

**Advent Devotional  
First Reformed Church  
November 2023**

*Dear First Reformed Church Family and Friends,*

*We are delighted to share with you this year's Advent Devotional, written by fellow members of the FRC family! This booklet is a wonderful example of how God uses the body of Christ – each contributor shared their voice in writing their entry, and God wove it all together into a gift that will bless every reader!*

*Please join me in thanking everyone who contributed to this devotional, and a special thanks to Kaitlyn Van Peurseem, my co-editor.*

*As you prepare your hearts for Christmas this Advent season, I pray that...*

- *the Lord meets you and blesses you in every quiet moment of reflection*
- *you are amazed again by the wonder of “God with us” as the tiny babe in the manger*
- *the messages you read here will remind you throughout your day of God's love and faithfulness*
- *you will share His love with others this season, especially those who do not know Him, and*
- *most of all, that everything in this booklet, and everything we do and say, will work together for His glory, to magnify His name at FRC and around the world.*

*May He be glorified forever! Have a blessed Christmas!*

*Debbie Asmus  
Worship Director*

*“May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” – Romans 15:5-6*

Day 1 – November 26 - Read: James 1:2-12

Faith and Endurance: A Wonderful Explanation of Advent

*“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.” - James 1:2-3*

Advent - Jesus showing up! - gives us hope, resolve, and determination to wait for His return. Why? Jesus showed up 2,000 years ago, so we know God’s promises are true. Now we trust He will come again, so we can have peace, hope, and faith.

How does this make you feel – hopeful? Confident? Grateful? Does knowing Christ was here, is with us now and will be again, sustain you in daily living?

We anticipate many things...

- Holidays and vacations
- Being with people that bring joy
- New things and experiences
- Times when things slow down or become easier

With anticipation, there can also be letdown. We develop the habit of never being quite content in the moment and expecting the next big thing. But the presence of Christ in our lives helps us move past the now into a life of faithful endurance.

Since His return will happen and Christ walks with us, part of our growing in faith looks like...

- enduring trials
- developing a prayer life
- seeking God’s wisdom
- asking God His plan
- sharing what God does
- looking at God’s work in lives
- asking for opportunities to be like Jesus
- listening and waiting

Embracing Advent keeps us focused on the journey God laid out for us. It’s God’s plan turned into reality, so we have hope for our journey. Advent doesn’t just teach us that someday everything will be all right. It teaches us that Jesus plays the key role in our everyday life. Advent is a wonderful gift we can share to bring people closer to the Savior Who came and will come again!

*Prayer: Father, thank You for the hope that Advent brings. Remind us to have faith and to endure patiently, knowing that You will make all things right. Amen.*

-Ty Hogue

Day 2 – November 27 - Read: 1 John 4:7-21

### Living in His Love

*“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God.” - 1 John 4:7*

The season of Thanksgiving, with Christmas well on its way, is a peaceful and joyful time of the year. We take this time to gather with family, enjoy the harvest, and celebrate the birth of Jesus, as well as share gifts with those we love. With all this season brings, we must not forget the true meaning of giving - “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 13:34). We remember what was given to us. God gave us His Son so that we shall not perish, but have eternal life.

Living in His love means that we give ourselves to God and to those around us. By doing this, we are able to live in God and God in us.

Jesus is the true example of how we are to show love for one another. He sacrificed His life for our forgiveness, and we had yet to even be created! As the scripture reads, “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).

Often we hear people say they love their favorite sports team, or the new gift that Santa gave them. As we gather this holiday, I pray that we all remember the Lord’s love for us, and that we find ways to share His love with those around us and to love one another.

*Prayer: Father God, we thank You for the love You have given us. I pray that we show others the same love, so You can live in us and we can live in You. Amen.*

*-Kayla Petersen*

Day 3 – November 28 - Read: Jeremiah 33:14-16

### The Precious Book of Truth

*“Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The LORD is our righteousness.’” - Jeremiah 33:16*

In our early morning men’s Bible study, we have been going back and forth from the Old to the New Testament. What a wonderful learning experience this has been! They mesh so completely. From Genesis to Revelation, the Bible proves itself over and over again; there is no kink in its truth. We need to read it (even though sometimes it’s confusing) with total trust that it’s the truth. Sometimes the truth is hard to swallow.

Today with social media, there is so much information out there that promotes lies and riles people up so negatively. America’s leadership in all areas has gotten so corrupt that I don’t believe they even know what the truth is any more. Our children must be so confused, because I know we don’t always know what to believe. But wait!!

Jeremiah, who lived 600 years before Jesus was born, had good news for the people of Israel AND us. In verse 15 of today’s reading he stated, “I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David’s line [Jesus].” Now, granted, this was going to take awhile, and they had to endure a lot until that time came. But it was true – He came! And while He was here, He promised He would come back again.

We may have to endure a lot too, but we know we have Him to turn to. Jesus is the Word, the Truth, our hope. Go ahead and read books for fun, but study the Word to hear the truth. Our eternal life depends on Jesus. Verse 11 says, “Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; His love endures forever.”

*Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for Your unfailing truth. Thank You for saving us from ourselves. Thank You for your undying love. Amen.*

*-Bob Polly*

Day 4 – November 29 - Read: Psalm 42

Put All Your Hope in the Lord

*“Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise Him, my Savior and my God.”  
– Psalm 42:11*

Being happy and having hope in difficult times is hard, but when you put all your hope in the Lord, He will help you and guide you through it all. In today's reading the psalmist asks himself why he is so downcast and reminds himself to trust God. When we do this, He will give us even more than we need. Trusting God is important even when we are in good times, because it will help us trust when we are going through hard times too.

For the last two years my whole family has had to learn to trust God with our hope, because my dad has not had a job he felt called to. Though he still felt called to work in ministry, he looked at a lot of churches in Holland, MI, but heard nothing or “no” from 14 churches. He never lost hope in his calling, because he trusted God through it all. That taught me to never lose hope. Once he started looking outside of Holland, there were three churches that all wanted him. When he came to this church and a youth pastor job, it was a yes! Because my Dad never lost hope, I never lost hope.

Another time I had to hold on to hope was when my dad lost his job at a former church. I had just asked a Sunday School teacher there to be my mentor and help me take my Profession of Faith classes. The same week my dad lost his job, his knee gave out and he fell. It ended up that he had to get surgery. That was a very hard time, because I wanted to make Profession of Faith, but my dad didn't work at that church any more, and now he was injured and couldn't even look for another job. But that taught me so much. I now know so much more about God, and my understanding for Him is so much stronger. I will never lose hope.

So put your hope in God and trust Him to keep it; He will help you through it all. You will never lose your hope if you put it in God.

*Prayer: Lord, help us to remember that You are our only hope, and that Your faithfulness will get us through every situation. Amen.*

*-Megan Hogue*

Day 5 – November 30 - Read: Isaiah 2:1-5

### God's Kingdom is Coming

*"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." – Isaiah 2:3*

Isaiah 2:1-5 is a beautiful passage that speaks of the coming of the Lord and the establishment of His kingdom. The prophet Isaiah speaks of a time when the mountain of the Lord's house will be established as the highest of all mountains, and all nations will stream to it. This is a powerful image that speaks to the universality of God's love and grace.

The passage goes on to say that the Lord will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. This is a reminder that God is not only a God of love, but also a God of justice. He cares deeply about the oppressed and marginalized, and He will not rest until justice is done.

Finally, Isaiah speaks of a time when nations will no longer go to war against each other. Instead, they will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. This is a beautiful image that speaks to the transformative power of God's love. When we allow God to work in our hearts, we become agents of peace and reconciliation in the world.

In conclusion, today's passage is a powerful reminder that God's kingdom is coming, and that we have a role to play in bringing it about. We are called to be agents of peace and justice in the world, working to build bridges between people and nations. May we be faithful to this calling, and may we always remember that God's love and grace are available to all who seek Him.

In this season of Advent we are reminded of Jesus Christ, who came to be the role model of peace and reconciliation in this world. Have a blessed Christmas!

*Prayer: Father, thank You for the promises You give us in Your Word. Help us to faithfully carry out our responsibilities in sharing Your love and justice with the world around us. Amen.*

*-Lyndon Overweg*

Day 6 – December 1 - Read: Isaiah 12:2-6

### Grinch Attitude

*“Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid.” –Isaiah 12:2*

One morning, I felt an attitude coming on. I realized I can choose to entertain that mood or ignore it, but I chose to entertain it. I picked the “Grinch” attitude. I continued my routine with the chosen attitude, and things went downhill quickly! NOTHING was right. I was in one bad mood.

But then...I heard a whisper, *“Child, focus on Me! Reflect Me.”* My response? “Yeah, whatever!” I wanted to be in this mood even though things were going from bad to worse.

But then...one of my favorite songs came on the radio. The words began to sink into my soul.

“Oh! Christ be magnified  
Let His praise arise  
From the altar of my life  
Christ be magnified in me.”

The whisper asked, *“Are you magnifying Christ?”* A phrase in the song hit me: “I won’t be formed by feelings.” I was humbled. I needed to change and ask for forgiveness. My desire should be to magnify Christ, and that wasn’t evident with my Grinch attitude.

Mary declares in Luke 1:46, “My soul magnifies the Lord...” Even though overwhelmed by the news, Mary chose to glorify God for what He was going to do in and through her.

During this season, we tend to focus on everything except the reason we are celebrating Christmas. Let’s live in a way that will magnify Christ even when we choose the Grinch attitude.

*Prayer: Lord, help us not to magnify our problems today, but instead magnify Who You are. Amen.*

*-Rhea Boender*

Day 7 – December 2 – Read: John 1:1-8

### Share Your Light

*“The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” -John 1:5*

Today begins with one of the Bible’s simplest, yet most reassuring, verses: the Word was in the beginning, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The passage reminds us that God made everything. He is life; He is the light who brings light to us, and we shine in the darkness.

The amazing part is that the light overcomes the darkness, not the other way around. This world is dark, but the light Christ gave to us can overcome this darkness as we share the light of Christ with others and spread that light.

John was blessed with one job: to witness and testify about the true Light. That true Light was coming to this world through the birth of Jesus.

As intimidating as it is to share, the Gospel is that simple. God gave us light, and life, to share our true stories of what He’s done for us with others. As we do that, we share God’s light with them, and they are no longer in the darkness. Like John, we have but one job to do: to witness and testify to the light in our lives.

This reminds me of our annual candlelight service. The sanctuary is dark; then a single candle is lit, and as it is shared with everyone, the light takes over the sanctuary. What a blessed thought if we could share enough light to totally take over the darkness of the world!

*Prayer: Father, help me to share Your light with those in the darkness of this world. May Your light overcome this dark and distressed world. Thank You for the gospel story You give each of us. Amen.*

*-Mike Asmus*



Day 8 – December 3 – Read: Psalm 124

Our God, Our Deliverer

*“Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” – Psalm 124:8*

Christmas is the time of year where we look forward to celebrating the birth of Christ. For many of us, it is a time of celebration. For others, it is a time of despair. Before Jesus came on the scene, the children of Israel were living under the authority of the Romans. There was little hope to be found. It seemed that God had abandoned them.

David reminds all who feel abandoned and in despair that God has brought deliverance from these things. He starts out by reminding the reader that if the Lord had not been on our side, we would have been overwhelmed by everything about life on this earth. Yet he tells us to praise God because we are not helpless, worthless or in despair. Our help is in the name of the One Who has given His all for us.

He sent His Son to come into this world, in the usual way, to give to us His redeeming love. We don't deserve this, yet God willingly gave His Son for you and me so that we can be delivered from all that Satan is striving to tell us. Christ is the light of God's salvation for all of humanity. Simeon declared this in Luke 2.

As you go through this Christmas season remember that, even though life can be extremely difficult, we have a Savior, born in Bethlehem, who died on Calvary and rose from the grave, who is giving us hope beyond today. May His grace fill you to overflowing as you celebrate His birth.

*Prayer: Father, fill us with Your presence this Christmas season, knowing that You are the one that has overcome this world. May Your love shine into our lives and overflow into the lives of those we encounter. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

*-Pastor LeRoy Boender*

Day 9 – December 4 – Read: John 1:14-28

### Knowing Who You Are

*“He who comes after me has surpassed me because He was before me.” – John 1:15*

In this passage, John the Baptist is a messenger, explaining who Jesus is before He comes. Jesus is ‘flesh,’ meaning He came to earth as a human. The God who created everything decided to become a human so that He could draw closer to us sinners. Verse 18 goes on to say that no one has ever seen God, but his Son, who is Himself God, has made Him known.

Verses 19-29 tells me that John the Baptist is very clear on who he is and who he isn’t. He was also very clear on who Jesus is, which allowed him to point others to Jesus. I feel that John could have easily said he was someone he wasn’t, but instead said, “I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way for the Lord.’” He didn’t say he was THE voice, or a voice that will forever change world history. Instead, he is just A voice, calling attention to the coming of the Lord. John was a truly humble person!

There are times in my life where I need to take the ‘John the Baptist’ approach and show a little more humility. We all need to realize that we aren’t the center of the universe. God should be the center of our attention. There are many distractions in everyone’s world, but it’s important to give more attention to God so that those other distractions will become less and less.

*Prayer: Father, help me to be more like John the Baptist, who said that Christ must increase and he must decrease. Let us humbly be willing to do whatever You ask. Amen.*

*-Aaron Moller*

Day 10 – December 5– Read: Psalm 146:1-10

Praise is Always a Choice

*“I will praise the LORD as long as I live.” –Psalm 146:2*

Where do you turn first when you get bad news? For example, if you found out a loved one had cancer, where would you go for help? For many of us, the first response to illness is to ask Dr. Google. I’ll come back to that in a moment.

When I was assigned this passage, I learned that Psalm 146 is the first in a collection of five **HALLELUJAH** psalms (146-150). Each of these psalms begins and ends by encouraging us to praise God. The word **PRAISE** led me to an interesting comparison by Dr. Josh Moody. “What you praise expresses what or who you trust.” I hope he won’t mind if I paraphrase his example:

If the Ford F-150 is, for you, the best pickup on the market, then when you tell your friends about that pickup, you’re praising it, and by praising it, you’re showing that you trust that vehicle. Let’s take that to the next level. If you think that God is the best, then you will praise God, and that will show you put your trust in God (not in people, 146:3). What is more, if you are struggling to trust God, then try this: praise Him! You will find that “Blessed is he whose hope is in the Lord their God” (146:5).

Let’s go back to my original question. Where do you turn first when you get bad news? Often when things go wrong, we ask God “Why?” Then, we turn to the internet or our friends for advice on what to do, instead of staying focused on Him.

Obviously, you have many choices. Please remember, PRAISE is always a choice. Praise helps you shift the focus onto God. Praise will remind you that God is in control.

*Prayer: Dear Lord and Heavenly Father, thank You for bringing Psalm 146 to my attention at a time when I needed a gentle reminder of the importance of praise – even when things become difficult. Thank You for Your promise to be our light in the darkness. Amen.*

*-Dave VerSteeg*

Day 11 – December 6 – Read: John 3:31-36

### John the Baptist Exalts Christ

*“Behold, I send a messenger before your face, who will prepare your way, the voice of one crying in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.’” - Isaiah 40:3*

John the Baptist was born to the Jewish priest Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth in their old age. “And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years.” (Luke 1:6-7)

The angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah in the temple of the Lord (Luke 1:6-23) to explain to a skeptical Zechariah that he will be the father to John, who will be filled with the Spirit and will turn the children of Israel to the Lord their God.

John was born for this purpose, to prepare the way, to exalt and witness to the coming of Christ. In these verses from John 3, John the Baptist witnesses that Jesus is above all, and explains that not only is He God, but also of the earth - fully human. John also foretells that He will be rejected and few will receive His testimony. Yet whoever receives and believes His testimony will have His seal - that God is true. Jesus was sent by God to utter the words of God. He also affirms God’s love for His son Jesus, and that the Father has given Him all power. He concludes with the final statement that whoever believes in the Son has eternal life.

This is a direct challenge to each and every one of us....do I truly believe these words of John? Do I truly believe that Jesus - the Son of the one true God - entered this world, only to die on the cross as the perfect sacrifice for all my sins, and to allow me to have the gift of salvation and eternal life?

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, I affirm this day that I truly believe in You, the creator of all and the God of all. I believe that Jesus, Your son, was the sacrificial lamb to atone for my sin. Forgive me, Lord, and accept me into Your family of believers. In Jesus name, Amen.*

*-Gregg Bleeker*

Day 12 – December 7 – Read: Genesis 22:1-14

### The Ultimate Test

*“Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love...  
and offer him...as a burnt offering.” -Genesis 22:2*

In many ways this is a very chilling story detailed for us. Abraham is asked by God to sacrifice his only son. Did he hesitate? NO. He listened and moved forward to sacrifice his only son. At the appropriate time, God stopped Abraham from doing this, and Abraham found and sacrificed a ram instead, honoring God with that.

Abraham is tested by God in the same way that God was willing to give up His only Son, Jesus, for our sin. Abraham is one of few people to whom God spoke directly. He, Moses, and Samuel were all called by name by the Lord, and their response was, “Here I am, Lord!” That should be each of our responses when we feel the Lord calling us to action.

Answering “Here I am, Lord” is very challenging for each of us. It’s submission, and we are longer in control; God is. Anytime we are not in control, we normally hesitate. Abraham did not, and we should work to do the same. If we are in relationship with God, and truly feel His call, we should be “all in,” not hesitating, and willing to let the Lord lead. He has never let anyone fail who He has called to respond.

In this Advent season, listen extra closely for the Lord’s direction. You may be surprised how clearly you hear Him. Don’t hesitate!

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for giving up Your only Son for us. He cleansed our sin forever and opened the door to relationship with You. Speak clearly to each of us, showing us where You want us to serve You. Amen.*

*-Mike Asmus*

Day 13 – December 8 – Read: Romans 3:21-24

### Our Debt is Paid

*“All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” -Romans 3:23*

The birth of Jesus Christ opened the door of being right with God and allowed a pathway to justification instead of condemnation. Jesus' grace redeemed us, for He has paid our sin debt by His death on the cross.

There was a person who owed me money for supplies. When I gave them the supplies, their life was in upheaval. So I waited patiently for them to start paying me back, but that didn't occur. This incident became a 52-year period of grace for them from me. Not that I did anything with grace in mind; I just totally forgot about it.

This person must have been more bothered by the debt through the years than I was, because I received a letter from them which said, “I'm finally getting around to sending this to you. When the Holy Spirit came into my life, convicted me of my sin, I knew that a part of the process was to make sure I paid you back. I'm not sure when we made the bargain for the supplies, so I took the year 1975 and looked at what the rate from then to now was. It stated that a dollar at that time is now worth \$5.65. That is how I came up with the amount on the check. I'm just glad I can do it now. It is long overdue.” This person repented, leading to a redemption of my feelings toward them and a chance for thankfulness.

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Son Jesus, who was born to give Himself up for us, to give us a way out of sin and into the freedom of being redeemed. By His grace we are now able to come to You, Father. Amen.*

*-Dellene Kleinsasser*

Day 14 – December 9 – Read: Isaiah 35:1-10

Walking with Jesus

*“The redeemed will walk there...They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads.” – Isaiah 35:9-10*

Each day I have the joy of taking my young grandsons to school and daycare. Some mornings when we pull up to his daycare, five-year-old Oliver is out the car door in five seconds flat, racing to beat me to the door. Other days he lingers a bit, and I get to hold his sweet little hand as we walk inside together.

Isn't Oliver just like his grandma? Some days I'm out of bed like a shot, racing to get through everything I think must be finished that day. Other days I take the time to speak with the Lord before hitting my list, lingering in His Word to hear His sweet words of comfort and wisdom, equipping me for what matters to Him.

Today's scripture passage mentions feeble hands and knees that give way, phrases growing more familiar as my years of life increase. Yet the Lord tells us He is building a highway for the redeemed, the Way of Holiness, and all who walk with Him will one day walk on that highway, singing wonderful songs of praise and living in eternal joy.

The way I invest my minutes now will shape not just my life, but my influence on Oliver and all others God puts in my path. O Lord, help me to linger and walk with You, so that I can point others to that glorious Way of Holiness!

*Prayer: Dear Lord, restore to us a spirit that longs to linger with You, that You may fill us with Your Word and strengthen us for the tasks You have ordained in advance for us to do. Help us to put You first as we prioritize our time. Amen.*

*-Debbie Asmus*

Day 15 – December 10 – Read: Luke 3:1-18

### Generosity in Abundance

*“And he answered them, ‘Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.’” – Luke 3:11*

A year ago I was diagnosed with stage 3 breast cancer. God has taught me a lot through this time. For one thing, I’ve had to learn to accept people's help, which I’m absolutely terrible at. I don’t want to bother people with my problems because I know I can take care of myself. Or so I thought.

It became very clear that I needed help. I couldn’t do all the things I used to do. The day-to-day tasks became difficult, and I needed to accept people's help. What was so amazing was the amount of help I received. People who I didn’t even know were sending me gifts, encouragement, food, prayers, and even money. I couldn’t believe it. I had never experienced the generosity of so many people. It changed my life.

During this time of year, generosity is in abundance, but I think it's easy to overlook the true impact a small gift can have. We need to remember the importance of being generous and how easily you can change someone’s attitude or life with even just a little generosity.

In Luke 3:1-18, John the Baptist was a very unconventional prophet, which is exactly what the Lord needed in order to pave the way for the new Messiah. John was sent to turn people away from sin and toward God. When asked, "What can the people do?", John very clearly stated, "Be generous."

During this holiday season, be generous. Help someone who needs help, but won’t ask. They are out there. Just look hard, and God will show you.

*Prayer: Lord, help us to see Your people in need and to find ways to be generous, even through the smallest tasks. Thank You for providing for us and giving us comfort in hard times. Amen.*

*-Dina Vander Wilt*



Day 16 – December 11 – Read: Psalm 80:1-7

### He Lights the Way

*“Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!” – Psalm 80:3*

It seemed as though God had abandoned his people. He let the Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years, and even David – in writing the Psalms – was awaiting the coming Messiah to save them from the torment and persecution from their enemies.

“How long will you be angry with your people’s prayers?” Have we ever prayed this? “God, where are you? Why aren’t you helping me with this work issue? Why won’t you speak into the heart of my family member?” At times, it can seem as though God isn’t present or He doesn’t care about our small problems in life.

But even David recognizes God’s light – “O God, let your face shine.” While the Israelites waited many years for their coming Messiah, He announced His birth through the light of a bright star, lighting the way for the shepherds and wise men to find His peace, comfort, and joy. He brought hope for His people through light after many years of darkness.

While there may be times when it seems like God isn’t listening, remember how long the Israelites had to wait before God revealed His bright plan. He’s always listening. He’s always with us. We just have to be patient. Emmanuel – God with us.

*Prayer: Father, thank You that You are faithful. Help us to rely on You and to be patient people, looking for Your salvation. Amen.*

*-Kaitlyn Van Peurseem*

Day 17 – December 12 – Read: Psalm 21

God's Plans for Joy

*“Be exalted, O LORD, in Your strength!  
We will sing and praise Your power.” – Psalm 21:13*

What is it you are good at? For me, I love to encourage others, and I enjoy planning and organizing. Every day, I tend to plan out my day in my head and oftentimes on paper as well. Over the years I have learned that my well-laid plans often go awry and what I had planned for the day doesn't happen like I had imagined.

One particular day, I had a plan and a timeline for my day. In my head this day would be spent sharing my passion for a project with a few people at different churches. It turns out that NONE of the people I talked to were even a little bit excited for the idea. After about four “nos” (it felt like 40), I left the last church, frustrated and wondering what God was thinking. Had I heard Him wrong?

It was raining and cold, and I still had one church I planned to stop by. Discouraged, I decided to stop in quickly. That stop ended up being exactly what God had planned for my day. I had an opportunity to pray with and for a pastor; I was able to share what I had been learning about in the Bible; and ultimately God filled my cup in the process and restored my excitement for what He had in store.

The Lord fills our lives with joy when we give Him the credit and allow Him to make the plans for our days. Over the years, the Lord has slowly, and painfully at times, showed me that pausing to be in His presence (instead of following my own agenda) has brought me more joy and peace than I could ever have dreamed of on my own.

What plan does God have for your day today? Can you trust that what the Lord has for you today is good?

*Prayer: Father, help me to trust You to plan my days and life for Your glory. Amen.*

*-Krista Smith*

Day 18 – December 13 – Read: Galatians 4:1- 7

### Adoption as God's Children

*“Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” – Galatians 4:6*

I love the analogy that Paul gives to the Galatian people. Here he uses a child that is an heir to an inheritance, which means the child will be the owner of everything. Although the child received the inheritance of his father's estate, he still doesn't have the authority that goes with the possession of that inheritance, because he is still a child. So he has to have guardians showing him how to be mature until the time for his father to give him authority over the inheritance.

Paul says that in the fullness of time, God sent forth his son, Jesus. That is what Paul means when he says the fullness of time. God chose this exact time, the fullness of time, to send his Son to be born of a woman, born under the law. I love that Jesus was human and was brought up under the Old Testament law. That way, the people living under those laws could relate and understand His redeeming Grace! Jesus came to free His people who were in bondage to the law. Through all of this, we can receive adoption into His family.

Because Jesus came, we have the Spirit of God's Son in our hearts. The Spirit leads us to follow God. Now we are no longer slaves, but are heirs to God, because of Jesus Christ and the Spirit within us that calls out to the Father, saying, “Abba Father, thank You for being born, dying, and rising again, so that we all can be adopted into Your family if we so choose You!”

*Prayer: Loving God, this Advent season may we be so thankful that You chose us to be called Your sons and daughters because of the inheritance of Your Son. Amen.*

*-Vicky Graves*

Day 19 – December 14 - Read: Galatians 3:6-14

### Living By Faith

*“Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” – Galatians 3:11*

When I was a young lad, it seemed that with everything I got into I wanted an explanation of “who, what, when and why.” It seemed natural to me to want those explanations of how that truck, machine, or tractor worked. I just wanted to know. The first thing I wanted to do was to drive it, see how it worked, and show the “older guys” I was better at operating every piece of equipment, and I did. It didn’t make any difference that I was only 10 years old. My faith was in my ability to do anything.

As time has been passing me by, my faith has been increasing, but it’s not my faith in my ability to run any piece of equipment. I spend more time in God’s Word reading passages that pertain to spiritual faith.

Galatians 3:11 tells us that “no man is justified by the law in the sight of God,” and it is evident, for “the just shall live by faith.” Hebrews 11 is known as the “faith chapter,” and above the chapter in my Bible, I have written, “Faith is Victory.” Hebrews 11 says that “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” This year at Vacation Bible School, we discussed “the whole armor of God,” and as Ephesians 6:16 says, “Take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one.”

The Bible is full of verses that talk about faith. During this Advent season, faith is important because it honors God, and God always honors faith. Genesis says it all: “And God said...”

*Prayer: Lord, help break us of our faith in ourselves and in our abilities. Build in us a strong faith in You, Your Word, Your promises, and Your faithfulness. Amen.*

*-Dale Houchin*

Day 20 – December 15 – Read: Hebrews 4:4-16

### He Knows Our Hearts

*“Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace.” – Hebrews 4:16*

Growing up in a farm family, my two older brothers worked outside with my dad, while my little sister and I helped Mom with the household chores. I was a little jealous of the attention the boys got from Dad, so I was thrilled when he asked me to scoop out a feed bunk in the nearby cow yard.

Despite skinning my knee from tripping on a silo door that was lying in the bunk, I completed the job and was excited to tell my dad all about it. As I replayed every detail of my traumatic experience, Dad became distracted by things that still needed to get done. Feeling I was losing the attention I craved, I embellished the story by adding, "And I fell on a cow and killed it!" I had his attention once again.

The good news is that we don't have to tell stories to get God's attention. This passage tells us in verse 13 that the living God sees everything about us. In verses 14 & 15, we're told Jesus is our High Priest who understands our weakness. He was tempted as we are, though He never sinned. Then verse 16 says, "So let us come boldly to the very throne of God and stay there to receive his mercy and to find grace to help us in our time of need."

We have God's attention. He knows our heartaches, struggles, frustrations, and joys. Let's turn to Him to receive all the love and grace we seek.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for knowing us and listening to our prayers. Help us remember that You understand our weakness and walk beside us as we battle life's daily challenges. Amen.*

*-Flora Tieszen*

Day 21 – December 16 – Read: Colossians 1:15-20

### The Supremacy of Christ

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” -Colossians 1:15*

This passage talks about the supremacy of Christ. First, He existed before creation. He created all things and holds all creation together. Second, He's the head of the church. Through Him we are reconciled to God by His death and resurrection.

As Christmas is approaching, we are preparing. We are singing Christmas music. This helps us to remember the infant in a manger in Bethlehem. We are busy purchasing or making gifts for family and friends. This is a reminder of the greatest Gift we received, Jesus. Also, we are planning get-togethers with family and friends. This should remind us of the heavenly feast we will celebrate when we arrive in heaven.

So, as we think of the babe of Christmas, let's not forget the rest of the story. Christ is supreme. He is our creator and head of the church. He loves us and offered His life for us. We need to thank and praise Him for what He is and for what He has done for us.

*Prayer: Lord, thank You for Who You are and what You have done for us. Help us remember You as the babe of Christmas, but also as our Savior and Lord. Amen.*

*--Janet Klinger*

Day 22 – December 17 – Read: 2 Corinthians 1:3-7

### Finding Comfort in Our Challenges

*“For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.” – 2 Corinthians 1:5*

God’s comfort is the focus of the Bible passage. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth after his imprisonment in Ephesus and Macedonia. He endured great physical suffering and was close to death. Paul’s focus was not on how much he had suffered, but rather that God was always with him.

God provided constant comfort to him through these difficult, even near-death, experiences. Even when Paul was suffering, God was using Paul to help other people. During this time, God used Paul’s work to bring salvation to people and to strengthen their faith.

God’s comfort is provided to all of us. God is still giving his children the same comfort He gave Paul so many years ago. All of us experience suffering in different ways. Most of us will never suffer in our lives quite like Paul did, but we all suffer from different afflictions – mental, physical, financial, or relational challenges. Each of us needs God’s comfort as it is strength and courage that only God can give us. When we are in trouble, sick, or have other afflictions, our first reaction is often fear. We cannot fight these battles with our own strength. Psalm 46:1 (NLT) says “God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”

I pray that each of you finds God’s comfort every day, but especially this holiday season as we celebrate the birth of our Savior.

*Prayer: Father, we thank You for being present with us during life's challenges and sin's temptations. Remind us that You are our refuge and strength no matter what happens. Help us feel Your comfort. Amen.*

*-Carri Kopfmann*

Day 23 – December 18 – Read: 1 Samuel 2:1-10

Bursting with God-News!

*“I rejoice in Your salvation...There is no Rock like our God.” –1 Samuel 2:1-2*

Have you ever looked at your life as a song like Hannah sang? She waited a long time for God to give her a son. I wonder if she ever felt like giving up? Then, when God made a way for her to be pregnant and give birth to Samuel, verse 2:1 in the Message Bible says her song was bursting with God-News!

What would your song look like? Lots of happy, thankful choruses for everything you asked for and received? Or lots of sad, disappointed choruses for what you didn't receive? I believe everything we go through is for a purpose, and God will use it for His glory.

Whether we're struggling with finances, going through relationship problems, or enjoying the abundant harvest of this year, your story is for His purpose. Even though God knew His Son was going to be rejected, beaten, whipped and hung on a cross, Jesus knew His purpose and His mission, and He endured through it all. We can, too, my friends, if we know our reason for living. That is our song.

We might be the only Jesus others may see, so share your song with others today.

*Prayer: God, I'm singing Matthew West's song for my prayer today. My story, Your glory, my pain, Your purpose, my mess, Your message. In all things, I know You're working. One life, one mission, one reason why I'm living. All for You, not for me. My story, YOUR glory. Amen!*

*-Carolyn Wolbrink*



Day 24 – December 19 – Read: Isaiah 1:1-20

Our Just and Righteous King

*“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” - Isaiah 1:18*

The book of Isaiah is an insightful read portraying God as the ultimate just and righteous King. Isaiah prophesied from 739 to 631 BC to a nation that had turned a deaf ear to the Lord and effectively alienated themselves from Him.

Isaiah has been called an extended “book of judgment.” In fact, the impact of God’s judgement lasts for the book’s first 39 chapters. Isaiah warns that those who persist in their rebellion of ‘spiritual sickness’ will lead the nation on a path to physical destruction at God’s judgment. He speaks of God as the ultimate judge of the world Who alone has the authority to decide what is right and wrong. Not only is God the judge, He is the Savior. In other words, God’s judgment declares what is broken; and in verses 18 and 19 He promises to heal those who are willing and obedient. What a blessing! What a Savior!

I was especially intrigued by God’s words to Israel in verse 17: *learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.* This verse reminded me vividly of a former bank customer who left a lasting impression on me. He was a strong-willed, high character family man who owned and operated a modest small-town business.

One cold December day he walked into my office and asked for my help. He pointed out a late model used car parked across the street and asked me to see that a young lady from his church would receive the car. He said she attended the church with her three small children, her husband left her with no child support, and “she just needs a reliable car.” He handed me the car title and said to tell her the car was an anonymous gift with no strings attached. Then he headed for the door. Overwhelmed by his generosity, I asked, “What am I supposed to tell her?” He paused and said, “Tell her Merry Christmas and know God loves you.”

As we move through this Advent season, may we remember our responsibilities as God’s children and to cherish the peace of knowing God loves us.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are thankful for Your teachings and Your love. May the way we conduct our lives be a tribute to You. Amen.*

*-Dan Pranger*

Day 25 – December 20 – Read: Mark 10:13-16

### The Lessons of Children

*"Anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." – Mark 10:15*

Anyone who has children knows that they are humbling. For example, say that your son "Billy" brings his teacher a surprise gift, and you receive the following text from the teacher: "Billy always knows how to make my day! His card was so cute and sweet! Thank you for letting him be him!"

You see it several hours later and text back, "Aww! He's one of a kind! Definitely keeps us on our toes, but he's so sweet. Grateful God gave us Billy!"

Her reply is immediate: "Me too! But.... He just came in from recess and I was told he was out there swearing like a sailor. I chatted with him especially about using God's name in vain."

(Mom's face turns red...)

This is a good description of my faith walk too. But the major difference is, when my child "Billy" came home from school, he was nearly in tears. He had said one inappropriate word that rhymed with lamb, and you know kids... the story was a little exaggerated when the class came inside from recess. My son apologized and felt bad for his actions, knowing there would be a consequence.

I often think of my sinfulness. How often do I try to hide my sin, or make excuses for it, rather than owning my sin, asking the Lord for forgiveness, and truly trying to change?

The faith of a child is something we need to strive for every day. We are invited and welcomed to sit at the feet of Jesus...knowing we don't have life all put together...but we know a guy!

*Prayer: Father, help us to strive for childlike faith, trusting that Your grace is sufficient to save us even when we don't quickly acknowledge our sin. Amen.*

- "Billy's" mom (since he said he'd write a devotional and then changed his mind 😊)

Day 26 – December 21 – Read: Romans 5:1-5

Verses for Each Moment

*“God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” – Romans 5:5*

When I first read this Scripture given to me for this devotional, I was slightly excited. Redemption, hope, and faith. It's got to be one of the easiest passages to tie into the Christmas season, right?

So when I sat down and began to write on redemption, I felt great about it. Then I read the verses again. No, I think focusing on hope makes more sense, so I started over. After an interruption halfway through, I went back and reread it again to get back on track, which prompted me to begin again about rejoicing in our sufferings. (FYI, I had a fun story all planned for it too.)

One more reading of the Scripture, and I felt once again I needed to change where this was going. My “easiest to write” devotional has now become far more difficult. These five little verses all tell a story, and they all could invoke different feelings and thoughts each time I read them.

The Christmas season can be like that too. Lots of different thoughts and feelings. Anticipation, joy, anxiety, faith, grief, etc. Every person and every day (or hour) can feel different. However, just like the words I read over and over never changed, neither does the love and commitment of Christ who remains there for us no matter how we are feeling. So I encourage you to reread those daily verses and let them guide you through whatever you are going through, in this holiday season and beyond.

*Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your unwavering Word and commitment to us, no matter where we are or how we feel. Continue to guide our hearts and minds as we seek Your love. Amen.*

- Tom Stevens

Day 27 – December 22 – Read: Luke 1:46-55

### Mary's Song of Praise

*"My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior." - Luke 1:46*

Wow, could any one of us imagine what it would be like to be Mary? She was a lowly peasant with nothing to show for the things she had done in her life – EXCEPT - now she has everything, humbly accepting the gift that God has given her. She was handpicked by God to be the blessed mother of the Messiah, our Lord and Savior!

I know if I had been asked, I would probably try and get myself out of doing this, find excuses, or maybe even reject God's blessing, worrying what people would say, being criticized for not being married. Our responses to demands such as this would probably be doubt, laughter, and unwillingness to do what would seem to be impossible.

But Mary was a servant of God, and she willingly obeyed and accepted this blessing from God, saying, "From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me."

Now was Mary being proud of herself for God choosing her? No, she simply recognized and accepted the gift God had given her. A person full of pride would also accept the gift from God, but they would take all the credit for themselves. God does not like proud people; He likes those that are humble, accepting their God-given gifts, and we are to be thankful to God and use them for His glory.

Mary understood she was carrying the Messiah whose birth would fulfill God's promise, and she praised God for honoring her. We too need to accept our gifts from God, and we need to be thankful and praise Him for blessing us.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank You for Mary and for her acceptance of Your blessings. Thank You for blessing us with our gifts so we can lift You up and glorify You with our praises. Amen.*

*-Kim Vermeulen*

Day 28 – December 23 – Read: Matthew 1:18-25

### Trust Without Fear

*“Joseph, do not fear to take Mary as your wife.” – Matthew 1:20*

When times are uncertain, it is hard to trust in God. We see in this Bible passage that even Joseph had difficulty during this time in his life.

But when times are uncertain, we need to turn to God. When we do, great things happen. God has everything planned out. God knows what will happen and what we are going to do, so there is no reason why we should worry.

When Joseph found out that Mary was pregnant, he tried to silently divorce her. Back in Bible times, it was very frowned upon to be pregnant before marriage. When the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph, Joseph could have taken it two ways. He could have freaked out and disobeyed the angel, or obeyed the angel. Joseph obeyed the angel.

We need to have trust like Joseph. When God tells us something, even if we are uncertain, we need to have trust in Him. This may be hard, but in the end, we need to trust God's plan just like Joseph did.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, during this season of Advent, please help me to trust in You. When things don't go my way, help me to remember that You still love me. Help me to remember You have a plan for me. Amen.*

*-Owen Kopfmann*

Day 29 – December 24 – Read: Isaiah 9:5-7

### The Prince of Peace

*“For to us a child is born...and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” – Isaiah 9:6*

The scripture for this devotional is from Isaiah 9:6-7, and I believe everyone should memorize these verses. I remember the incredible experience of first singing Handel’s *Messiah*, and how I enjoyed singing this passage of scripture. It was challenging but also beautiful.

*“For unto us a child is born, to us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”*

*Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts will do this.”*

Isaiah wrote this passage several hundred years before it happened! Reading these scriptures brings the full meaning of Christmas to life. Jesus would be born as the Son of God and would establish His government, an extension of David.

These verses are one announcement of the prediction of Christ’s birth, His deity, His earthly government, and His eternal rule. What was Christ’s purpose in coming to earth? It was FOR US! Right now there may be gloom and distress, but someday there will come a time when there will be joy, happiness, and salvation.

*Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember You in our sorrow and fear. Give us Your grace, love, and power. Help us know You in a deeper, loving way. This Christmas, may we be joyful and share the good news of Your coming. Amen.*

*Merry Christmas!  
-Wayne Klinger*