

Advent

Advent is a time of breathless anticipation. Children joyfully count the days until Christmas arrives. They pore over the latest and greatest toys that would be an awesome fit for their collections. Kitchens are operating at maximum efficiency as Christmas treats are being created in endless supply. Menus are being created for the many parties and get-togethers, and, of course, Christmas dinner. Travel plans are being made. Airfare and hotel rooms are being secured. Timelines are being planned to the minute.

Adding to the hustle and bustle of preparation to celebrate Christmas is the house cleaning, sheet washing, and bed making that has to happen for the family who will be coming. The anticipation (and often stress) builds with each passing day as December 25th approaches.

Even Churches aren't exempt. The hallways, sanctuaries, and offices will be decorated. Pastors are preparing sermons. Music directors and musicians are preparing and practicing the music of the season. Services are scheduled. Candles are lit. Worship folders are printed and neatly folded for all to peruse.

Unfortunately, in our "preparations" to celebrate Christmas, we often miss the reason and purpose for the season. Like Clark Griswold, planning an "Old-fashioned family Christmas," the stress builds to the boiling point and the reason for the celebration disappears.

Advent is a time of waiting, expectant waiting for the gift of God to appear to us in a transformative way. Jesus Christ came, the first time, to bring God's salvation **and HOPE** into the world.

This season of Advent is a time of longing for the return of the child-Savior. We look expectantly, wondering if tonight will be the night. As we are waiting, we look inward. We confess. We open our hearts to the transforming work of the Holy Spirit, all so that we may be ready when the child of Bethlehem returns to complete His redeeming work.

The pastors who prepared this devotional guide are just that, pastors. We each have a deep burden and have given our lives to see our congregations experience the hope that comes from a personal encounter with Jesus Christ that makes all things new. It is our prayer that this devotional guide will help you on your own personal journey to the manger to meet Jesus there, and to know the hope that comes from Jesus.

Give to you for Jesus' love,

Cody, Erica, Art, and Caleb

Thursday, November 27, 2025

Scripture Readings: Psalm 122; Daniel 9:15-19; James 4:1-10

⁷Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. ⁸Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded. ⁹Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and *your* joy to gloom. ¹⁰Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up. (James 4.7-10 NKJV)

If we are honest with ourselves, there is not much going on around us, from a worldly perspective, that gives us a reason to hope. The reality is quite the opposite. We see division and strife, crime, drugs, wars, poverty, bigotry, murders, and all manner of abuse. Depending on your perspective, the economy is not great. Political powers do little except squabble. Reading the headlines can threaten the faith and hope of even the most steadfast follower of Jesus.

Truthfully, if you read all of the passages today, the world that we live in isn't much different from the world of exile that Daniel experienced. Carried away to Babylon, Daniel witnessed the punishment meted out on Judah because of their sin and faithlessness to God's covenant.

Yet, even in exile, Daniel finds cause to hope. Daniel's hope is not in the circumstances around him, but in the presence, the power, and the salvation of Yahweh, whom Daniel serves faithfully. The passage in Daniel exemplifies the hope of God's future deliverance. Daniel's lived-out hope is the embodiment of David's song – "seek the good of the city...I will seek YOUR good." Daniel could see that God was up to something, bringing about the redemption of God's people.

This hope is the point that James is directing us to in James 4.8, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you!" Our hope is in the nearness of our hearts and minds to the omnipresent God of us all. Our Advent hope is the knowledge that God-with-us is up to something...even as he was two thousand years ago, moving in the life of a Jewish peasant girl, bringing about the salvation of the earth.

Hope still lives in us today, as we seek the presence and work of Jesus in the world and within us.

- In your prayer and reflection time, name the places where you can recognize the presence and the work of Jesus in your life today.
- Pray for specific people in your life who need to know the hope you have, to experience the reality of hope in Jesus.

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 122; Genesis 6:1-10; Hebrews 11:1-7

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

Hebrews 11.1, ESV

Hope is hard unless one is rooted in the life and ministry of Jesus.

The writer to the Hebrews is about to express what our other readings today hint at. Hope and faith are intricately tied together. The Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible defines hope as, "An expectation or belief in the fulfillment of something desired (996)." The crucial word is "expectation." Hope is more than just a pipe dream or a wish upon a star. Hope is an active expectancy that God is who God reveals God's self to be, and God will accomplish all that God promises. Faith is a life lived out, actively trusting in the hope God promises.

The rest of Hebrews chapter 11 records the "Hall of Faith." The Hall of Faith reports how ordinary people who, convinced of God's faithfulness, lived out their entire lives in response to that promised hope. Their acts, their deeds, their words, their songs all reflected the bedrock conviction that God was faithful and would deliver on the promises that God made. Faith is hope lived out loud for all to see.

St. Gregory of Nazianzen said, "faith is that which completes our argument (*Third Theological Oration no. 21*). Faith is an active life that portrays the **conviction** that the promise of our Savior is real, and our God is big enough, strong enough, loving enough, and gracious enough to bring God's promise to reality. Faith is the final word for those who would follow Jesus.

In the Old Testament readings, Noah finds grace because he trusted in God's words. When no one else could see or understand, Noah trusted and built an ark. David, when called to worship, sang with praise and prayed for peace...trusting that God's peace would come to Jerusalem.

As we move through Advent to the celebration of the gift of Jesus Christ to the world, we LIVE trusting (faithing) in the ultimate completion of all the promises of God. His LIVING word, Jesus Christ, is the guarantee of God's promised redemption. God's New Thing is alive and at work among us.

- Where do you see God at work, in your life, accomplishing God's purposes?
- In what specific areas of your life do you need to live out the hope you have in God's promises?

Saturday, November 29, 2025:

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 122; Genesis 6:11-22; Matthew 24:1-22

¹³ But he who endures to the end shall be saved.

Matthew 24.13, ESV

As you read today's scripture readings, it may be hard to conjure images of hope. After all, in the Genesis reading, God proclaims judgment and destruction, and in Matthew, Jesus prepares the disciples for the last days and his return. Let's be honest, the end of things doesn't often conjure images of hope.

But the fact remains that hope is the latent theme of both "ending" passages. In the Genesis account, God commands Noah to build an ark as a means of restoring the earth following the flood. Not EVERYTHING is destroyed. Noah and seven of his family members, along with two of every kind of creature on earth, are spared to repopulate the earth. In Matthew, Jesus promises his disciples that the one who, in faith and in obedience, endures the trials that are coming, will be saved eternally.

The gospel message of Scripture, repeated countless times throughout the biblical narrative, is that God provides hope, in the form of deliverance, for those who are faithful and endure.

During Advent, we celebrate the seal of God's promise of hope, the birth of Jesus Christ, God incarnate. Jesus comes to bring God's promise of salvation to pass. All who believe and trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus have the promise of eternal hope. God has made the way for His followers to endure to the end, and to celebrate eternally with the resurrected Lamb of God.

The point of hope is that God has already guaranteed the future of those who place their trust in Him.

During this Advent, if you find yourself low on hope, we invite you to place your trust in Jesus Christ and follow Him. Our prayer is that you experience the kind of eternal hope that only comes from the Savior of the world.

- How full is your hope meter today?
- In what have you been placing your trust and hope?
- Invite Jesus to become more than a Christmas decoration; invite him to become your Lord today.

Let this Advent season remind you of the unchanging goodness of God and His unfailing love for you.

Intentional remembering is vital to our spiritual health.

We are a forgetful people—not because we don't care, but because our daily routines rarely make space for reflection. In the busyness of life, we often move from one moment to the next without pausing to recall God's faithfulness. Without intentional practices that root us in remembrance, we lose sight of what He's done and how He's been present with us.

The people of Israel understood the power of remembering. As they journeyed to Jerusalem, they sang songs like Psalm 124—not just out of tradition, but as a way of retelling their story and reminding each other of God's deliverance. These songs were woven into their travel, their worship, and their everyday lives.

When was the last time you made space to recount God's goodness with others? Have you ever turned a car ride, a walk, or a quiet moment into an opportunity to speak or sing of what God has done?

Maybe we've lost something valuable in our modern pace—a rhythm of remembrance that shapes our hearts and strengthens our faith.

Take time today to reflect on all that God has done in your life—the times you cried out to Him in despair, and He met you; the times He came alongside you, and you felt His presence and nearness. Think about the joyful moments when His goodness flooded your heart.

God is good, and His mercies never end.

Thank Him for who He is and for all He has done for you.

"Our help is from the Lord, Who made heaven and earth."

-Psalm 124:8

- What can you praise God for today?
- Who can you share it with?

Tuesday, December 2, 2025 Today's Scriptures: Psalm 124, Genesis 9:1-17, Hebrews 11:32-40

Have you ever looked at someone else's faith and compared it to your own journey? I think, to some degree, we all do this. It's human nature to measure where we are by looking at where others seem to be. We admire the strong, steady faith of others—maybe even feel inadequate when our own path feels messy, uncertain, or slow.

Hebrews chapter 11 gives us what's often called the "Hall of Faith"—a list of men and women who trusted God through impossible situations. Their stories inspire us: Abraham, who left everything to follow God's call; Moses, who chose obedience over comfort; Rahab, who risked everything to protect God's people; and many more.

But it's important to remember—none of these people had perfect faith. They doubted. They struggled. They failed. What set them apart wasn't flawless belief, but a willingness to trust God, step by step, even when they didn't see the whole picture. They made themselves available. They allowed God to lead them. They partnered with Him in obedience, believing that His plan was greater than anything they could have imagined.

And now, your story is being written too.

Your faith journey may not look like someone else's—and it's not supposed to. God isn't asking you to be Abraham or Moses or anyone else. He's inviting you to trust Him with *your* life, *your* story, and *your* journey.

The heroes of faith weren't great because they were perfect.

They were great because they trusted a perfect God.

For Prayerful Consideration

So, pause and ask yourself:

How is God wanting to use your story to glorify Him?

Your struggles, your victories, your moments of quiet faithfulness—they all matter. They are all part of something bigger.

You don't have to have it all figured out. Just be willing. Be present. Be open to letting God lead you—even if it's just one small step at a time.

Wednesday, December 3, 2025 Psalm 124. Is 54:1-10. Matthew 24:23-35

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the Lord, who has compassion on you." Isaiah 54:10 (NIV)

Isaiah 54 is a chapter of promise, restoration, and tender reassurance. It follows the powerful prophecy of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53—Jesus, who bore our sins and carried our sorrows. And now, in chapter 54, God speaks to His people not with judgment, but with deep compassion.

The chapter opens with a strange command: "Sing, barren woman..." (v.1). God speaks directly to the one who feels empty, forgotten, or disqualified—calling her not by her failure, but by her future. He invites her to rejoice before the breakthrough, to sing before the miracle.

God is not limited by what is. He sees what will be.

He speaks to the rejected and the shamed and says, "You will forget the shame of your youth" (v.4). He calls Himself your **Redeemer**, your **Husband**, your **Builder**. In every verse, God gently reminds us that His heart is not to cast us off, but to draw us close again.

And then comes verse 10, one of the most powerful promises in all of Scripture:

"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken..."

Everything else in life may shift. People may leave. Plans may fall apart. Dreams may die. But **God's love remains unshaken**.

He has established a covenant of peace with you—a promise that is not based on your performance, but on His mercy. He has compassion on you, even in your brokenness. He is not finished with you.

Where do you feel barren, forgotten, or unworthy today?

Isaiah 54 invites you to expand your tent, stretch out your faith, and make room for what God is going to do—even if you don't see it yet. He is a God of restoration. What was empty, He will fill. What was broken, He will rebuild. What was lost, He will redeem.

You don't have to live in fear or shame. You are not forsaken. You are loved with an everlasting, unshakable love.

- Are there areas in your life where you've stopped believing that restoration is possible?
- What would it look like to "sing" before the breakthrough—praising God in faith for what you have not yet seen?

Thursday, December 4, 2025 Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 4:2-6, Acts 1:12-17, 21-26

"May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth... May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him."

— Psalm 72:8,11 (NIV)

Psalm 72 is a prayer.

Not just any prayer—but a kingdom-sized prayer.

It was originally written by Solomon, asking God to bless the reign of the king with justice, righteousness, and compassion. But as you read the psalm, the language expands beyond any earthly ruler. The reach of this king's reign stretches to the ends of the earth. His rule brings justice for the poor, deliverance for the needy, and worship from all nations.

This is more than a royal wish—it's a **prophetic prayer pointing to Jesus**, the eternal King of kings.

Psalm 72 invites us into a kind of prayer that goes beyond our personal needs. It teaches us to lift our eyes and pray **kingdom prayers**—prayers that ask God to establish righteousness, justice, peace, and healing **in our lives and in the world**.

Too often, our prayers are limited by what we can see. Psalm 72 invites us to pray as Jesus taught us: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

This kind of prayer is bold. It's expansive. It's full of vision and faith.

Prayer is not just about asking for help—it's about **partnering with God** to see His kingdom break through into our lives, our communities, and our world. Psalm 72 is a model for this kind of praying:

- **Pray for justice** "May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy..." (v.4)
- Pray for peace "In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound..." (v.7)
- Pray for the nations "May all nations be blessed through him, and may they call him blessed." (v.17)
- Pray with praise "Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory." (v.19)

- You don't need to be a king or a prophet to pray like this. You just need a heart that longs for more of Jesus in the world.
- What does your current prayer life say about what you believe God can do?
- Are your prayers mostly inward-focused, or are you also praying for God's purposes in the world around you?

Friday, December 5, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 30:19-26, Acts 13:16-25

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.'"

— Acts 13:32–33 (NIV)

In Acts 13, Paul stands before a Jewish audience in a synagogue and boldly proclaims something world-changing: Jesus is the Messiah they have been waiting for.

This was not just a new teaching—it was the fulfillment of ancient promises. Paul connects the dots from **Abraham to David to Jesus**, showing that everything God had spoken through the prophets had now come to pass. The long-awaited Savior had come, not as a military leader or political figure, but as the **suffering Servant who rose from the dead**.

"What God promised our ancestors, He has fulfilled..." (v. 32)

This is the heart of the gospel: **Jesus is the fulfillment of God's faithful promises.** He is not an afterthought or a new idea—He is the centerpiece of God's redemptive plan from the beginning.

Through His life, death, and resurrection, Jesus brought forgiveness, freedom, and a new kind of kingdom—one marked by grace, not law; by love, not fear.

The people in Acts 13 had a choice to make: would they recognize Jesus as the Messiah, or reject Him? Some received the message with joy. Others resisted.

That same choice is before us today.

We live in a world filled with promises, many of them empty. But **God's promises are sure**, and Jesus is the proof. He is the One who fulfills the deepest longing of the human heart. In Him, we find not only forgiveness, but purpose, peace, and the hope of resurrection life.

If Jesus truly is the Messiah, the Risen One, then everything changes. Our past can be redeemed. Our present can be transformed. Our future is secure.

- Have you embraced Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promises—for the world, and for *you* personally?
- Who in your life needs to hear the "good news" that Jesus is the Messiah the one who saves?

Saturday, December 6, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19, Isaiah 40:1-11, John 1:19-28

"I am a voice shouting in the wilderness, 'Clear the way for the Lord's coming!" John 1:23

Before Jesus began His public ministry, there was a man sent by God with a specific calling: John the Baptist. His mission wasn't to build a following for himself, but to prepare hearts for the coming of the Messiah.

John preached with urgency and clarity:

"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." Matthew 3:2

He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that one would come to prepare the way for the Messiah.

For centuries, God's people waited. Prophets had spoken of a Savior, a Redeemer, a King who would rescue them. And now, John announces, "The wait is over. He is here."

John's message was simple yet powerful:

Turn back to God. Get your heart ready. The Messiah is coming.

Then Jesus came on the scene and John pointed away from himself toward Jesus, proclaiming:

"Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29

John's ministry is a powerful reminder that God keeps His promises.

Jesus was God's plan from the beginning—to save the world and offer eternal life to all who would receive His gift of salvation.

At just the right time, Jesus came and fulfilled everything God had promised. **God is** faithful. Always.

John also reminds us that we must prepare our hearts. That preparation is spiritual—it means turning away from sin and turning toward Jesus, the only one who can forgive and restore us.

We live in a time of **hopeful anticipation**, looking forward to the day when Jesus returns. But as we wait, we are called to **point others to Him**, to trust in His promises, and to live each day ready for His return.

- What areas of your life need to be "prepared" for Jesus to work more fully?
- Are you trusting that God is still fulfilling His promises, even if you can't see it yet?
- Who in your life can you help "point to Jesus" like John did?

MONDAY December 8, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 21; Isaiah 24:1-16a; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

"Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more." – 1 Thessalonians 4:1

It is hard to be joyful when we all feel so burned out.

Burnout used to be something reserved for CEO's, politicians, and other high-stress type jobs. In modern culture, burnout is experienced across every sector of society, whether it is a stay-at-home mom, a teenager in school, or a car salesman. This psychological phenomenon has been studied, leading to a focus on forcing people to take vacation time and an entire cottage industry focused on relaxation and wellness. While these things are all good, and taking time off and caring for ourselves are important, what if that isn't the actual problem?

The last thing that could help us fight burnout is *more*! But here we stand with Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, encouraging us to do "more and more." He even says it is the "will of God" in verse three —what?! Maybe Paul and scripture are on to something. Maybe the burnout, which is really just aggregated low-grade anxiety, we feel is not caused by the volume of our work, but by not having a clear *why* for doing the work.

I have realized there is no end to the challenges and tasks I take on. Laundry never ends, bills keep coming, and the dishes seem to pile up in the sink no matter how fast I do them. These are simply facts of life. If I frame these things as problems to solve, then I will always have "problems." If I reframe this as 'these are things I do to take care of my family and show them how much I love them,' I can begin to find joy in these tasks. I will never love doing the dishes, but I do love Katie (my wife) and helping her. This makes the dishes not so bad.

This is the same with serving people. If we view them as problems to solve, we will have a lot of problems. If we view them as people to love, then we will have joy in helping them. This is the heart of finding joy in our lives and this world.

- 1. What is a problem in your life that is draining you, and how could you reframe it with the perspective of love and Christ?
- 2. If we are called to live and work with increasing love, what steps can you take today to obey this command?

TUESDAY, December 9, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 21; Isaiah 41:14-20; Romans 15:14-21

"Now, I will make of you a threshing-sledge, sharp, new, and having teeth; you shall thresh the mountains and crush them, and you shall make the hills like chaff." – Isaiah 41:15

This week is all about joy. It is difficult to feel joy when we witness so much pain in the world. Christians in Nigeria are being martyred by the thousands, slavery is widespread in the fast fashion industry, immigrants are exploited by both cartels and governments, and childhood hunger remains a serious issue in our own communities. Injustice seems to be everywhere, and we often feel powerless to make a difference. I lie awake at night, praying and asking God why there is so much pain and suffering in our world and wondering how we can find joy amid it all.

In the second half of this reading, God confirms he will provide for those who suffer, and that gives some sort of eschatological hope for sure. We are firm believers that in the resurrection, "He is making all things new" (Isa. 43:19, Rev. 21:5). There is definitely hope and peace there, but I struggle to have joy with only this distant promise of justice.

But Isaiah's words here are what give me real joy. Joy at this very moment. He is prophesying that God will use us as a tool to refine this world, removing the chaff and bringing down the mountains, and to bring His kingdom here "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).

The church has historically done this —from creating educational institutions that have lifted more people out of poverty than ever in human history to creating hospitals and health care systems that provide healing on a scale never before seen. The church has been busy bringing the Kingdom here and joy to people's lives. We cannot stop. There is more work to do, and God is ready to use his church to bring joy.

- 1. What issue, local or otherwise, keeps you up at night, and what is a tangible step you could take to help?
- 2. Pray for God's kingdom to come and for God to invigorate his church to fight injustice in this world.

WEDNESDAY, December 10, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 21; Genesis 15:1-18; Matthew 12:33-37

"You bestow on him blessings forever; you make him glad with the joy of your presence." – Psalm 21:6

Friday nights are sacred in our house. The life of a pastor leaves little room for margin. We spend our weeks like most normal families, rushing around with work and coming home to get dinner ready, doing homework, and going through bedtime routines. But the difference is Sundays. Sunday is the busiest day of our week. This makes our Friday night the only night when nothing happens the next day. We fill this night with special desserts, movies, board games, and staying up past bedtime. Fridays are sacred because our family intentionally spends time together. There is so much joy just being in each other's presence.

There are times I wish joy were easier than this, though. While it is simple, spending unhurried time together. It is hard to protect this sacred time. Everything in the world seems to want that spot in our lives. But we must protect it; otherwise, we will never get to have that true joy together.

True joy, joy that gives our souls life, is no different. It is from spending unhurried time in the presence of God. Yet, this is the easiest time to give away to other things. Everything in this world is competing for our attention, and there is a billion-dollar advertising industry built on distracting you. Their very purpose is to make you dissatisfied with your life so that they can sell you the solution. We allow our prayer time to get cut short by social media or streaming. We cannot sit down and engage in scripture because we must read about the latest celebrity gossip. We miss church for travel ball, dance competitions, or a myriad of other things.

All of these things that may make us laugh or that we may even enjoy will never bring us true joy outside of God's presence in our lives. When we prioritize spending time with God, and protect it, true joy fills our lives.

- 1. When is the last time you wasted some time with God?
- 2. Take a prayer walk today, no phone, no distractions. You and God walk around your block talking.

THURSDAY, December 11, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 1:6-18; 2 Peter 3:1-10

"The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." – 2 Peter 3:1-10

Staring at the oven timer, anxious with anticipation, my girls could barely contain their excitement. The smell of fresh-baked brownies had invaded the kitchen and taken hold of the last vestige of patience and willpower in all of us. These were brownies that we had planned to make earlier in the day, and all that stood between us and these sweet delicacies were a few moments in a hot oven. Timer chimes, oven mitt on, and the brownies were within our grasp. I sliced and served this chocolatey goodness to us all. The bite that we had been longing for was nothing but pure pain! The brownies were a touch cooler than molten lava

Patience is not my strong suit. With all the verses in the Bible about waiting on the Lord, I often wonder if I am cut out for this Christian life. When talking to one of my mentors about a friend I had been praying for and trying to minister to, I expressed my frustration about why God would not move in his life. He gave me some of the best advice I've ever received: "God is more like smoking barbecue than microwaving it." Sure, you can cook food in the microwave quickly, but it won't taste very good. The slow process of smoking is part of what makes it tender and flavorful. Patience is needed. Patience is required.

I know we see broken people, an unjust world, and myriad problems in our lives that we want God to just fix, but God does not work like that. He is truly working all things out for our good, and that means for all of humanity and creation. We must realize that God's patience with us far exceeds our lack of patience in his redeeming work in this world.

We can find joy in knowing that God's plans and ways are higher than ours and that he can be trusted with all of them. Joy comes when we release the burden of believing our plan is better than God's.

- 1. When have you struggled to trust God's timing and found it difficult to be patient? How did you see His plan unfold over time, and what did you learn through that waiting?
- 2. How might embracing God's patience and releasing your own expectations help you experience more joy and peace in your daily life?

FRIDAY, December 12, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 146:5-10; Ruth 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:11-18

"Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation." – 2

Peter 3:14–15

My quads were wadded up like crumpled newspaper. I could feel my muscles seizing up from dehydration, and I wondered if I would be able to drag myself off this trail. My race plan and lack of training were failing me. There is no worse feeling than walking up to the race table and withdrawing. I wanted to offer some race-day reasons why I could not complete what I had set out to do, but the reality was that my lack of training and preparation was the real problem.

Peter is encouraging us not to fall into this same trap in our faith. The lack of training was not a single missed session or a bad day on the trail; it was a series of poor decisions and a lack of effort that led to my failure that day. Our faith is the same thing. We will have bad days and make poor choices, but if we continually work out our salvation and keep our eyes fixed on Christ daily, we will be ready when he comes again.

The goal in running and in our faith should be to beat yesterday's effort. In faith, we can do this by challenging ourselves daily to develop the virtues that Christ called us to—loving God and loving our neighbors. Every day, we should set out to practice these loves. We should daily seek to waste time with God and actively love our neighbors. This might be as simple as sharing a kind word with a friend or stranger, delivering baked goods to someone, or finding other ways to show love to people. We can waste time with God by going on prayer walks or sitting quietly and enjoying God's presence. Joy comes when we know we are prepared to run the race.

- 1. In what areas of your life or faith do you find yourself making small, repeated choices that lead you away from growth or preparation? How can you begin to make intentional changes to "work out your salvation" each day?
- 2. What practical steps can you take this week to intentionally spend time with God and actively show love to those around you?

SATURDAY, December 13, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 146:5-10; 1 Samuel 2:1-8; Luke 3:1-18

"Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever, who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry." – Psalm 146:5-7

The Jewish people modeled the idea of eschatological joy for us as Christians. They were always defiantly hopeful of the second coming of David. Even when they were not sure how God would fulfill this promise while they were in exile or while enemies occupied their promised land, they had joy and hope. I am sure you are thinking about the entire book of Lamentations, or Jeremiah's sad prophetic words to Israel. The brokenness and sadness that permeate several Old Testament stories would seem to contradict this very idea. Our understanding of joy is too naïve. Joy is not some persistent dopamine trip happiness that ignores the very real brokenness of our world. It is hopeful, defiant joy against the evil around us, which has been defeated and is being overcome with every breath of our living Savior and his church's refusal to surrender.

This defiance looks like homeless ministries going into the streets to give food and blankets while sharing the Good News of Christ's resurrection. It is the defiant hope of praying outside of abortion clinics and weeping with terrified mothers. It is standing in a prison and preaching a Gospel of true freedom. It is holding the hand of people taking their last earthly breath without fear because they know that their savior lives. This defiant joy looks in the face of sin and death and says I know that you think you have won, but Christ has defeated death, and your reign is done. This is true joy, joy that cannot be shaken. This is the joy that began with our King's birth.

Questions:

- 1. How does the concept of "defiant joy" in the face of suffering challenge or reshape your own understanding of what it means to be truly joyful as a follower of Christ?
- 2. In what specific situations in your life or in your community can you actively embody the kind of hope and justice described in Psalm 146 and the devotional's examples?

Today's Scriptures: Psalm 42; Isaiah 29:17-24; Acts 5:12-16

Love Longs and Love Restores

Psalm 42 does not give us a calm picture of serenity in nature. "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God." This is not about peaceful scenery. It is the cry of someone gasping, desperate for what only God can provide.

Advent is the season for people who can no longer pretend they are fine the way they are. It is the season for people who ache for God to break in, to heal what is broken, and to bring hope where there is none.

Isaiah gives us a glimpse of what that healing looks like. The deaf hear. The blind see. The poor rejoice. God's love opens a reality unlike anything we have ever experienced.

In Acts, we see that love is on the move. Crowds gather. Bodies are healed. Shattered lives are restored.

That is the love I need. Maybe you need it too. Advent reminds us that longing is not something to suppress or ignore. It is often that very restlessness that keeps us turning back to God. And when we do, we discover His love does not leave us empty. He meets us in the dry and desolate places and restores what only He can.

The invitation is simple: let your longing lead you toward God, not away from Him.

For Prayerful Consideration:

- Where in your life do you feel the deepest sense of longing or restlessness right now?
- How might you bring that longing honestly to God this Advent instead of trying to fill it elsewhere?

Prayer

Lord, meet me in my longing. Restore the places in me that are dry and thirsty, and let my ache lead me closer to You.

-CB

Love Flows Like a River

Ezekiel saw water trickling out from the temple. At first, it was only a shallow stream, but it kept rising until it became a river too deep to cross. Wherever the river went, new and abundant life followed. Stagnant water turned fresh. Trees bore fruit, and their leaves brought healing. That is what God's love is like. It may begin in quiet, almost hidden ways, but it grows and surges until nothing can hold it back.

Psalm 42 shows us the other side: our thirst. "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." Advent meets us in that thirst. Our dry and empty longing is answered with the living water of Jesus. His love moves. It refreshes. It heals.

Jude reminds us to remain in that love through prayer, through hope, and through lifting each other up. God's love is not meant to stay bottled inside us. Like the river in Ezekiel's vision, it is meant to flow outward.

Advent is about more than remembering that Jesus came. It is about receiving His life and allowing it to move through us into a weary world.

For Prayerful Consideration

- Where do you feel spiritually dry or thirsty right now?
- How can you let God's love flow through you into someone else's life this week?

Prayer

Lord, let Your love flow into me like a river. Teach me to stay close to You so that my life brings blessing to others.

Love Heals and Restores

Psalm 42 gives us the cry of a thirsty soul: "My soul thirsts for God, for the living God." It is the prayer of someone who knows that nothing else can satisfy.

Through Zechariah the prophet, God promised to meet that longing. He spoke of returning to His people with zeal, dwelling among them, and turning their streets into places of safety and joy. It is a vision of restoration, where old and young alike find life again in the presence of God.

Matthew shows us how that promise begins to take shape in Jesus. He heals Peter's mother-in-law, drives out spirits, and restores those who are broken. Wherever He goes, wholeness follows. Yet His power is not just for physical healing. When He crosses the lake and frees two men tormented by demons, we see His authority over everything that binds and oppresses.

Advent reminds us that this is the love of God on display. Jesus does not stay distant from our pain. He enters it. He brings restoration where there is despair, freedom where there is bondage, and hope where there is emptiness.

For Prayerful Consideration

- Where in your life do you most long for Jesus' restoring presence?
- Who around you needs to experience His healing love through your care and compassion this week?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, my soul thirsts for You. Thank You for stepping into my brokenness with healing and hope. Restore what is weary in me and use me to carry Your love to others who long for freedom. Amen.

Love Promises and Fulfills

David longed to build a house for God. But God turned the plan around and promised to build David a house instead, a family line that would carry His kingdom forever. That promise pointed directly to Jesus.

Psalm 80 gives voice to the people waiting on that promise: "Restore us, Lord God Almighty; make your face shine on us, that we may be saved." This is the cry of Advent, trusting that God will keep His word.

Paul tells us in Galatians that the promise is fulfilled in Christ. Through Him, we are no longer outsiders. We are children of God. We are clothed in Christ. The walls that once divided us no longer define us.

Advent is a time to cling to the promises of God. He promised David, and He kept it. He promised Israel, and He kept it. And He will keep His promises to you.

For Prayerful Consideration

- What is one promise of God you need to hold on to in this season?
- How does remembering God's past faithfulness strengthen your trust for today?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for keeping Your promises. Teach me to wait with trust and hope, knowing I belong to Your family of love.

Love Adopts and Redeems

God made a covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7. David longed to build a house for the Lord, but God turned it around and promised to build David a house instead. Not a building of stone, but a family line and a kingdom that would last forever. That promise pointed directly to Jesus, the Son of David.

After hearing this, David sat before God and said, "Who am I, Sovereign Lord, that you have brought me this far?" He was overwhelmed by a love that reached further than he ever expected.

Paul describes that love as adoption. Through Christ, we are not slaves. We are children. We are co-heirs. Adoption is more than a status change. It is God's embrace, welcoming us into His family. His love chooses us, calls us His own, and gives us a new identity.

God's promise of restoration finds its fulfillment here. He gives us a place in His household. This is what Advent celebrates: the Son of God entering our world so that we could enter His family.

If you ever wrestle with feelings of being unloved or unwanted, Advent speaks directly to you. Through Jesus, you are not just accepted. You are adopted, redeemed, and forever part of the family of God.

For Prayerful Consideration:

Where do you struggle most to believe you are God's beloved child?

How might the truth of adoption change the way you relate to Him and to others?

Prayer

Father, thank You for adopting me into Your family. Let me live each day in the freedom and joy of being Your child.

Love Saves and Sends

David praised God for rescuing Israel. He knew it was not their strength that saved them. It was God's love reaching down.

John the Baptist pointed people to that same love. He said that Jesus came from heaven, spoke the words of God, and poured out the Spirit without limit. Then he gave this promise: "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life."

Advent is not only about remembering that Jesus was born. It is about remembering why. He came to save. He came to give eternal life. But His love does not stop with us. Love that saves also sends. When we believe in Christ, we are drawn into His mission.

The story of Advent does not end at the manger. It moves forward into the world. Jesus rescues us so that His love can flow through us to others. He saves us, and then He sends us. Advent turns our eyes outward. Who needs to see this love? Where is God calling you to go?

For Prayerful Consideration:

- Who in your life might God be sending you to this Advent season?
- What step can you take to show them His love in a real way?

Prayer

Lord, thank You for saving me. Fill me with Your Spirit and send me to share Your love with others.

Monday, December 22, 2025

Today's Scripture Readings: Luke 1:46b-55; Isaiah 33:17-22; Revelation 22:6-7, 18-20

²⁰He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly."

Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

Revelation 22.20 ESV

Christmas is three days away. All over the world, children are vibrating with eager anticipation of the many joys that will be unleashed on Christmas morning. Many homes already have wrapped presents under the tree. Cookies are still being baked. Pies may even be in the oven as you are reading this devotional. I remember one Christmas, I was so overwhelmed with anticipation and excitement that not only could I not sleep, but I burst into tears because I was so excited. For children all over the world, Christmas simply cannot come quickly enough.

That child-like emotion expresses the anticipation expressed in the Revelation to John. For most of the previous chapter, John has been envisioning the day when God's New Heaven and New Earth will become a reality. The old ways, the old pains, the old sufferings will pass away. The damage that sin has caused will be eliminated. Rewards will be passed out for those who are found faithful on that day. On that day, the day of the return of Jesus Christ, all things will be made new, and God's eternal blueprint will come to its final and ultimate completion.

As you read the words of John, you can hear the breathless hope, the cosmic excitement as he exclaims, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" Come quickly and put an end to sin and death, pain and suffering, and tears and grief! Come quickly, Lord, and renew this old earth and the faithful in it. Bring about the Heavenly Worship service where God is enthroned in the midst of us.

Now THAT is hope that I can get behind. That is eternal hope worth waiting for. In these last few days before Christmas, let us join together with St. John in praying that simple, confident prayer of hope, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!"

- In what specific arena of your life do you need the Lord Jesus to quickly appear, bringing God's hope to you?
- Join with Christ-followers all over the world, praying for the hope of Jesus Christ to come quickly to this world.

Tuesday, December 23, 2025

Today's Scriptures: Luke 1:46b-55; 2 Samuel 7:18, 23-29; Galatians 3:6-14

²⁵ "And now, Lord God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, ²⁶, so that your name will be great forever.

2 Samuel 7.25-26a (ESV)

David prays an amazing prayer of hope. The great King of Israel foresees the fulfillment of God's promises. King David prays a prayer of deep faith, a simple prayer that reveals the ultimate trust that David has in God and in God's future.

David, in my estimation, prays the most appropriate Advent prayer a person could pray, "Lord, do as you promised!" Bring to pass those promises for a future. Make your eternal kingdom known for all to see. The prayer is, "Come, Lord Jesus, Come."

In the coming of Jesus Christ, we have God's ultimate promise come true. In the baby born in Bethlehem, we see God's ultimate plan for redemption. Salvation came to earth in the form of God incarnate. In the birth of Jesus Christ, we experience the beginning of God's ultimate goal, a New Heaven, a New Earth, and New Life in God through Jesus.

With the celebration of God's promise, Christmas, now only two days away, it is time for God's faithful to pray the same prayer of radical trust, "Lord, do as you promised!" Make your Kingdom a present reality – and give us the courage to be involved in bringing it to pass. "Lord, do as you promised! Let there be peace on earth! And let that peace begin with me, my relationships, my words, my deeds, my service!" And further pray, "Lord, do as you promised! Make your love and righteousness a reality in my life!"

The amazing thing about Advent is that while we are waiting, we are called to participate with God in bringing about God's eternal promises. Our faith and trust in God is evidenced by our cooperation in bringing God's promised Kingdom to fruition.

Let's pray together, "Lord, do as you promised!" And let's work passionately, praying for God's Kingdom to come! Even now, Lord Jesus, Come!

- How strong is your faith? Let's pray together, "Lord, do as you promised!"
- How can you be a part of God bringing His promised salvation into the world today?

Wednesday, December 24, 2025, Nativity of the Lord

Today's Scriptures: Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all...

Titus 2.11 (ESV)

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light! A child was born to us; a son was given. The promise of God's hope had come among us. Jesus is the eternal light of God, bursting onto the scene to bring the promise of God's salvation to pass.

In the unlikeliest scenario, God's salvation comes to earth in the form of a child, born of humble parents with no social standing or power. God's grace came to earth in a backwater community with nothing to draw anyone to it, other than it was known as the birthplace of King David. The Kingdom of God comes not in power, not in wealth, not in influence, but in humility.

Make no mistake, that baby was the very grace of God come to bring God's salvation to all. In this one baby, God's grace and salvation rested. Salvation is available to all through trust in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Salvation has come.

On this night of hope, of celebration, and of light, we ultimately celebrate the appearance of the grace of God, come to us to create God's new life in the world and in our lives. Salvation brings the blessing of God and God's righteousness to us.

Salvation makes the hope of God's grace a reality. The death that sin wreaks in the human heart is overturned by the power of the grace of Jesus Christ. The slavery of sin is shattered by the victory of Jesus Christ, who has come to us. Our part is to accept the greatest Christmas gift of all, the salvation given to us by Jesus Christ.

Our prayer for you and your family this Christmas season is that you know the reality of the gift of the grace of Jesus Christ, His salvation.

- Have you received the gift of God's grace and salvation?
- How are you being prepared by the Holy Spirit to enter into His Eternal Kingdom?
- How is the righteousness of Jesus being created in your soul?

Contributors



Cody Bren is a husband and father of three, a pastor, church planter, and consultant who helps people and churches live out the simple call of following Jesus. He leads Village Church in Red Rock and co-founded both the Gathering of Neighbors Collective and Everyday Church Consulting.

Erica Farmer serves as the Lead Pastor of Foothills Community Church in Tucson, AZ. She and Dan have been married for 28 years, and they have four children. She is gifted at helping people discover how to connect with God on a deeper level and grow in their personal relationship through discipleship, to reach the world for Him. Her passion is to develop healthy churches and leaders that become transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit. God has given her a heart for global missions and missionaries serving overseas. Part of her calling is connecting churches to missionaries and getting people involved in global outreach. She serves as the chairperson of the Eastern Zone District Board of Ministerial Development and loves working with ministerial students, helping them hone their gifts and call, preparing them for ordination.



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Art Roxby is the Pastor of Christ Center Wesleyan Church in Sedona, Arizona. Pastor Art was born in the mountains of Central Pennsylvania, near the family farm on which his great-grandmother prayed a singular prayer, "Dear Lord, give me preachers!" The Lord has answered that prayer six times over. Pastor Art's greatest desire is to see followers of Jesus Christ experience the fullness of the Holy Spirit, grow in their walk with God and in the Community of faith, and live into their unique calling to be witnesses to the lifechanging power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Art has been married for 37 years to his wife Allyson. They have three adult children: Caitlin and husband Brandon, Kyle and wife Sara, and Abigail and fiancée Aidan. They are also proud and doting grandparents to Maddie, Evie, Hagen, Runa, and

Callie. You can find Christ Center at www.christcentersedona.org or on Facebook, or visit us in person at 580 Brewer Rd. Sedona, AZ 86336. **Pastor Art's YouTube page is** *A Pastor in Camo*.

Caleb Strickland is a pastor at Christ Wesleyan Church in Winston-Salem, NC. He is married to Katie Strickland and has two daughters, Nora and Amelia. He has a passion for pushing the church to be more missional in local contexts. When he is not working in ministry or with his family, he enjoys watching Alabama football and running on local trails.

