home during the winter began in the 16th century among northern and eastern Europeans. During this period, pruning the tree was a part of the preparation process. Instead of throwing the pieces of greenery away, the Europeans wove the excess into wreaths.

AFTERWORD

Once again, a formal “THANK YOU” goes out to each and every person involved in compiling such a diverse devotional. God has blessed us at CBC with much talent, spiritual wisdom, and perseverance! Not to mention, courage and just a hint of nuttiness for those willing to write with so short a deadline. Some of you were reticent, but mustered up the inner fortitude to try—thank you so much. I hope you found it rewarding as a project and that you’re pleased you said yes. Just as last year, a special thank you goes out to Jim Owen for trusting us with his poetry in ways he probably never envisioned it would be used when he conceived of it. Thanks Jim!

If you have not participated in a devotional book in the past, please consider contributing next year. We are a Body and every member is important, necessary, and very vital. You have something to say, and we’d love to hear it!

We hope this Advent journey has served to enrich your quiet time with the Lord and perhaps for some, provided opportunity for a daily time set aside. Perhaps this was the first time you have had a regular quiet time. Our hope is that you will continue to spend daily time alone with the Lord studying His Word. Every opportunity you take to grow in your walk with Him benefits us as a Church, for you have learned much and you will continue to learn much in your journey with the Lord. Please consider sharing it with your church family to edify and enrich others. May God richly bless you and your families this New Year!



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