



YOU'RE INVITED TO

CHRISTMAS *Dinner*

A FAMILY ADVENT GUIDE
FROM TRUENORTH CHURCH



JOIN US ON SUNDAY MORNINGS FOR
OUR CHRISTMAS SERMON SERIES

CHRISTMAS *Dinner*



SUNDAYS AT 9AM & 11AM





JOIN US FOR

CHRISTMAS

At Trueneorth

DEC 23 AT 6PM | 8PM

DEC 24 AT 12PM | 2PM | 4PM





WHY ADVENT?



Christmas is nearly here! Have you decorated yet? Mailed your Christmas cards? Bought all your presents? Planned what you are bringing to Christmas dinner? Figured out the costumes for the performances? Remembered to send an invite to that family member you only see once a year? There is a lot that goes into planning for Christmas. Oftentimes, all of the to-do lists prevent us from remembering what this season is actually all about. The importance of celebrating our Savior is sometimes overlooked because of the **busyness** of our calendars. This is why our staff loves the opportunity to create a calendar each year that allows us to focus on the true meaning of Christmas. *That's where Advent steps in.*

Advent is so much more than a calendar.

Advent is the coming and the arrival of the presence of God Himself—God with us. For hundreds of years, followers of Jesus from a wide variety of church traditions around the world have set aside the four weeks leading up to Christmas as a meaningful season of celebration and anticipation. That's what we do when we participate in Advent.

Why is it a season of celebration and anticipation? We celebrate that Jesus came to earth to save us. When He came, He answered the prayers of believers who called out to God for years to send a Savior that would wipe away their sins. Jesus came as a living and breathing man who walked among them. He brought hope, peace, joy, and love for all. Advent is a time to celebrate our Savior!

We also believe Advent is a season of anticipation. Just as those believers long ago prayed for our Savior, we too anticipate the return of that same Savior. **So, this year** as we prepare our hearts for the arrival of Christmas, our prayer is that this season would refresh us in the truth that God is faithful and keeps His promises. He kept His promise of sending a Savior to the world, and He will keep His promise that Jesus is coming back again one day!

This Christmas, we ask you and your family to participate in this season of Advent with us as we reflect on the hope, peace, joy, and love that is found in Jesus.



DAILY SCRIPTURE READING

☐ **DECEMBER 1**

John 3:16, 1 John 4:8, 1 John 4:11

☐ **DECEMBER 2**

John 13:34-35, Romans 8:38-39

☐ **DECEMBER 3**

John 10:10, John 1:14



☐ **DECEMBER 4**

Romans 5:8, Romans 10:9-10

☐ **DECEMBER 5**

Romans 12:13, Romans 12:15

☐ **DECEMBER 6**

1 John 4:9-10, John 15:13



☐ **DECEMBER 7**

Zephaniah 3:17

☐ **DECEMBER 8**

Romans 15:13, Isaiah 9:2, Hebrews 6:19

☐ **DECEMBER 9**

Psalms 130:5-8, Isaiah 40:28-31

☐ **DECEMBER 10**

1 Peter 1:3-5, 1 Peter 3:15, John 16:33

☐ **DECEMBER 11**

Hebrews 11:1, Jeremiah 29:11

☐ **DECEMBER 12**

John 1:12, Luke 2:1-20



☐ **DECEMBER 13**

John 8:12

☐ **DECEMBER 14**

Lamentations 3:21-23

☐ **DECEMBER 15**

Galatians 5:22, Psalm 118:24

☐ **DECEMBER 16**

James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 4:12-13

☐ **DECEMBER 17**

Luke 2:8-12, Psalm 28:7

☐ **DECEMBER 18**

Luke 1:44-45, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 51:12

☐ **DECEMBER 19**

Philippians 2:1-11, John 12:1-3

☐ **DECEMBER 20**

Psalms 16:11

☐ **DECEMBER 21**

Isaiah 35:8-10

☐ **DECEMBER 22**

2 Thessalonians 3:16

☐ **DECEMBER 23**

John 14:27

☐ **DECEMBER 24**

Isaiah 9:6, Philippians 4:6-7



01
DEC

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
LOVE



SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 3:16, 1 JOHN 4:8, 1 JOHN 4:11

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son..."
John 3:16 (NIV)

Love is at the very heart of Christmas. Long before shepherds heard the angels sing, before wise men followed the star, God's love was already in motion—a divine plan set in place from eternity to redeem a broken world.

The Christmas season invites us to slow down and reflect on that love—not as a fleeting feeling, but as the very nature of God. *"God is love" (1 John 4:8)*. His love took on flesh in Jesus Christ, who entered our darkness to bring light, peace, and salvation. This is not a distant, abstract love. It is love that draws near, dwells among us, and changes everything.

Christmas is also a reminder that love gives. God's love moved Him to give His Son, and in response, we are called to love others with that same generous spirit. *"Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11)*. Christmas is the perfect time to practice that love in tangible ways—offering forgiveness, showing kindness, giving time, or extending grace to someone who least expects it.

Love was the message of the manger and the mission of the cross. It is patient, kind, and enduring. It never fails. God's love conquers fear, bridges divides, and brings hope to weary hearts.

As we prepare for Christmas, may we not only celebrate the birth of the One who demonstrated love to us but also become vessels of that love in our home, church, and community. Let every act of compassion, every word of encouragement, every humble gesture reflect the love that came down at Christmas.

Gene Jennings

QUESTIONS

Have you seen love in action lately?

How can you show someone the love of God in a practical way this week?

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for Your unfailing love revealed in Jesus. As we await the joy of Christmas, fill our hearts with Your love so that we may share it freely with others.



FAMILY ACTIVITY

LOVE IN ACTION

Think of someone in your family's life who needs encouragement to remember God's love. Plan a time to call this family member or friend who you maybe don't talk to often. Before calling, teach and practice saying encouraging words to this person with your children, then call them together as a family. Talk to your children about how Jesus was the ultimate gift of love God sent to us. He wants us to show that same love to everyone!



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF LOVE

02
DEC

SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 13:34-35, ROMANS 8:38-39

There was something keeping me from fully enjoying the Christmas season this week, but I just couldn't put my finger on it. There was that long line I stood in for presents where those two girls cut right in front of me when I was almost to the cash register. Then my four-year-old wanted to help make cookies for his teacher this year and I ended up having to stay up late and bake a second batch because of all the extra ingredients he had added to the first batch. The traffic seems to be really bad this week with everyone out trying to get their shopping done. I just don't seem to have enough time to get everything done with the numerous dates on the calendar that everyone keeps adding. When I finally get home, someone says one thing to me that sends me over the edge. It has me thinking, *"Is this really what Christmas is all about? Where is the love this season?"* It all makes me want to turn out the Christmas lights and crawl into bed for the rest of the month, but instead I open God's Word.

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

I am reminded to not let all the things I have to do separate me from God's love this season. I sit and dwell on God's promise that there is nothing that can separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus! I take a moment to refocus on God's love in each of these frustrations and allow His love to fill me, and flow through me, spilling into the lives of others. If my focus is on what I need to get done, I will end up missing out on opportunities to share God's love with others this Christmas. I think of my crazy week again, and I remember what God says:

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

This Christmas, remember how much God loves you. He gave us the warmth of a fire on a chilly night. Remember the giggles of children excited under covers on Christmas Eve. He shares His love with us as we sometimes get to awaken to the beauty of a winter wonderland of lightly fallen snow. And then, when we didn't deserve it even on our best day, He sent His only Son to save us from all our worst days. **What a God!** What love! When the to-do list gets too long and the frustration begins to pile high, remember God's love for you. Let that love from the Holy Spirit fill your heart this Christmas and overflow into each person you come in contact with. God loves you. Let someone know how He loves them today.

QUESTIONS

What frustration is keeping you from God's love today?

How can you share God's love with someone to make them smile?

PRAYER

God! You are love! Help us to remember You in all our to-do lists and invite You into each moment. May Your love flow from our hearts into the lives of others today.



Harmony Smith

03
DEC

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
LOVE



SCRIPTURE READING
JOHN 10:10, JOHN 1:14

When we were growing up, Christmas often meant a trip to our grandparents' home in Eufaula, Alabama. As a family of seven living on a farm in Central Florida, our mom spent weeks preparing for this festive road trip. On departure day, the excitement and chaos were unmatched. When Dad got home from work, our "Home Alone"-style scramble began. At full speed, we loaded up our massive station wagon with shared suitcases—each of us kids allotted about a lunchbox-sized space for clothes.

Once the animals were fed and watered, Mom kept us occupied while Dad strapped a large vinyl storage bag to the roof and filled it with "mystery items" (*we all had our guesses—after all, it was just before Christmas!*). Finally, with sandwiches packed, sweets secured, and five kids squished in the back, we'd hit the road as the sun went down.

Though the trip was more than seven hours, it always seemed to fly by. We didn't care how cramped the car was or how ridiculous we looked rolling down the highway. What mattered most was that we were together—and that love fueled the whole journey. We were on a mission to be with family we cherished deeply.

In John 10:10, Jesus reminds us, "*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" It's easy to overlook that truth during the Christmas season. Between the shopping, the parties, the travel, and the endless school performances ("*Mehwwy Qwistmas!*"), life can become so full that our hearts grow empty. The enemy loves to use our busyness to steal our peace and distract us from what matters most—**God's love.**

But love is at the heart of Christmas. It's the reason for the season. Jesus came because of love—God's deep, self-giving love for you and me. John 1:14 declares, "*The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" That love changes everything. It draws us closer to God and to one another. It's what fills the chaos with peace and transforms obligation into joy.

So, this Christmas, slow down. Make room for love—God's love and the love of those around you. This begins by spending consistent daily time in prayer and in His Word. Remember that Jesus came for you, not to add to your to-do list, but to fill your life with His abundant love.

QUESTIONS

What tends to steal your peace and destroy your joy at Christmas?

What steps can you and your family take to live in the abundant love of Christ this Christmas?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for giving me an abundant life through a relationship with You!

Please guide me on how to spend time with You daily, so that You might be glorified in my life continually.



Chuck Gordon



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF LOVE

04
DEC

SCRIPTURE READING

ROMANS 5:8, ROMANS 10:9-10

The Christmas season is a great time to share with someone how much God loves them. When I was 16 years old, there was someone I really cared about who hadn't embraced God in their life. So, I prayed and asked God to give me the courage to talk to them about it.

I ended up talking to them at school about it and even left them with a little booklet that told them about God's free gift of having a relationship with Him through Jesus. My friend was very open minded and kind as I shared my faith with them. But then the bell rang at school, and we went on about our day. However, I was burdened for my friend. I wanted them to know God and to step into a relationship with Him. I prayed and trusted God with the rest. I didn't bring it up to my friend again.

Then a few days later and one week before Christmas that year, my friend asked if I would walk them through what it meant to step into a relationship with God. I was amazed and so thankful that God was working in their heart! I pulled out my Bible and read several verses from the book of Romans to help them understand.

I read Romans 5:8 that says, *"But God showed His great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners."* My friend was touched that God would die for him!

I also shared that, *"If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in your heart that you are made right with God, and it is by openly declaring your faith that you are saved"* (Romans 10:9,10).

After hearing the good news, my friend said he wanted to begin his relationship with God. We prayed together and he made the decision to accept God's free gift through Jesus and follow Him.

I write this with tears in my eyes because I got to witness God's love flood my friend's heart. And my friend has never been the same. Everything about him changed that day. God's love transformed him and put him on a new path. God is so good! He desires that all people know that He came as a baby to one day grow up and become the Savior of the world.

That Christmas my friend said, *"it changed the whole holiday."* The entire meaning of Christmas changed because of the REAL gift he experienced that Christmas. God's love is what we all desperately crave and need. It is the true gift. **Christmas is about a PERSON.** It's not just a day. It is about Jesus Christ loving us so much and coming down so that we could be saved, made whole, and worship Him forever.

Olivia Cheshire

QUESTIONS

How has God's love personally changed your life or the way you see Christmas?

Who is someone in your life that you can pray for or lovingly share God's love with this Christmas season?

PRAYER

Thank You, God, for the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Help our hearts to see You as the real gift this Christmas season!



05
DEC

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
LOVE



SCRIPTURE READING

ROMANS 12:13, ROMANS 12:15

I don't know how you feel about it, but December seems to have arrived quite quickly. We're now in the sprint lane towards Christmas and New Years, and even that feels like it will fly by so quickly! But in the midst of it all, I have been thinking much about unconditional love; the overarching theme of the Christmas story. Nowhere is the love of God expressed more powerfully than in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. My favorite hymn I've sung since childhood is *"How Deep the Father's Love for Us."*

*"How deep the Father's love for us,
How vast beyond all measure,
That He should give His only Son
To make a wretch His treasure..."*

Such sweet words to such a sweet reminder of how deeply, widely, and unconditionally loved we are. What a selfless and immeasurable sacrifice! God's love for us is not earned but freely given. There is no greater love than giving your own life for the sake of another, and that is what Jesus did for us! It is an overwhelming feeling to allow ourselves to be loved this much and truly comprehend that God loves us this much. But as we accept His love, it is incredibly freeing for our lives. The Lord loves us not because of what we are or what we do, but because of who He is. May we remember that the same love that rescued us, the love that paid our ransom, is the love we are called to share. And as we open our hearts and lives to others, we don't have to do it alone, Jesus goes with us, giving us the strength and courage to love not just in feeling, but in faithful action.

Romans 12:13 reminds us to **"Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."** Opening our homes, our hearts, and our lives to others is a tangible way we can live out His unconditional love. It is choosing to serve, to welcome, to extend kindness, even when it is inconvenient. Romans 12:15 goes on to call us to **"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."** Unconditional love moves us beyond ourselves. It rejoices when others celebrate, it mourns when others hurt, and it steps into other people's lives with empathy and presence. It's about allowing Jesus to work in us so we can act in love, even when it's hard. It is seeing people as Jesus sees them, worthy of love, care, and compassion. The birth of Jesus signifies God's unconditional love for us and allows us to learn how to love others and honestly, there is no greater gift than that! Let God's unconditional love overflow from you.

QUESTIONS

How does it make you feel to know that God loves you unconditionally?

What are some ways you can celebrate and/or help others in a tangible way this Christmas season?

PRAYER

Father, help us to put on love by seeing the needs of others and giving us a willing heart to serve them out of love for You. Remind us that no joy is too small to share and no sorrow is too insignificant to bear with another.



Patricia Mills



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF LOVE

06
DEC

SCRIPTURE READING

1 JOHN 4:9-10, JOHN 15:13

Have you ever said something like “Oh! I just love Christmas music!” or maybe something like, “I love all the Hallmark movies!” or maybe, “Oooo! I loooooove baking cookies!”?

We often use the word “love” to describe something, the way it makes us feel, or to show favoritism to an object or person. And because of this, we can forget that God’s love for us is so much bigger than how we “love Christmas movies” or “gingerbread cookies.” His love is deep, wide, never ending, always continuing, and flowing non-stop, day and night.

God’s love is the ultimate offering. 1 John 4:9-10 says: *“God showed how much He loved us by sending His one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through Him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.”*

Real love, the way God intended it and how He demonstrated it, is a commitment. It isn’t dependent on good feelings or excitement or butterflies in our belly, but rather a decision to give of ourselves for the well-being of others. And because of this action, it then produces those feelings of love and goodness. God loved us so much that He sent His only Son Jesus to take the punishment we rightly deserve, so that we could choose Him and be with Him forever! I don’t know about you, but that means so much more than me “loving hot chocolate” or me “loving the hustle and bustle of the season.” This type of love that God shows is unconditional and everlasting!

So how do we show God’s love—true love, to the world? John 15:13 says, *“There is no greater love than to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”* Jesus isn’t saying that we must die for our friends, but that we must be willing to put ourselves aside for them. We can practice real, sacrificial love by listening to someone who is having a hard time, giving a helping hand at our local soup kitchen, encouraging an elderly shut-in neighbor, or maybe it’s just putting our arm around someone to show them they are seen and not invisible in this busy world. These are great examples of the way Jesus loved, and the way God loved us when He sent Jesus. God has given us everything we need to love others the way He has loved us.

So next time you catch yourself saying “I love _____,” remember God’s undeniable, super abundant, crazy expansive, genuine, and perfect love that He shows us everyday!

QUESTIONS

How does God’s real love for us move us to show love to others?

What are some ways you can show God’s love this week?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, we thank You for Your everlasting love You show us daily. Please help me to show this same love to others that I will interact with today.

Courtney Radtke



07
DEC

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
LOVE



SCRIPTURE READING
ZEPHANIAH 3:17

The greatest gift my three-year-old daughter has ever received was a hand-me-down dress with a rainbow skirt and a sequined butterfly on top. She received this dress when she was a little over one and a half and it was two sizes too big, but she latched onto the dress. She loved the rainbow skirt and would twirl and twirl every time she wore it. Fast forward to now. She is almost three and a half and she asks to wear this dress every day. The sequins are falling off the butterfly, the white top is stained, it's starting to get too short for her, but she refuses to take it off. She cries when it's dirty and asks me to wash it as soon as possible.

We recently ordered her a new butterfly dress that is very similar to the hand-me-down dress, and she reluctantly put it on once and proceeded to never wear it again. *"It's just not the same,"* is the phrase she keeps repeating to us. Have you ever loved something that much?

Can you remember a Christmas gift you received that delighted you and reminded you that someone loved you? My husband still has the first guitar he ever received as a Christmas gift from his parents. He would never play it publicly now, but he keeps it to remember what it felt like to fall in love with playing guitar for the first time.

The reading today reminds us that God delights in **YOU**. How wonderful is it to have a God that not only loves us unconditionally, but one that actually finds pleasure in knowing us? Just as my daughter loves her butterfly dress despite the stains and the lack of sequins, God looks at you, His creation, and loves you just as you are.

Christmas is a beautiful time to be re-reminded that God loves you. He loves you so much He sent His Son as a sacrifice to save you despite the sins and pain you cause Him. Nothing you can do or say will keep that love from you. The God of the Universe delights in you and His love is available for you to rest in today. You don't have to strive for that love, just accept this ultimate gift that He offers to each of us.



Kayla Martin

QUESTIONS

Have you ever received a Christmas gift that you loved for years and still remember today?

Are you living like someone who is loved just as you are? Or are you striving your best to be someone "worthy" to God?

PRAYER

God, thank You that You love us just as we are. Thank You that we can come to You with all our hurts, habits, and problems and You still love us and forgive us. Help us to live like someone who is *"delighted in"* today.





JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF HOPE

08
DEC

SCRIPTURE READING

ROMANS 15:13, ISAIAH 9:2, HEBREWS 6:19

*"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
Romans 15:13 (NIV)*

Christmas draws our hearts to one of its central themes: hope. In a world often clouded by uncertainty, division, and disappointment, the message of Christmas shines like a light in the darkness—reminding us that our hope is not found in circumstances, but in Christ alone.

For many, many years, God's people waited for the coming of the promised Messiah. Through long seasons of silence and struggle, they clung to God's word: *"The people walking in darkness will see a great light"* (Isaiah 9:2). That promise was fulfilled in Bethlehem when Jesus was born—the Light of the World, the embodiment of hope for all mankind.

Hope is more than wishful thinking. It is a confident expectation—trust in the character of a faithful God. *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure"* (Hebrews 6:19). Even when life feels uncertain or prayers seem unanswered, the story of Christmas reminds us that God keeps His promises in His perfect time.

During this special time, we remember that our Savior not only came once but will come again. His birth assures us that God has not forgotten us. His return promises that every tear will be wiped away and every wrong made right.

Let this season rekindle your hope. Look beyond the noise and the rush of the holidays to the quiet manger where eternal hope was born. Hold fast to the truth that Christ's light still shines in the darkness—and the darkness has not overcome it.

Gene Jennings

QUESTIONS

What part of God's creation illustrates the promise of hope?

What can you do for a friend or family member that will increase their hope in God?

PRAYER

God of hope, thank You for the promise fulfilled in Jesus and the assurance of His coming again. Fill our hearts with steadfast hope and help us to trust You more deeply each day.

FAMILY ACTIVITY

NIGHT OF LIGHT

Drive around looking at Christmas lights as a family and talk about how Jesus is the Light in darkness. *"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine."* Isaiah 9:2 Jesus came to bring **HOPE** to a dark world just like Isaiah prophesied.

09
DEC

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
HOPE



SCRIPTURE READING

PSALM 130:5-8, ISAIAH 40:28-31

Hope. We simply cannot live without hope. I mean, try it. Give it a shot. Close your eyes and think to yourself...can you honestly imagine a life where you don't have anything to look forward to? Ever? How grim and devastatingly dark, right?

I think it's safe to say we, as a community, have endured quite a difficult, dark year. A year of rebuilding, a year of questions, doubts, and trials. A year of...waiting. Waiting for our city to have a spry life again. Waiting for the debris to be cleared, structures to be restored, and houses to feel like homes again. There were days when many of us questioned if there was any hope moving forward. I mean, where does hope lie within the hurt and struggle of life?

Think back to the end of Matthew 27. Jesus has been crucified. He is laid to rest. The world literally grew dark. The Light of the World was no longer physically earthside. His close friends and followers are heartbroken and sitting in the sorrow of losing a loved one and patient teacher. As you keep reading, you realize that the women closest to Jesus take their pain and use it to glorify Jesus, even in their darkest moments of wondering what's next. Psalm 130:5-8 shows a beautiful ballad of having hope in the waiting. But not just any hope...active hope. Twice in these verses is the word "put"- an action. *"I put my hope..."* Isaiah 40:31 specifically uses the word "hope" as a verb. *"Those who hope in the Lord..."*

Although the holidays are traditionally associated with celebration and unity, they can also evoke feelings of sorrow, solitude, and emotional struggle. I challenge you to have active hope through it all. God, in all His glory, will find a perfect time and way to meet you where you're at. No matter the circumstance. So search for Him in every detail! Because that's the truth: ***Biblical hope is always a hope for a person. NOT a circumstance.***

So, as we prepare our hearts and await the arrival of Jesus, reflect. This isn't a season of passive waiting, but active. We must be actively waiting! What does that mean? Ask the Lord to reveal to you where you're struggling. Then don't stop there. Ask Him to replace it with the opposite of what you're struggling with. If you're struggling with generosity, ask the Lord to help you live open-handed. If you're struggling with resentment, ask the Lord to give you strength to forgive.

Isaiah 7:14 says, *"A virgin shall give birth to a son and His name shall be called Emmanuel."* Emmanuel means God with us...God with **YOU**. God with **ME**.

Hope for you. Hope for me. Place your hope in the person and character of Christ.

QUESTIONS

What is it that you are currently waiting for in this season?

Do you struggle to have hope? Fill in the blanks: Jesus, I am struggling with _____. Help me to surrender it to You and replace it with _____.

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, we come and surrender to you with all our burdens, struggles, and doubts. Lord, may you help us live each day to actively seek you and the hope that you offer this broken world. You are powerful and reign over it all. We love you!



Bailie Morris



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF HOPE



SCRIPTURE READING

1 PETER 1:3-5, 1 PETER 3:15, JOHN 16:33

I love movies. I love action movies, sci-fi movies, and adventure movies. I also love thrillers, comedies, family movies, independent films, and classic black and white movies. I even love those cheesy, predictable made-for-tv Christmas movies. Maybe it's the collaborative art form of writers, performers, and filmmakers joining together to craft a compelling visual narrative that speaks truth about humanity and inspires hope for the future. Or maybe it's just the popcorn.

Either way, if you pay attention, you'll start to notice common themes between different movies. One common theme is the power of hope. Oftentimes the bad guys are trying to quash any sense of hope among the people so they can maintain power and control. The evil ones in the story see hope as a dangerous threat. The good guys, on the other hand, rely on hope to overcome evil and restore peace to the galaxy.

It might look a little different than it does in the movies, but we are faced with evil in our lives as well. It's in the world around us, and more alarmingly, evil is in our own hearts—known as sin. But there's good news. We have hope. Jesus defeated sin once and for all. When we put our faith and trust in Him as Lord and Savior, our sins are forgiven and we are made new! Peter writes in 1 Peter 1:3-5, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you."*

Christmas is the perfect reminder of the hope we have. Jesus' arrival was the fulfillment of humanity's hope in God. Peter continues, *"but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15).* Our reason for hope is Jesus. Jesus said in John 16:33, *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."*

We don't have to fear evil. The hero of our story is Jesus, and He has overcome! **Let's celebrate Him this Christmas.**

QUESTIONS

We would be hopeless without Jesus. How does His arrival change our story?

When you have troubles, what are some ways you can focus on your hope in Jesus?

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the everlasting hope we have in Jesus.



Jared Bell

11
DEC

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
HOPE



SCRIPTURE READING

HEBREWS 11:1, JEREMIAH 29:11

Have you ever had to wait for something for what seemed like a really long time? Maybe you are single, and you are waiting for the one God has for you. Maybe you are a couple waiting for a baby's arrival. I bet there is a kid listening to this devotion that cannot wait for Christmas morning to open presents! Waiting can be hard. This is where we learn to hope, in the waiting.

Israel waited over 400 years from the last prophet's mentioning of a Savior coming in the Old Testament until His arrival. Finally, John the Baptist proclaimed the coming of a baby who would shake the world with true hope. They had waited and prayed for so long hoping for God to send His one and only Son to save them. But God said "wait" as sometimes He does. God needed this time to prepare the world for Jesus. And so, generations waited in hope and grew their faith in the promises God had spoken to them. A hope that grows into a deep faith is one who has waited and trusted in God's promises confidently.

"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." (Hebrews 11:1)

Is there something for which you've been waiting to happen? Maybe you have been praying for what has seemed like centuries. We cannot always see the full picture of eternity the way God can see how each detailed puzzle piece fits together into the long awaited, put together masterpiece. Don't lose hope. Your loving Father has good plans for you. Let your hope rise in the waiting and trust God enough for your hope to grow into a confident faith. You cannot see it yet. I know it can be hard but just wait! When the time was right, God sent His Son to save us from our sins. He sent us hope and an eternal future.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." (Jeremiah 29:11)

QUESTIONS

What are you hoping for this Christmas season?

What can you do to help you wait while you hope confidently and grow your faith?

PRAYER

Father God, thank You for the hope You give us in the promise of Your Son, Jesus. We will trust You as we hope and wait confidently for the desires of our heart.



Harmony Smith





JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF HOPE



SCRIPTURE READING JOHN 1:12, LUKE 2:1-20

Isn't it true that we all love a good story, especially when we're included in it? Many Christmases ago, when our three daughters were very young, we often ran family errands together. To make the most of our time, my wife, Jennifer, would “*just run in*” to a store to grab something. Knowing it would be “*quick*” (or not), I stayed in the van with our girls. This small act of automobile babysitting spared us the ordeal of unbuckling car seats, wrangling a stroller, and chasing three wide-eyed little ones through aisles filled with Christmas wonder. More importantly, it gave Jennifer a priceless gift—several quiet moments where no one called out her other name: “*Mooooooom!*”

Meanwhile, in our minivan, the inevitable chant would begin: “*Daddy, PLEASE tell us a story!*” And within seconds, we were no longer sitting in a parking lot—we were adventuring together in faraway lands. Though I rarely knew where the story was going, it always began, “*A long time ago in a land not so far away...*” and every tale shared a common thread: hope. There were always three brave and adventurous little girls who faced challenges but never gave up. One of my favorite memories is catching their reflections in the rearview mirror—eyes wide, mouths slightly open, dreaming far beyond the store lights into worlds of imagination and promise.

On Christmas Day, our family continues a similar story tradition. But this story is not imagined—it's true. And though it doesn't name three little girls, it includes each one of us. It's a story of eternal hope. Every year, as we open the Bible to read, “*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered...*” (Luke 2:1-20), we are reminded that the birth of Jesus Christ is more than a historical event—it's the beginning of the greatest story ever told.

Jesus left Heaven and entered our world as a baby so that we could have a real, growing relationship with our Heavenly Father. That's what hope looks like—God coming near, not because we earned it, but because He loves us. This hope is offered to everyone who would place their trust in Jesus Christ, no matter where you've been or what you're facing. As John 1:12 says, “*Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.*”

So, this Christmas, as you tell your stories and make your memories, remember you're invited to be a part of God's story—one written in love and overflowing with hope that never ends.

QUESTIONS

Will you take a moment now and read Luke 2:1-20? As you read, imagine being there at Jesus' birth—hearing His first cry, seeing the angels, and witnessing what Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds experienced.

How can your life begin to be like that of the shepherds in verse 20?

PRAYER

God, how we thank You for making a way for us to be invited into this eternal story with You through a relationship with Jesus Christ! Please give us Your strength and joy to live every day like those shepherds, glorifying and praising You for our Savior and Lord, Jesus!

Chuck Gordon

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DEC

JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
HOPE



SCRIPTURE READING
JOHN 8:12

Every year my family gets so excited to put up the Christmas tree! It seems we put it up earlier and earlier every year (*sorry Thanksgiving!*). The way the tree lights up the house in the early morning and at night brings so much comfort and warmth to my heart.

I am a big fan of summertime. I love the days being lit up with the sunshine and all the fun that going to the beach and swimming brings. However, I also love wintertime because we get to enjoy the awesome holidays with family and friends. But I don't love the cold and darkness. The sun sets earlier, which means it's darker outside for longer each day which can sometimes make me feel down or sad. But when I see the lights of the Christmas tree shining bright in my home, my heart is filled with hope. According to Google, hope is the belief that your future can be brighter and better than your past and that you actually have a role to play in making it better.

The lights at Christmas are better enjoyed in the darkness, right? You can really see them shine and admire their colors. The darkness really reveals the beauty of the lights!

Every time I look at the Christmas tree and feel that hope in my heart, I am reminded that Jesus Himself said, *"I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life"* (John 8:12).

When we put our trust and hope in Jesus and we follow Him, we never have to walk in darkness. Jesus is the Light of the World. He is like a Christmas tree lit up in the dark! He promises to be the light in our life and to lead us every day of our lives if we will follow and obey Him. Every time you gaze upon your tree this Christmas season, take a moment to think about Jesus and how He wants to be the light in your life.

Olivia Cheshire

QUESTIONS

When have you felt Jesus' light bring you hope or comfort during a dark or difficult time?

This week, how can you help shine Jesus' light to someone who might be feeling sad, lonely, or discouraged?

PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for coming to save us and being the light of the world. Help me to follow You all the days of my life.





JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF HOPE

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SCRIPTURE READING LAMENTATIONS 3:21-23

"Remember Red, hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies."

Those are the words of Andy Dufresne to his good buddy Red in the Academy Award-winning movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*. There's a lot of truth packed into that one line, isn't there? Hope keeps us going when life feels dark or unfair. Hope looks beyond the walls we feel trapped behind and reminds us that there's something more—something better that is coming.

In Scripture, we learn that hope isn't just wishful thinking or pretending things are okay when they're not. It's confidence—confidence in the God who keeps His promises and who is both the author and sustainer of hope. I love these words on hope found in Lamentations 3:21-23...

"Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness."

Even when circumstances don't change, we can still have hope because God never changes. He's faithful, He's good, and He's still writing an incredible story out of our lives that is for our good and ultimately His glory. What would it look like for you to choose to walk with hope this Christmas season?

Here's what I've learned over the years...hope is a funny thing, because like faith, it's only as good as the object in which you place your hope. In other words, how trustworthy is the person or thing that's holding your hope?

A perfect example of this would be for all my Cowboys fans....going back to the days of Roger Staubach, Tony Dorsett, Ed "Too Tall" Jones, Randy White, and Tony Hill. You hope the Cowboys will win the Super Bowl this year...but based on their track record and the evidence we've seen so far this year...your hope might be in trouble. It's on shaky ground, to say the least.

You see, the hope we walk with as believers in Jesus isn't connected to our external circumstances or how many good things are happening to us this Christmas season. Our hope is rooted in Jesus—the one true source of unshakable hope. It's built on our trust and faith in Him to fill us with lasting joy and peace.

This Christmas season, find your hope in the Christ Child. The One sent on a rescue mission to redeem, restore, and make all things new.

***Your hope isn't in who's in Washington.
Your hope isn't in your financial situation.
Your hope isn't in your relationships.
Your hope is in Jesus—the only solid ground and firm foundation
worth holding on to.***

QUESTIONS

What's the difference between hoping for something (*like your team winning*) and having hope in someone (*like Jesus*)?

Why do you think it's important to put our hope in Jesus instead of things that can change or disappoint us? How can you remind yourself to have hope in Jesus when life feels hard or unfair?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You for being the source of our hope. A hope that never fades, never fails, and never dies. When life feels uncertain or discouraging, remind us that our confidence isn't in what we see, but in who You are. Help us fix our eyes on You this Christmas season. The One who came to redeem, restore, and make all things new.

Austin Davis

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JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
JOY



SCRIPTURE READING
GALATIANS 5:22, PSALM 118:24

The holiday season moves quickly. Recently, a good conversation with a friend concluded with us agreeing that each year of our lives seems to come and go quicker than the last. For me, Christmastime only amplifies hurriedness. Maybe you know what I mean, in the midst of busyness, responsibilities, and to-do lists, we often forget that each day we wake up is a true gift from the Lord. So, what should our response to such a gift be? Psalm 118:24 tells us directly and beautifully. It reads, *"This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it."* (NLT)

"Today is the day the Lord has made." What an amazing reminder of the gift of a day, and who has gifted it to us. All things are from Him and to Him; He is the creator of the universe, He is the creator of you and me. And today is a day He has made. So, what else could be our response besides joy? Does it mean that every day will be easy, free of hardship or challenges? No, it does not. But it does mean that each day is ordained by a good and loving God who sees us and walks with us in the midst of our trials. Because of this truth, joy is our response. Not out of obligation, but out of our love for Him.

When we choose to be joyful every day, despite our present circumstances, we are a witness to those around us. By the fruits of our lives, others may come to see Him. Galatians 5:22 speaks to this. It reads *"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!"* (NLT)

Joy is a fruit from the Holy Spirit. When we live a life guided by the Spirit in all that we do, joy is the fruit we will produce.



Bennet Schimmelpfennig

QUESTIONS

Are you displaying the fruit of joy in your daily walk with Jesus?

What is one thing you can do every morning to remind yourself that each day is a gift from God worthy of our joy?

PRAYER

Lord, help me to see each day for what it is: a gift from You. Thank You for this day You have made, and help me to be joyful in all I do.

FAMILY ACTIVITY
DANCING FOR JOY

Plan a night to turn on some upbeat Christmas or worship music and dance, sing, and have fun with your kids. Watch the **JOY** they experience as you dance alongside them.

Remind your children what the angel told the shepherds!

"I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Luke 2:10



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF JOY

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SCRIPTURE READING

JAMES 1:2-4, 1 PETER 4:12-13

I'll be honest—I find it difficult to experience joy at Christmastime.

The season is beautiful and full of meaning, but it also feels overwhelming. Between endless events, expectations, and carrying the weight of all the household Christmas responsibilities, joy easily slips through the cracks. And I know I'm not alone—many people struggle to find joy during the holidays for different reasons. For some, it's family tension or loneliness. For others, it's illness, loss, or financial stress. Whatever the reason, joy can feel out of reach when life feels heavy.

James challenges us to see joy differently. In James 1:2-4 we read, *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."* (NIV) The word *consider* doesn't mean we flip a switch in our minds and suddenly feel happy about our struggles. It's not about forcing emotion—it's about choosing perspective. James invites us into a mental and spiritual exercise: to think, reflect, and view our trials through the lens of faith.

We're not called to wallow in difficulty, but to grow through it. Whether we like it or not, our trials can be unexpected gifts that build endurance and shape us into Christlike wholeness. The ESV translation even says, *"that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* Interestingly, James uses the word *"perfect"* seven times in his letter—and in Scripture, seven often symbolizes divine perfection and completion. Our brokenness becomes the very space where God's perfecting work takes place.

We see this truth echoed in 1 Peter 4:12-13: *"Dear friends, don't be surprised at the fiery trials you are going through, as if something strange were happening to you. Instead, be very glad—for these trials make you partners with Christ in His suffering, so that you will have the wonderful joy of seeing His glory when it is revealed to all the world."* (NLT)

In the middle of our trials, we rarely see how God is working. Yet we're called to trust that there's a larger story unfolding behind the scenes. In a message earlier this year, our children's pastor, Kayla Martin, encouraged us to keep a record of God's faithfulness—so we can look back and remember when times are tough. I'd add that we should also keep track of our trials, because when we reflect, we'll see God's hand in pulling us through. We'll recognize how we've grown, how others have supported us, and how our experiences now equip us to help others in similar seasons.

Joy isn't a fleeting emotion—it's a posture. It's a way of seeing. Joy is a journey, and sometimes, it's hard work. But it's worth it, because joy runs deep.

QUESTIONS

When you think back on a difficult season in your life, how can you now see evidence of God's faithfulness or growth that came from that experience?

What is one practical way you can choose joy or shift your perspective the next time you face a trial?

PRAYER

Lord, when joy feels distant and life feels heavy, help me to see my trials through Your eyes. Teach me to trust Your work in me so that even in hardship, I may grow in faith and reflect Your perfect joy.



Daphne Brown

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JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF JOY



SCRIPTURE READING

LUKE 2:8-12, PSALM 28:7

As we open our Bibles, even in the moments we don't feel like it, we encounter God's endless joy. We read accounts of people who've struggled with fears, anxieties, doubts, uncertainties, and worries, just like us, and we'll begin to feel less alone. It becomes clear to us that God has been and will always be faithful to His people. These verses in Luke remind us that joy can come from the most unexpected places. The role of a shepherd was one of the lowest jobs. Their testimony was not considered acceptable, and they were prohibited from entering the place of worship. But the Lord redeems the role of the shepherd. The shepherds became the first people to meet Jesus after His birth! As people who were commonly known as lowly and often overlooked, God's message is clear: *joy is accessible to everyone, and it starts with knowing Jesus.* When the shepherds saw the Messiah, they were filled with a deep, abiding joy that overshadowed their challenges and encouraged them to share their story with those around them. The shepherds' joy was not dependent upon their circumstances; therefore, our lives do not have to be perfect to experience joy.

As we enter the Christmas season, I hope that ease is something you feel. I hope that joy makes its way to you. And I hope that grace is all around you. Can I tenderly find your eyes and just ask you, honestly: How are you doing—really? You are not alone. We all get distracted; we all get turned around in a thousand ways. We all get discouraged. We all can feel defeated. Can I say?...I see you. I really see you, right now. I see you and I know you. I'm right there with you. Lately, I've been feeling exhausted, wrung out, wheels spinning, and stuck in an existence of feeling like I'm never good enough. Even though I know better, the Lord's promise of joy still slips my mind. Sometimes, I read aloud Bible truths with the little strength I have. Other times, I whisper a prayer or verse as my petition. As each word moves from the pages to my heart and through my mouth, the presence of the Lord surrounds me like a faithful shield. In searching for the answers to suffering and release from my fears, I keep finding joy. As I walk through discovering what it means to change my mind and heart to be in tune with God, I invite you to experience real, God-filled joy as well.

There are no quick fixes to the trials we face and the fears that so often threaten to steal our joy, but we have the Word, and that is more than enough to meet our needs in every season of life. Psalm 28:7 says *"The Lord is my strength and my shield; I trust Him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving."* We can surely thank God for the gift of being able to rise each day with the assurance that He will always walk with us. Let's rejoice in that! Maybe even bust a little dance move while we're at it.

QUESTIONS

Do you often feel overlooked? What does God's heart teach us when He chose the shepherds, people who were often overlooked, to witness Jesus' birth first?

What are a few ways you can share joy with others this Christmas season?

PRAYER

Lord, our hope for this Christmas season is to take some time to rest, reset, and heal in the fullness of Your joy. Help us to experience joy not because of the absence of pain or struggle, but because of Your presence in our everyday lives. Amen.



Patricia Mills



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF JOY

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SCRIPTURE READING

LUKE 1:44-45, PSALM 16:11, PSALM 51:12

Have you ever been in a place where you know you should be full of joy, but you find yourself regrettably empty? Maybe you have been to a family gathering or some other holiday event where you just weren't "feeling it." I know I have. Sometimes my mind is just preoccupied with a to-do list, and I'm not able to be present in the moment. Sometimes there's somewhere I would rather be instead, so I'm a little bitter about the situation. It's not enough to just recognize my incongruity in that moment because then I start feeling guilty, which is just another step further away from joy.

What do we do when we are not feeling how we think we should feel? How do we access real joy when it seems like our joy tank is empty? Do we just put on a happy face? Do we just grin and bear it? Do we try really hard to force ourselves into joy? No, joy isn't something we can fake or just conjure up out of thin air. Real joy is something we access from the source. Vidalia onions come from Vidalia, Georgia. You can't grow them in some random town in Ohio. Fraser firs, my favorite type of Christmas tree, only come from a certain area of the southeastern Appalachian Mountains. Joy comes from the One who created it.

In the psalms, King David reaches out to God for joy only He can provide. *"Restore the joy of Your salvation to me, and sustain me by giving me a willing spirit" (Psalm 51:12). "You make known to me the path of life; You will fill me with joy in Your presence, with eternal pleasures at Your right hand" (Psalm 16:11).*

When Mary was pregnant with Jesus, she went to visit her cousin Elizabeth who was also pregnant. At the sound of Mary's greeting, Elizabeth's baby, who would grow up to be known as John the Baptizer, leapt for joy. Even before birth, John was filled with joy by the presence of Jesus. Again, we see joy in His presence.

This is good news. What a relief to know that we aren't left to cobble together some semblance of joy on our own. He fills us with joy in His presence. We can come into the presence of the Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in the name of His Son, Jesus. Every Christmas we sing, *"Joy to the world, the Lord is come!"* He didn't just come to the world at large; He came to you and to me so that we could be filled with joy in His presence.

Jared Bell

QUESTIONS

How does it feel to know that you're not responsible for creating joy on your own?

How can you reach out to God when your joy tank feels empty?

PRAYER

Father, please help me remember to come into Your presence so I will be filled with joy that only comes from You.



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JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF JOY



SCRIPTURE READING

PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11, JOHN 12:1-3

This time of year brings many things—magical lights, laughter and cheer with loved ones, and memories to be made and remembered for a lifetime. Call me silly, but one of my favorite things about Christmas are the smells! I love a home filled with the fragrance of fresh balsam. Or... imagine this...gingerbread cookies, fresh out of the oven. The house is filled with the warmth of the oven and aroma of cinnamon. Or what about the batch of hot cocoa you just made on the stove for the family? The scent of chocolate and marshmallow fills the room, eager to be enjoyed as a unit while watching your favorite Christmas movie. *(Wow...looks like I know what I'll be doing once I finish writing this devotion...someone send over some marshmallows and preheat the oven to 350° for me.)*

Did you notice something about the scenes pictured above? They all are enjoyed alongside others. You decorate the tree with your family and friends. Gingerbread cookies and hot cocoa are meant for sharing (*but also, this is a judgement free zone...if that batch of cookies is for yourself and no one else, you do you!!*).

While the Christmas season becomes a packed schedule, please-don't ask-me-about-another-Christmas-party-time-of-year with all of the to-dos, it is meant to be a shared season. A season of reflection, looking back on the mighty ways Jesus has enriched your life that year. A season of looking out for one another, sharing smiles, gifts, and your presence. A season of caring for those around you, seeing a need and stepping in to bring the magic of Christmas to someone who needs it. Ultimately and most importantly, a season of shining the light and love of Jesus Christ.

I love how, in Philippians 2, Paul reminds us and calls us to live in the Spirit with tenderness, compassion, and humility. Not just for us, but to look to the interests of others. He draws the ultimate example for us to live from our precious Jesus, who lived in obedience, humility, and with a servant nature. When the Christmas season picks up, how quickly do you observe the needs of those around you? Humility is one of the strongest fragrances of being a Christ follower. When we serve and value others and choose to deny ourselves to serve the needs around us, we are releasing the fragrance of Jesus to a broken, hurting world.

John 12 starts with an incredible story of Mary who sacrifices an expensive perfume to worship and glorify Jesus. Scripture says, ***"And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."*** Our lives, patterned after Jesus, become living sacrifices, spreading the fragrance of Him everywhere we go.

So go this Christmas season, live in humility, look for the needs around you, and spread—everywhere you go—the fragrance of Jesus!

QUESTIONS

Which attribute of Jesus do you find easiest, and which one do you find hardest to live out every day: compassion, obedience, or humility?

What's one way this Christmas season you can be aware of community needs and serve those around you?

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, we come to You grateful for the example You lived to serve others and serve them well. I pray over the hearts reading this page that together, we can be the hands and feet of You this Christmas season!



Bailie Morris



JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF JOY

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SCRIPTURE READING PSALM 16:11

I remember being a little boy and having so much joy that was connected to the Christmas season. Joy in the Christmas lights, the Christmas desserts, the presents under the tree, the Christmas music, and the movies that never got old. It was like a never-ending feeling of joy. I couldn't wait for Thanksgiving to get over with so we could move on to Christmas!

As I look back on those years and all those precious memories, I've become more aware that it wasn't necessarily the stuff, the activities, or the lights that brought me so much joy—it was the people I was with. The memories we made, the laughter around the dinner table, the conversations that went late into the night, and the simplest moments of just being together. It was in those ordinary, unhurried moments that joy seemed to overflow not because everything was perfect, but because we were present with one another.

In other words, the joy I found wasn't connected to what I was doing, but who I was doing it with...family, dear friends, and people who loved me for me. It was uninterrupted time with those I cared for deeply.

It makes me think about David's words in Psalm 16:11:

*"You make known to me the path of life;
You will fill me with joy in Your presence,
with eternal pleasures at Your right hand."*

David understood something that we can so often forget...real joy isn't found in the presents we open, but in the presence we keep. The presence of those we love and even more so, the presence of the God who loves us.

This Christmas season, may you rediscover the kind of joy that doesn't fade when the lights come down or the gifts are unwrapped—a joy that comes from being in the presence of the One who never leaves you.



Austin Davis

QUESTIONS

Why do you think being with people we love can bring us more joy than just getting presents and doing all the Christmas festivities?

Psalm 16:11 says God fills us with joy in His presence. What do you think it means to be in God's presence? How can you become more aware of God's presence this Christmas season?

PRAYER

Father, help us to walk with joy this Christmas season, knowing that we get to journey through it with You. Open our eyes to see the work of Your hand in our lives and in the relationships with those we walk alongside. Thank You for bringing joy to me and my family. Help us to be carriers of that same joy to a world that so desperately needs it.

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JOIN US IN CELEBRATING
THE SEASON OF
JOY



SCRIPTURE READING
ISAIAH 35:8-10

Growing up with both sets of my grandparents living many states away, we traveled on Christmas day for many years. We would wake up on Christmas morning, open our presents from our parents and Santa, then we'd get in the car and start the multi-hour journey to our grandparents' house. Our Christmas dinner was Waffle House, because it was normally the only thing open on Christmas day. This may not sound appealing, but as a young child I thought it was so fun traveling on Christmas. I can remember going to sleep in the car after the Waffle House dinners and waking up to the feeling of my father carrying me out of the car and into the bed I'd be in at one of my grandparents' houses.

If I could go back and re-live that feeling of the cold air touching my face, the warmth of my dad carrying me in his arms, and the joy of knowing we'd arrived at one my favorite places on Earth; I would in a heartbeat. There's nothing like being a child at Christmas. Not much compared to the kind of joy and excitement I felt when I arrived at my grandparents' house for Christmas. The journey to get there was always worth it!

These verses in Isaiah talk about how the Messiah who was coming, Jesus, would take God's people onto a Highway of Holiness. Jesus would make a way from sin to holiness, from death to life, from shame to joy. Only those who call Jesus as Savior can walk this road. This highway leads to the final destination of Heaven, where tears and pain will be no more. Where we will be singing and filled with joy and gladness forever!

God invites all of us onto the Highway of Holiness. He invites us to spend our lives on Earth walking with Him. When I meet with children to talk about salvation and baptism, I always remind them that following Jesus makes this life on Earth so much better right now. Following Jesus and living like Him leads to a better life for each of us. Isaiah reminds us that God sent Jesus to not only defeat sin forever, but to walk life with us, and to experience a life with Him that leads to ultimate joy.

QUESTIONS

Are you on that
"Highway to Holiness?"
Are you making
progress on it?

How can you enjoy life
with Jesus more this
week?

PRAYER

God, thank You for
making a way for us to
know You deeper and
to walk alongside You
every day through the
gift of Your Son, Jesus.
Help us to remember
and experience the joy
that comes in following
and living with You.



Kayla Martin





JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF PEACE



SCRIPTURE READING

2 THESSALONIANS 3:16

If I'm truly honest, I would have to admit there are certain times in my life when I've searched for peace in the wrong places. In my search for it, I sometimes misplace the source of peace. I begin to think peace is a wavering mindset—something that comes and goes according to my own accord. Perhaps, for you, this Christmas season is one where true peace seems to be fleeting. Even in the midst of all the good of the holiday season, real-life still happens. Struggles and uncertainty don't simply disappear when December rolls around.

However, Scripture gives us a beautiful reminder of where our true peace comes from in 2 Thessalonians 3:16, which says: ***"Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you."*** (NIV). These are Paul's words to the church in Thessalonica, reminding them where true peace is found.

True peace is not a feeling dependent on our circumstances. True peace comes from Jesus—the "Lord of Peace," as He is described in this verse. He alone gives us peace *"at all times and in every way."* In Hebrew, one name for God is Yahweh Shalom, which means The Lord is Peace.

So, what does true biblical peace look like? The world defines peace as the absence of conflict. Biblical peace, however, has a deeper meaning. It speaks of wholeness, unity with God, and the assurance that He is in control no matter our present circumstances. Biblical peace gives us confidence to trust our Heavenly Father at all times, knowing He is bigger than any trial we may face.

This Christmas season, when we find ourselves searching for peace, may we not look for it through our own effort or strength. We can't simply will ourselves into peace. Instead, may we remember that true peace comes from Jesus. He is Yahweh Shalom—our God of Peace. He alone is our source, and He freely gives His peace to us at all times and in every way when we place our faith in Him.

Bennet Schimmelpfennig

FAMILY ACTIVITY

PEACEFUL HANDS CHALLENGE

Trace each child's hand on paper. Inside each finger, write or draw one way they can:

• **Use hands gently** • **Help someone** • **Show peace**

Hang them on the fridge as a visual reminder daily to practice showing Jesus' peace this week!

QUESTIONS

When you hear the word "peace," how do you describe it?

What is something in your life that is keeping you from experiencing biblical peace at all times and in every way?

PRAYER

Lord of Peace, help me to remember where true peace comes from. In the midst of struggles and trials, give me peace at all times and in every way, so that I may be confident in Your plan for my life.



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JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF PEACE



SCRIPTURE READING

JOHN 14:27

Peace. That's a hard one for me right now.

I find that there are times in my life when things are going well, the pace of life is good and all feels right. And then, there are times when I struggle and my mind feels heavy and peace feels like it is the farthest thing from my heart. And honestly, I am in that latter place right now. I don't have peace, because this world has shadowed His perfect peace...I have shadowed His peace.

It is so easy to zoom in on our flaws, to focus on them and miss out on who He created us to be as a whole. For instance, if you were to go to the mountains during "peak season" and you only focus on the crunched up, brown leaves piled messily all over the ground, you would likely leave unhappy and unfulfilled for not seeing God's beautiful, colorful masterpiece. But, if you could hike to the top of a mountain and overlook an entire gorge, what you would see is a banner of beautiful fall colors. Those crumpled leaves are still there, but by backing up and taking in the whole picture, it makes those imperfections become smaller and not as noticeable.

I feel like maybe when Joseph came to wed Mary and found her carrying our sweet Jesus, he must have felt betrayed, afraid, and uncertain. But thankfully, he didn't stay in that frame of mind. He was able to encounter the Lord through an angel in his dream one night, and he was assured. He was assured that what Mary had said was truth, assured that this was God's perfect plan, and assured the Lord chose him to be a part of something with eternal impact. He didn't zoom in and focus on the doubts...where would Jesus sleep? What if he wasn't cut out to be a good father? Would he be able to support both a wife and child? No, Joseph panned out and kept his eyes on the whole picture, the story that has been passed down generation after generation. The story that God sent His one and only Son, to save the world and not condemn it. He didn't focus on the surrounding imperfections, but allowed God to cast a broader vision, that He would be with Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, which in turn, likely gave Joseph true peace. And that's exactly what we have to do when we find ourselves without peace.

In John 14:27 Jesus says, *"I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."* Worldly peace is usually defined as the absence of conflict. Jesus' peace gives us confident assurance in any circumstance. Jesus offers us His peace if we are willing to accept it from Him.

So when times in our lives turn to fear, uncertainty, doubt, and despair, we must recenter ourselves to look at Him and His perfect, whole plan for our lives, and find rest in His promises. Focusing on the small, mundane hurts and pains the world offers us, robs us of a resounding, unwavering, and steady peace that He willingly provides us.

QUESTIONS

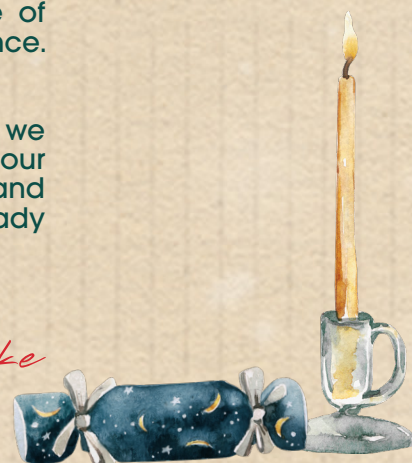
What does true peace look like in my life—not just the absence of conflict, but a deep, lasting peace within?

What distractions do you need to lay down in order to experience the deep, soul-level peace that Jesus offers?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, the peace You give us is unmatched from anything this world can offer. Please keep my eyes and heart from focusing on the small things that offer distress, but help me to keep my eyes focused on You and Your big picture for my life.

Courtney Radtke





JOIN US IN CELEBRATING THE SEASON OF PEACE



SCRIPTURE READING ISAIAH 9:6, PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7

I think we often have a romanticized view of peace at Christmas. Maybe it's the image of snow slowly falling outside a window, or the hope that this year everyone will finally get along. Maybe it's the serene phrase from the carol—*"all is calm"*—or the longing for that elusive *"world peace"* we hear so much about. Whatever the picture, it's easy to forget that the kind of peace Jesus offers looks very different from the world's version.

One of my favorite things to do during this season is to sit in my living room at the end of a long day, with only the soft glow of the Christmas tree lights illuminating the room. No noise, no distractions. Just stillness. Those quiet moments help me unwind and refocus my heart on Jesus. After all, Isaiah 9:6 reminds us, *"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (NIV)

But if we're honest, peace can feel fleeting—especially in a season full of busyness, expectations, and pressure to make everything perfect. That's why Philippians 4:6-7 has become one of my go-to passages whenever I feel out of control. Paul writes, *"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."* (NLT)

I love how Eugene Peterson paraphrases this in *The Message*: *"Let petitions and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns."* What a beautiful image—our worries being reshaped into prayers that open the door for peace to enter.

Whenever I start to feel anxious or overwhelmed, I try to pray right away and hand it over to the Lord. If I don't, anxiety begins to fester and grow. But when I pray, I'm reminded that I'm not in control—He is—and that He's writing a far greater story than I can see. It also brings to mind His faithfulness and provision in past seasons of uncertainty.

My Hebrew-Greek Study Bible defines the word *"peace"* in Philippians 4:7 as *"peace of mind, tranquility, arising from reconciliation with God and a sense of divine favor."* Doesn't that sound like the most priceless gift? And the best part—it's freely given to each of us through our relationship with Jesus, the true Prince of Peace.

Daphne Brown

QUESTIONS

When you think about *"peace,"* do you tend to picture calm circumstances or a calm heart? How does Jesus' definition of peace challenge or change your own?

What is one situation this week where you can intentionally turn your worries into prayers and invite God's peace to guard your heart and mind?

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, quiet my heart in the midst of life's noise and help me to bring every worry to You in prayer. Teach me to rest in Your presence and trust the peace only You can give.





FROM OUR FAMILIES TO YOURS

MERRY *Christmas*





Christmas Cookin'

with the



TrueNorth Staff



As we close our Advent journey, we're delighted to share a few favorite Christmas recipes from our staff—spanning hearty meals and sweet desserts. Gathering around the table is one of the most meaningful ways we live out the love, joy, and hospitality of the season, turning kitchens into places of warmth, connection, and generosity. Whether you're sharing a meal with family or blessing a neighbor with a dish, may these recipes remind us that Jesus, the Bread of Life, came to nourish every heart and home with His goodness. Enjoy!




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