2026



ADVENT DEVOTIONAL

CORNERSTONE BIBLE CHURCH

ADVENT IS HERE!

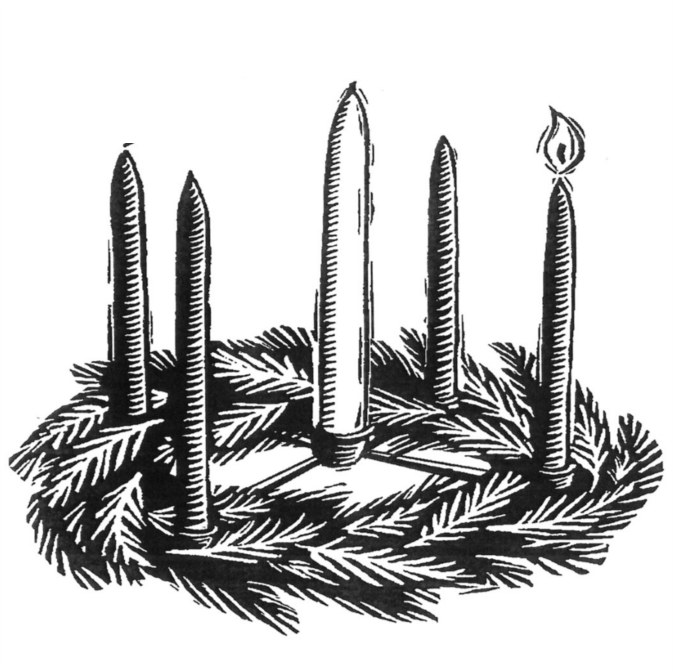
As I travel through town, it is wonderful to see Christmas decorations everywhere. It just brightens my mood. People get really excited about Christmas, but I wonder, what about Advent? You may be curious as to why I bring this up, but it is something that has changed the way I worship Christ at Christmas. Participating in Advent has helped me celebrate Christmas in a much fuller and deeper way. For those unfamiliar with Advent, it is a season of anticipation and reflection on the arrival of our Savior, Jesus Christ. In case you are wondering, Advent is not merely a countdown to Christmas (although we do love our festive Advent calendars!), but a four-week liturgical season that focuses on the themes of hope, peace, joy, and love, culminating with the celebration of the birth of Jesus. It might seem trite, but it is true: Jesus is the reason for the season!

In fact, we celebrate Jesus' first advent while eagerly anticipating his future arrival (the second advent). I hope you will find this evident as you read this Advent Devotional. I encourage you to utilize this booklet each day in order to enhance your anticipation and celebration of Jesus' birth. Each day has a particular Bible passage for you to read. I am so thankful for each of the authors from Cornerstone Bible Church who penned their thoughts and feelings in response to the selected passages while also pointing us to God. Please consider the questions and comments made in the Ponder section as you reflect on Jesus, and use the closing Prayer for further conversation with the Lord regarding the day's devotional. I hope you will be encouraged each day as Christmas draws near, and that you will have a deeper sense of God's love for you in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Joyfully in Christ,

Pastor Mike Medeiros

<u>The First Candle</u>
Prepare the Way &
Be Filled with Hope



The first candle of Advent symbolizes hope. God's people eagerly and patiently wait for the arrival of the promised Messiah. As we celebrate his first advent, we have hope in the return of Christ our King.

THE FIRST DAY

November 29 **Psalm 130**

"Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice!
Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." (v. 1)

This psalm spoke to me in various ways. One is the basic human need we all have, which is to feel "seen" and "heard." How many of us in our lives have sometimes felt invisible and lost in this noisy world? Those loud yet silent pleas deep within our souls weren't "fulfilled" because, unfortunately, they're often unrecognizable to many. In pain, we silently wonder: does God or anyone truly 'see' and 'hear' me in my darkness? As finite human beings, it's natural that sometimes we miss the 'red flags' others are waving in our direction due to our own limited capabilities. But praise God, his power is unlimited and because he's sovereign, he sees, hears, and knows everything we need before we even express it. "For there is not a word on my tongue, but behold, O LORD, you know it altogether" (Psalm 139:4). That promise of reassurance from his unchanging Word of truth gives me and all of us hope and confidence that nothing we go through in life is unnoticed by him. There's not a need he won't supply, nor a yearning that's inaudible to His loving and always open ear. He sees all our struggles and pain and knows every need (tangible or not).

PONDER: Where in your life have you felt "unseen" or "unheard," and remembered how God showed you in his amazing ways that made you feel truly seen and heard by him? If led, share with others as an encouragement and a reminder of his unfailing love.

PRAYER: Lord, help me to remember that you are sovereign and eternal; remind me to trust in your unchanging character in my life as I rest and trust and hope in you daily. Guide my heart to seek you first and foremost always.

Kitty Fung

THE SECOND DAY

November 30 **Colossians 1:15-20**

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (vv. 15-17)

Wow! The study of Colossians helped me have hope when I needed it. Recently, I have been feeling heavy-hearted with all of the responsibilities and demands on my life. Preparing this devotion forced me to study all of Colossians in order to understand the verses above.

I learned that Paul wrote this letter while in prison in Rome. His purpose was to correct some wrong teaching that had crept into the church, such as rigid legalism and another that permitted an unrestrained license to sin. He wanted to remind the church that although Christ was fully human, he was fully God, and to reflect on Christ's supremacy and atoning death. In Jesus, we have all we need. If God can hold the universe together, he can hold you together!

PONDER: When have you felt overwhelmed and God has held you together by his great power and might? If he did it once, he can do it again.

PRAYER: Jesus, you are the source of all our hope, our comfort, and our strength. Protect us from deception, and may your words dwell in us as we rest in the knowledge that you hold all things together. Amen.

Jody Schrock

THE THIRD DAY

December 1 **Isaiah 40:9-11**

"Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him. Behold, his reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young." (vv. 10-11)

In the first 39 chapters of Isaiah, he writes much about God's condemnation of the people and leaders of Judah who were destined for Babylonian captivity as a consequence of their faithlessness and sinful decisions. In Isaiah 40, however, he prophesies the eventual hope, and comfort God will provide for the people of Judah. Isaiah looks past the hardships of the past, and also the hardships of the captivity, and he exhorts the people to "lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid, say to the cities of Judah, 'Behold, your God!'" Behold, *your* God *is* the Good Shepherd who feeds his flock and carries us in the warmth of his bosom. As we find ourselves in difficult situations in a fallen, hostile world, he will never forsake us.

Do you ever feel condemned due to sinful decisions in your past? Have you felt like a captive in a foreign land, forsaken by God? If you have repented and accepted Christ, God promises to help you finish your race. Believe and trust in him; rejoice in your trials, and allow them to mold you into maturity.

PONDER: God allowed the people of Judah to suffer captivity for a time; He allows all of us to suffer trials. However, in the end, he will return to reign with eternal Hope and Comfort for those who are in Christ.

PRAYER: Dear Lord, please help us to remember that you are our comfort and hope, even through the most difficult situations. In Jesus' name, amen.

THE FOURTH DAY

December 2 **Isaiah 64:1-9**

"Oh, that You would rend the heavens and come down … When You did awesome things that we did not look for, you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence. From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides you, who acts for those who wait for Him." (vv. 1a, 3-4)

This week's Advent theme is hope. The passage speaks of the hope of God's salvation that couldn't even be imagined by the original audience. The people were about to go into captivity and were desperate for God to act on their behalf. God answered, just not in the time or manner that was expected.

Isaiah wrote this hundreds of years before Christ, but it accurately described what happened when Jesus was born—the heavens were rent and God came down. He didn't come as a conquering king, but in the form of a human baby. The passage also points towards Jesus' finished work on the cross when the temple curtain that separated the Holy of Holies was torn from top to bottom. God did "awesome things that we did not look for."

PONDER: What "awesome things that you did not look for" has God done for you? Or how did His answer differ from how you thought He "should" answer your prayer? How does this promise spoken by Isaiah and fulfilled by Jesus' birth give you hope for God to act in your life?

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, that you "rent the heavens" to come to us with salvation, the hope of Advent. Help us to keep our focus on you when "You did awesome things that we did not look for." Especially when these "awesome things" are not what we expected, help us not to turn those expectations into idols of self and false gods.

Susan Weber

THE FIFTH DAY

December 3 **Hebrews 1:1-4**

"…having become as much better than the angels,
as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." (v. 4)

The author of Hebrews extols God's Son in the first 4 verses. He continues to do so throughout the book, making claims about the perfect God-man. One claim that is especially meaningful is Hebrews 4:15: "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin." In trials and temptations, we can never say that Jesus does not understand what we are going through. James 1:13 says that God [in his deity] cannot be tempted, but in his *humanity* he *was* tempted *in all things*, yet without sin. This paradox of the perfect God-man is seen throughout Scripture. We read that God, in his deity, knows all things (I John 3:20), but we are taught that Jesus, in his humanity, had to learn the Scriptures as a boy (Luke 2:52). God is immortal and has always existed (I Timothy 6:16), but Jesus, in his humanity, was born and died. No wonder this perfect God-man is seen as better than the angels and inherited a more excellent way!

PONDER: His work at the cross for our salvation and the forgiveness of sins was necessary, but his life and ministry leading up to it is an example of how we should live. He came as a baby, to grow up, to know what it is like to be tempted, to sympathize with our weaknesses, and show us how to love our neighbor. As the prophets of old had hope for a future Savior, our hope for this Advent season is to live the kind of life He lived.

PRAYER: Father in heaven, thank you for the miracle of the Incarnation. By your grace, help us to imitate the kind of life your Son lived. In his name, amen.

Neil Stipp

THE SIXTH DAY

December 4 **Isaiah 42:1-9**

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out or raise his voice in the streets. He will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching, the islands will put their hope." (vv. 1, 2, 4)

God chooses the individuals to serve his people. The Holy Spirit compels us to accept and respond: a tugging at our heart, saying, "I need to do this." In the past (and still), I would look for ways to escape, to say NO. Sometimes I found that way; other times I could not say NO; I had to say YES. When I said NO, I felt guilty, because I did not participate. When I said YES, I was blessed by the accomplishment of helping to build a house, but more so by receiving 2 small, sincere words: Thank You.

To me, being a servant is not about receiving recognition or praise, although that does happen. It is the hope that people will see my actions and hear my words, copying those that are good and honorable, and that I stop using my bad actions and words. In Jesus' teachings, I find the way for me to continue my good deeds and stop my bad deeds. This is my hope in his truth, mercy, and grace.

PONDER: Are you being called by the Holy Spirit to serve? Are you receiving his gentle persuasion, asking you to help? (See Mark 10:45)

PRAYER: Our Heavenly Father, please give me your Holy Spirit to help others, to be a servant for their needs. Help me to show your love through my service.

Yogi Brenner

THE SEVENTH DAY

December 5 **Romans 15:1-13**

"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." (v. 13)

Do you remember as a child longing and hoping for that latest toy that everyone wanted? You hoped with all your heart to find it under the tree on Christmas morning. Biblically speaking, hope is that type of confident expectation of receiving what God has promised, more than just a wishful or uncertain desire.

This passage, in its entirety, calls us to bear with each others' weaknesses and to build each other up. Our God gives us endurance and encouragement to live in harmony with one another and thereby, we glorify Him. This brings God praise from both Jews and Gentiles alike. Jesus gave us new hope by his obedience to God through his birth, his life, crucifixion, and resurrection.

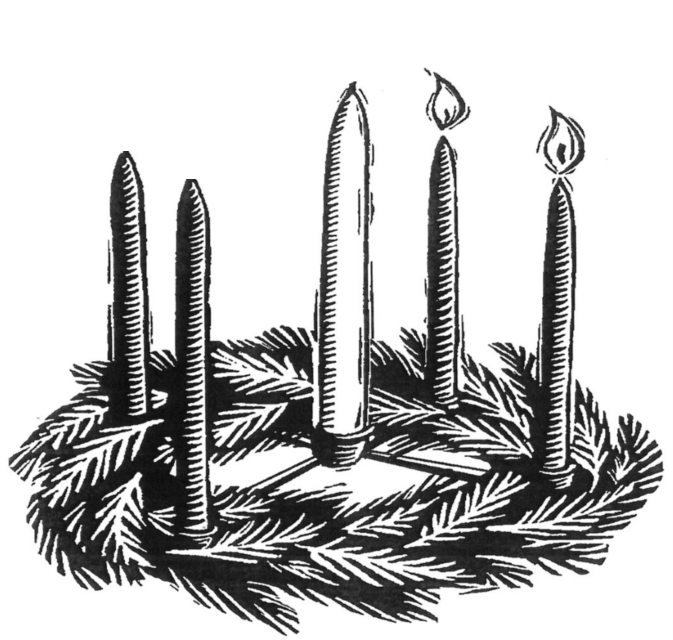
Our God of hope can fill you and me with His joy and peace, as we single mindedly focus on Him and fully trust Him over our lives and circumstances. Then our cup is not just filled, but overflows with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. As we look at our situations today and our hope of eternity with our Savior, He provides the endurance we need to glorify Him.

PONDER: Can you take this moment to thank God for being our eternal hope and giving us daily endurance?

PRAYER: Thank you Jesus for being our Emmanuel, God with us. Thank you for your Holy Spirit and for filling us with your hope, joy and peace this Christmas season!

Linda Wiltsey

<u>The Second Candle</u>
Prepare the Way &
Be Filled with Peace



The second candle represents the coming Messiah as the Prince of Peace. In the midst of chaos, hurt, and uncertainty in this world, God's people realize that lasting peace can only come from the Lord.

THE EIGHTH DAY

December 6 **Psalm 19**

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." (v. 14)

Peace is this week's Advent topic. Although "peace" is not in Psalm 19, David was seeking Peace with God by living an acceptable life of prayer and devotion. The Hebrew word for "acceptable" is a sacrificial term used in the O.T. Lev. 19:5 says: "*Now when you offer a sacrifice of Peace offerings to the Lord, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted."* Since "sacrifice" itself is the embodiment of prayer, David wants to present his life as a living sacrifice to whom he owes the strength to worship, and through whom he hopes to be accepted because he has a Redeemer: "*Present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual sacrifice of worship*" (Rom. 12:1).

David is not seeking salvation by works. He doesn't hope to be accepted till he has first been saved, pardoned. But when the Lord has forgiven him and sanctified him, then he comes with both mouth and heart to serve his God; and his prayer is that he may be acceptable in his sight. Like a sacrifice without spot or blemish, offered up with a perfect heart to God. "*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have Peace with God"* (Rom. 5:1).

PONDER: what Isa. 56:7 says: "*Even those I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be acceptable on My altar; For My house will be called a house of prayer for all the peoples."*

PRAY: "*O Lord, my strength, and my Redeemer*." May each one of us be thus acceptable in the sight of the God of Peace, in our walk of sanctification, for the sake of Christ! Amen.

Ray Paul

THE NINTH DAY

December 7 **Psalm 67**

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us; Selah. That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health among all nations." (vv. 1–2)

When I think about peace, I think about how often we spend our days worrying about things we cannot control. We worry about our families, our health, our future, and the challenges life puts in front of us. Sometimes we get so caught up in those worries that we forget to stop and turn to God. Psalm 69 reminds me that God's blessings are not just meant to make our own lives better. They are meant to be shared. The psalm begins with a request for God's mercy and blessing, but it also asks that his ways be known throughout the Earth.

That makes me think about how I live my own life. Am I showing God's love through my actions? Do I bring peace to the people around me, or do I sometimes allow frustration and worry to get in the way? I believe peace starts when we trust God enough to let go of some of the things we cannot change. As we celebrate Advent and prepare our hearts for Christmas, we remember the greatest expression of God's love: sending Jesus into the world. Jesus came to bring hope, forgiveness, and peace. That means we never have to face life's difficulties alone.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can give someone this Christmas is a little more patience, kindness, understanding, and love.

PONDER: What worries are keeping you from experiencing God's peace? How can you be a source of peace to someone else this week?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for your mercy, your blessings, and the peace you offer us through Jesus. Help us trust you through life's challenges and share your love and peace with everyone we encounter. Amen.

Tony Alderton

THE TENTH DAY

December 8 **John 1:29-31**

"John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, 'Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'" (v. 29)

As we enter this season of Advent, our hearts are drawn to the promise of peace found in Jesus Christ, our Messiah. This reminds us that the birth of Christ was not simply the arrival of a child, but the fulfillment of God's greatest promise to humanity. The world often defines peace as the absence of conflict, hardship, or uncertainty. But the peace Jesus offers is far greater. It is a peace rooted in God's presence, His faithfulness, and the assurance that we are never separated from His love. The manger points us toward the cross. The promised Messiah came with a purpose: to take away our sin and restore our relationship with God. His promises are not temporary comforts: they are eternal truths we can stand upon, even when life feels uncertain. This helps prioritize my thoughts, actions, and schedule during this busy season. It is not all about the material things of this world. Rather, it is a reminder that I find peace in knowing God's greatest gift to our family is the most cherished gift of all this Christmas season.

PONDER: During Advent, may we quiet our hearts and remember that our peace is not found in circumstances, possessions, or the world around us. Our peace is found in Christ alone, trusting that the Prince of Peace is faithful yesterday, today, and forever.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son, our Messiah, to bring salvation and everlasting peace. Help us to rest in your promises, trust your faithfulness, and keep our eyes fixed on Jesus throughout this Advent season. May His peace fill our hearts and shine through our lives. In Christ's precious name, amen.

Susan Bulot

THE ELEVENTH DAY

December 9 **Isaiah 2:1-5**

"He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples… Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore." (vv. 4-5)

These are uncertain times. War, election results, international upheaval—the list goes on. Humanity has had to live with uncertainty since the beginning of time. The Bible provides multiple examples of this. Abraham was asked to leave his family and country for an unknown land. Moses was instructed to tell Pharaoh to free the Hebrew slaves despite his self-doubt. King Jehoshaphat faced a vast army, admitting he was unsure how to proceed. Job experienced unexplained suffering that affected his family, wealth, and health. Uncertainty is a part of the human experience as we live in a fallen world. God tells us in his Word that we will face trials and tribulations, wars and unrest. But he also teaches us about the peace Jesus has brought in his coming and the peace that he promises us in his coming again. Abraham was given a covenant by God and personal assurance (Genesis 12:2-3; 15:1). Moses was promised God's presence and a helper (Exodus 3:12; 4:14-16). King Jehoshaphat was given a direct prophetic word of assurance (2 Chronicles 20:15-17). Job was allowed a personal encounter contributing to his trust in God's wisdom and authority (Job 38-42). Ultimately, we are promised peace on Earth between nations (Isaiah 2:4-5). God is so good that He allows us opportunities to know his peace through our uncertainties.

PONDER: How have you faced your uncertainties? In what ways has the Lord provided you peace?

PONDER: Lord, thank you for allowing us opportunities to know your peace when we face uncertainties. We can trust in you for our future, as you have shown us your faithfulness in the lives of your people. Amen.

Jerilyn Otto

THE TWELFTH DAY

December 10 **Micah 5:2-5a**

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of your will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel." (v. 2)

The very first verse of this passage points to a thread woven throughout Scripture: God uses the ordinary to do something extraordinary. Out of one of the smallest clans of Judah emerges a ruler over Israel, a promise once true for David and true again in the birth of our Savior, Jesus Christ. This is not a new story, but a refined and perfect rendition of a consistent promise from our God. Micah tells how Christ will stand and shepherd his flock, allowing them to live securely. He will be their peace in invasion, strength in hardship, and hope for a good future. We have the privilege of being shepherded by a Savior who is intimately aware of our every thought and desires a lasting relationship with us. He connects us to the God of the universe, who has a track record of redeeming even the direst situations. In your current situation, you can experience true peace as a Christian. In the menial, seemingly mundane tasks of your day, don't underestimate how God is working or how he might use you. He did it with Moses, David, and countless others, empowering those who felt insignificant. If you are willing, let him in; let him encourage you. He will use you mightily and bring you assurance of faith and an inexplicable peace.

PONDER: How has God been faithful to bring you peace in the past, and how can that encourage you now? What small, seemingly insignificant thing has God made extraordinary in your life?

PRAYER: God, thank you that you are a present, loving Father who cares about even the smallest details of my life. Though I may feel insignificant, reassure me that I am your child and spur me on toward the work of your Gospel. Use me as an instrument of grace, truth, and light, and may my every action bring glory to your name.

Jared Storz

THE THIRTEENTH DAY

December 11 **Philippians 4:4-9**

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (vv. 6-7)

This world offers a lot of opportunities for worry, depression, anxiety, and hopelessness. The news is a daily reminder of how terrible things can be in this world; how terrible man can be towards man. It can be difficult to see God, to hear God, through the constant cacophony of negative information we are continuously fed. Yet here is Paul telling us not to worry! No matter what is going on, the bottom line is this: GOD IS ALWAYS SOVEREIGN. No war, no election, no social movement, or anything else will ever change that. Do we worry? It is natural to have moments of worry, but we cannot give in to worry, nor do we ever need to. BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING! We all go through storms, much as the disciples did as they travelled on the Sea of Galilee in the midst of that great storm. It was terrifying, yet Jesus slept without worry. They woke him. He rebuked the storm. The storm subsided. If you were to take the drama of the storm out of the story, it would go like this: they got on the boat on one shore, and they got off the boat on the other shore.

PONDER: We experience drama in our lives, but so long as we trust in Jesus, we need not be afraid; we will arrive at the other shore.

PRAYER: My beautiful Savior! Thank you for always keeping your promises! Thank you for calming our storms! Thank you for protecting us from the enemy! Thank you for your never-ending love! Thank you for the gift of the peace that passes all understanding! In the name of Jesus, amen.

David Sanchez

THE FOURTEENTH DAY

December 12 **Psalm 85**

"Faithfulness springs up from the ground,
and righteousness looks down from the sky." (v. 11)

As I have grown in my faith, I have come to understand how important my relationship with God is. It gives me comfort, security, and peace, even when life brings challenges.

Psalm 85 reminds me that God is always willing to restore his people when they turn back to Him. He offers forgiveness, mercy, and the promise of his peace. I am reminded that I will never be perfect, but I can always come before my Father with a humble heart, ask for forgiveness, and trust that he will guide me.

God reveals his peace to us in our present circumstances, no matter where we are or what is happening in the world around us. When we remain faithful, surrender our will, follow his Word, and seek him, we let his love and peace work within us. Sometimes we want answers immediately, but God reveals himself in different ways and in his perfect timing.

For me, surrendering what I think I know and trusting God to lead me is the key to experiencing his peace. As we draw closer to him, his truth and righteousness become more evident in our lives.

PONDER: Can you recall a time when God restored a relationship with a loved one, whether a spouse, child, family member, or friend? Have you ever asked God for forgiveness when you felt undeserving, only to discover that your faith and relationship with Him grew stronger? What brings you peace today?

PRAYER: Oh Lord, today I pray for my loved ones, my family, my church, and my community. Guide them, protect them, and bless them. May those who do not yet know you come to seek your love and forgiveness. Help me remain faithful to you and to those around me so that I may represent your love and truth. Amen.

Nicole Brandt

<u>The Third Candle</u>
Prepare the Way &
Be Filled with Joy



The third candle symbolizes joy. The angels would announce the promised Savior's birth by saying, *"I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people" (Luke 2:10).* On that day we can sing, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come – let earth receive her King!"

THE FIFTEENTH DAY

December 13 **Isaiah 12:1-6**

"Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation." (v. 3)

If I wanted water from a particular spring, I would either need to travel to the spring like a pilgrim, or purchase spring water from someone else who gathered it. Yet, these springs, mentioned in Isaiah, aren't bound to one location. There is a beautiful salvation progression in this short chapter. It's a balm when anger is turned away (v. 1). Salvation is received then fearless trust tethers us to God, who is our strength. "And song," denotes joy in a God who saves (v. 2). Drawing water from the springs of salvation is free- we didn't buy it, we don't deserve it, and these springs never run dry! (v. 3). Now that we have received this salvation, what do we do? We give thanks to the Lord - calling on His name, in ongoing communication. The result? Sharing what he has done (v. 4). Not only is he our song, but we praise him in song. The footnote in my Bible reads, "praise the Lord in song for he has done gloriously" (v. 5). Zion in the Old Testament referred to a specific geographical location - Jerusalem and Mount Zion. In the New Testament, Zion would refer to the heavenly New Jerusalem, where all who believe in Jesus are inhabitants (v. 6). Rather than requiring people to make a pilgrimage journey to salvation, God has made a journey to us by sending his only Son. His springs of salvation are for all people, for all time, and they will never run dry!

PONDER: Have you drawn from God's springs of salvation?

PRAYER: Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him, all creatures here below; Praise Him above, ye heav'nly host; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost! Praise God the Father who's the source; Praise God the Son who is the course; Praise God the Spirit who's the flow; Praise God, our portion here below! (Thomas Ken, v. 1)

Audra Churchill

THE SIXTEENTH DAY

December 14 **Psalm 96**

"Let all creation rejoice before the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness." (v. 13)

Sing, proclaim, declare, worship, ascribe, and tremble. All those actions are the proper responses to God. And those are not just for us to do, but for the heavens, the earth, the sea, the trees, and the fields. In this psalm, those are the responses to who God is and what God has done.

This psalm ends with a causal statement, "because." Yup, verse 13, in the Hebrew, more or less states, "because." We are supposed to sing, proclaim, declare, etc. "because"…. So why are we supposed to sing, worship, proclaim, and such? BECAUSE HE COMES. Not only is this about the advent of Christ, the coming, but also what he is going to do when he comes. We rejoice because he will come to judge the earth, not on a whim, not like a human, but in righteousness and faithfulness.

PONDER:
Jesus came the first time, and his disciples expected him to take a crown and be king. He did take a crown (thorns), but didn't become the king that they desired. As we read this psalm, do we get excited about judgment? Are we excited about God as King? Does it bring us joy to know that judgment is coming, but not poor judgment, but righteous judgment? A judgment based on God's faithfulness?

PRAYER:
Thank you, God, for coming to dwell among your creation. We are humbled by your grace and love. Thank you that you will return to judge, not like we do. Not in our opinions, our sins, or our weakness, but in your love, your righteousness, and your faithfulness. We are blessed, grateful, and humbled. Amen.

Steve Jung

THE SEVENTEENTH DAY

December 15 **Isaiah 35**

"The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall blossom abundantly and rejoice with joy and singing.
Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not!" (vv. 1, 2, 4)

Jesus, the Creator, entered our world as a baby. A multitude of the heavenly host sang his praise (Luke 2:14). A few shepherds, and later some astronomers, came and remarked on the signs in the skies they had seen. However, the situation on the ground was still hard.

When Isaiah wrote the words in our passage for today, life in Jerusalem was not easy. Judah (the Southern Kingdom) was living under the shadow of military invasion, political uncertainty, spiritual decline, and fear. Refugees from the Assyrian invasion of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) had streamed into Judah, bringing stories of hopelessness and helplessness.

At Jesus' birth, the people of Israel were again waiting under difficult circumstances. Roman occupation, political unrest, and spiritual weariness marked the age. Yet into that waiting came the Savior.

Isaiah looked ahead and said, "Be strong; fear not!" because God was coming to save his people and restore his creation. Centuries later, Jesus stood in a synagogue and declared that the promises spoken by Isaiah were being fulfilled in him. The joy of Advent is that the promised Savior has come, and every promise of God finds its fulfillment in Him.

PONDER: How is life today similar to the times of Isaiah and Jesus? Is it possible that Jesus can bring us joy *before* our circumstances improve?

PRAYER: Lord of all Creation, please help me to *fear not* when things don't get better. Please strengthen my weak hands, steady my feeble knees, and calm my anxious heart. Help me to experience joy from trusting in you rather than from my circumstances.

Michael Harrison

THE EIGHTEENTH DAY

December 16 **Psalm 126**

"When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed." (v. 1)

I remember the 1994 California State Junior Chess Championships and the day I faced Asuka Nakamura, Hikaru Nakamura's older brother. Less than 5 minutes on the clock, 60-plus moves, I grinded out a win and ultimately the state title. That year, I traveled to New York for the National Championships and finished 8th in the nation. What a season of joy! "*The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy"* (v. 3). Asuka went on to win 13 national scholastic titles, while Hikaru became a world-class grandmaster.

Life takes us through many different seasons. Psalm 126 reminds us to celebrate the blessings we've experienced and recognize God's work through every season of life. For me, those championship days never came again … "*Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them"* (v. 6).

Perhaps you remember a season when you excelled, but life took you somewhere unexpected. What if its value extended beyond what you achieved? Chess trained me to think several moves ahead, weighing possibilities, and anticipating how one decision might shape the next. God now uses that gift to help others evaluate difficult situations, consider their options, and discover paths they hadn't considered.

This Advent, remember that joy extends beyond past victories. God can bring new fruit from old seasons and use what we've learned for His glory.

PONDER: What past season brings you joy, even if things turned out differently? How might God use this to bless others today?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for joyful memories and the gifts You develop in us. Help us trust You when dreams change and use our experiences to bless others. This Advent, renew our hope that even through tears, You are preparing a harvest of joy. Amen.

THE NINETEENTH DAY

December 17 **Psalm 16**

"Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge. You have made my lot secure. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me. You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures." (vv. 1, 5, 7, 11)

Psalm 16 captures the spiritual progression of my family's life these past years. A gas explosion destroyed our Lake Arrowhead home on March 4, 2023. We watched our home burn on a neighbor's cellphone: such a loss, such devastation, precious memories, and plans gone in an instant. We prayed to the Lord, questioning why. We were at a loss and *sought his refuge*. We prayed, and the Lord responded in his way and his timeline. The Lord kept us close to our immediate family and provided an additional family: Cornerstone Bible Church. We started attending. The Lord confirmed where we needed to be. *Our lot was secured.* The Lord *continues to counsel us* and instruct us, opening new doors for us to walk through on *His path for our lives*. We feel His presence. He sees the works we do to glorify Him. The Lord provides *joy and eternal pleasures in our lives.* God is great.

PONDER: There are so many "what ifs" in life accompanied by " why me?" We cannot allow doubt to grow in our lives, creating confusion and a weakness in our spirit. We need to look to God, our Father in heaven, for refuge and guidance. We must make God the center of our lives, and he will provide the path to follow. Pray, trust, and believe. He awaits. What in your life needs to be given to God? Who do you know who needs to hear these words?

PRAYER: "Our Father who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name." We ask that you show us where we need to be in our lives so that we can become who you want us to be. Amen.

Guillermo (Will) Rojano

THE TWENTIETH DAY

December 18 **Psalm 98**

"Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.
Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy." (vv. 7-8)

Think back to a time when you were out in nature and saw something so beautiful that you were overwhelmed with joy and gratitude for the wonders of Creation. The author of this psalm leads us in celebrating the Kingship of the Lord and the Earth's response to his mighty works. Reading this psalm, I think of the Christmas carol "Joy to the World," where the hymn writer states that the Earth's — and our — response to the Savior is to "repeat the sounding joy." Repeating the sounding joy can be difficult at times, especially when our life circumstances are anything but joyful. When we find ourselves caught up in the worries of everyday life, we often forfeit the opportunity to recognize the beauty of Creation laid before us and the Salvation Story at work in our lives. This psalm is a reminder that the Lord has already gone before us and won the battle, which allows us to "repeat the sounding *joy*" instead of "repeat our sounding *worries*." When we experience and reflect upon his mighty works, it becomes easier to be joyful in all circumstances. With this in mind, our natural response will turn towards gratitude and joyful expectation of our Lord Jesus' return.

PONDER: How do you "repeat the sounding joy?"

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for giving us the gift of salvation. Lord, continually show us how to join with heaven and nature to praise your name. Amen.

Jonah and Brenna Ross

THE TWENTY-FIRST DAY

December 19 **Psalm 145**

"On the glorious splendor of Your majesty
And on Your wonderful works, I will meditate.
Men shall speak of the power of Your awesome acts,
And I will tell of Your greatness.
They shall eagerly utter the memory of Your abundant goodness
And will shout joyfully of Your righteousness." (vv. 5-7)

During the Christmas season, there are often many things we experience that bring us joy: gathering with family and friends, enjoying parties and gifts, even the spirits of those around us seem to be more joyful. As we prepare for Christmas and enjoy the many things we have been blessed with, it's easy for our eyes to stray from where our true joy comes from. In Psalm 145, David is talking about the many attributes of God and how glorious and majestic he is, and how men will speak of the things he does. There is truly no one like our God and this Christmas season we have the opportunity to celebrate his coming to Earth as a baby and to share the true meaning of the season with those around us and the joy this brings. God is the source of all of our joy, so let us remember his greatness and majesty and extol the reason for our joy to those we meet.

PONDER: Christmas is the time we celebrate God coming as a baby to save us. How can we share this joy God has given us with those around us during this Christmas season?

PRAYER: Glorious God and Father, help me to focus more on the joy you have given us and take the opportunities you give to share that joy with those around me. Amen.

Chris Coppa

<u>The Fourth Candle</u>
Prepare the Way &
Be Filled with Love



The fourth candle of Advent symbolizes love.
God shows us His amazing love by sending us a Savior,
Jesus Christ the Lord.

THE TWENTY-SECOND DAY

December 20 **Psalm 89:1-18**

"I will sing of the lovingkindness of the Lord forever;
To all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth.
For I have said, 'Lovingkindness will be built up forever;
In the heavens You will establish Your faithfulness.'
'I have made a covenant with My chosen;
I have sworn to David, My servant,
I will establish your seed forever
And build up your throne to all generations.' Selah." (vv. 1 - 4)

These are the first four verses of the longer passage. In these verses, Ethan sings of God's love and faithfulness to establish David's seed as a king forever. Jesus is a direct descendant of David on both sides. Jesus is the everlasting King: for that we can be thankful. No other king lasts forever. What a Gift he has given us in this season! I love the response of one person, when asked how much Jesus loved us: the man spread out his arms and hands as Jesus did on the cross and said, "This much."

The word "Selah" at the end of these verses can be translated as "Stop and think about it," and that's good advice for us today.

PONDER: We have the opportunity to praise God for the incredible gift of Jesus as our King forever, which we received when we set him on the throne of our lives as we came to him, being born again. Let's turn that over in our meditations.

PRAYER: Lord, thank you so much for giving me that unsurpassable gift of Jesus to be the King of my life forever, even though I was still rebelling against you, as we're told in Romans 5:8. Amen.

Larry Stein

THE TWENTY-THIRD DAY

December 21 **1 Corinthians 13**

"*And if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." (v. 2)*

In the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 13, we see how, despite our efforts, we are nothing without love. Even one of our cornerstones, "*faith,*" is nothing without love. As we continue through the chapter, we see the definition of "love," both what it is and what it is not.

Many years ago, as a young Christian, I tried to incorporate love's great virtues into my walk with Jesus, not realizing my effort was more "works" than inspired by the Word. Scripture continually indicates that a person is justified by faith, not works. If so, how does one accomplish 1 Corinthians 13 in our life?

The reality is we are all sinners: Romans 3:23 states, "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*." This suggests we have fallen short in the past, the present, and will in the future. Our shortcomings continue. Romans 5:8 says, "*while we were still sinners."* Scripture emphasizes that we are sinners and will continue to sin, unfortunately. The key: Paul writes about running and finishing the race well. Our race towards 1 Corinthians 13 is an ongoing process towards the goal of unconditional *agape* love, only achievable at the coming of Christ. "*He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 1:6)

PONDER: How are we running the race towards the goals Christ established for us? Or are we left with the opinion that, as a Christian, we need to lead a perfect life? God's love is open to everyone. We must be willing to do the same to our neighbors.

PRAYER: Father God, you have given us salvation through the blood of Jesus Christ. Teach us how to fulfill your commands, especially the two greatest commandments: Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor as yourself.

Barbara and Armando Corella

THE TWENTY-FOURTH DAY

December 22 **John 3:16-21**

"But he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been done by God." (v. 21)

Oh, I believed! When I told a friend that relationships felt hollow and deep love seemed impossible to find, God stirred his heart to tell me that Jesus loves me—and always will. I was twenty-five. I knew something was missing within me. Later that day, I called my girlfriend. She told me never to call her again.

Hmm. Jesus loves me—but who is Jesus? It was time to go to church and find out. Without a Bible, I spent Sundays watching people and wondering, "What do Christians look like?" Christian radio taught me words, phrases, and rules, but much remained unclear. I bought a Bible but, like Nicodemus, I had questions.

"Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:7)

Decades passed before these words took deeper root in my heart:
"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him." (vv. 16–17)

God knows how fragile and fearful we are. He gave His Son—not to teach us how to look like Christians, but to save us. Coming into His Light means living openly before Him, letting His work in us reveal itself. Oh, I believe!

PONDER: Will you come into His Light and allow Him to expose what needs to change? Will you embrace the love God has demonstrated toward us?

PRAYER: God, I believe in Your Son, Jesus Christ, who loves me and gave himself for me. Help me walk in his Light and live openly before you. Amen.

Mark Engquist

THE TWENTY-FIFTH DAY

December 23 **Psalm 86:5-13**

"O Lord, you are so good, so ready to forgive, so full of unfailing love for all who ask for your help … Teach me your ways, O LORD, that I may live according to your truth! Grant me purity of heart, so that I may honor you. With all my heart I will praise you, O Lord my God. I will give glory to your name forever, for your steadfast love for me is very great." (vv. 5, 11-13a)

As we draw closer to Christmas Day, we continue to dwell on God's love and our responses to Him. This psalm contains David's cry for God's mercy, a declaration of God's worthiness to be praised, God's faithfulness to rescue, and David's commitment to also remain faithful to the Lord. In response to what God has done, David asks for an undivided and dependent heart to deepen his ongoing relationship with the Lord. This psalm continues describing God's character as forgiving, good, and abounding in love. He is someone we can always call upon in our day of trouble or need. He will hear us and He will answer us. He is the one who will correct and guide our hearts into His truth and into a closer walk with Him. God's love is demonstrated in His ongoing and never-ending faithfulness in our daily lives to all who call on Him. The Lord our God is worthy of praise.

PONDER: How can we, amidst our trouble and need, be fully dependent on and trusting in God's steadfast love? How have you experienced God's love or faithfulness? What is God teaching you?

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for faithful love that meets us in our brokenness and desperation. Mold us to be more like you. Teach us Your ways that we also may become reliant upon You. Amen.

Kara Weber

<u>The Central Candle</u>
Christ is Here!



The center candle, also known as the Christ candle,
is lit on Christmas Eve. It reminds us that the incarnation
of Immanuel is at the heart of our celebration.
Jesus himself is the light of the world!

THE TWENTY-SIXTH DAY

December 24-25 **Luke 2:1-20**

"And you will recognize him by this sign:
You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger." (v. 12)

God, the Lord of this Earth, the Maker of all creation, the Great I AM, had every option at his disposal for the entrance of his Son into the world. He knew his Son was leaving the splendor of heaven, yet he chose not a palace or temple, but a manger. The Prince of Peace entered the world in the humblest of circumstances.

This humility stands in contrast to the world today. Jesus, *"being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant"* (Philippians 2:6–7). We must follow his example, not clinging to power or control, but submitting daily at the feet of our Lord. The manger was the sign given to the shepherds; our humility should point others to Christ. Jesus came to serve, even unto death. And yet, this is not how his story ends. God exalted him to the highest place, and one day every knee will bow before him (Philippians 2:9–10). What a glorious day! We celebrate the humble coming of our Savior while looking forward to the day he returns in glory.

PONDER: Jesus, the King of all creation, chose humility and servanthood. Is your life marked by humility? This Christmas, what worldly desires or comfortable habits do you need to surrender to follow Christ?

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for sending your Son for us. Your love is too great for us to comprehend. This Christmas, help us keep our eyes on you, the author and perfecter of our faith. Teach us to walk in the humility of Jesus. Amen.

Tiffany Horton



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