

# *Waiting in Remembrance*

2023 Advent Devotionals

By Sugar Land Students

Edited by  
Miriam Billing, Scotty Swinger,  
and Danielle Sellier

*Thanks for checking out Waiting in Remembrance! I pray it is a wonderful tool for you and your family during this Advent season. The Scripture in this book is quoted from the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible.*

*I'm so grateful for each student that wrote a devotion in this book. They have some really good things to say. Gen Z continues to amaze me with their hearts. They're a gift to the Church. Thank you for entrusting Sugar Land Students to be your spiritual leaders for the next four weeks.*

*We're blessed at Sugar Land Baptist Church to have a tremendous student ministry staff that works selflessly with little recognition. The investments Scotty Swingler, Jamar Mitchell, Ambree Swingler, and all of our youth Sunday school teachers make into teenagers and God's Kingdom each and every week is flabbergasting and I am fortunate to be on a team with them. Their devotionals here will give you a glimpse into their hearts for Jesus. I'm thankful for these friends who contributed to this book. And I'm thankful for you, a church family who would use it and celebrate it.*

*The Creator has come to visit Creation, and we wait with eager expectation for his return! May we worship in celebration and sincerity this Advent!*

*- Miriam Billing*

# Introduction: Fully Arrived

*Scotty Swingler*  
*Student Pastor*

**Scripture:** *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4:4–7***

Advent is the season on the Christian calendar marked by remembrance and expectation. During the four weeks of Advent we both commemorate and anticipate the arrival of Jesus as Lord. We pause to remember the first coming of Christ at Christmas while looking ahead to the second coming of Christ in Glory. More broadly, here's how the Cambridge Dictionary defines the word "advent" linguistically:

**advent** *noun* the fact of an event happening, an invention being made, or a person arriving

The heart behind our Advent season overlaps beautifully with this definition. We recall a factual event—Jesus Christ, God Godself, was born to Mary at Christmas as

a human infant. Jesus will return as King, and all are invited to partake in his re-invented Kingdom as citizens. And perhaps most importantly—there is a person arriving. And I don't just mean Jesus; I mean you. In this Advent season God is inviting you to arrive. To plant yourself as a mighty tree by streams of water (Psalm 1:3) and spring forth with the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). To faithfully follow your Creator as you grow into your best self.

How do we arrive? In just a few verses, Paul gives us a pretty clear roadmap. First, we're commanded to rejoice always. Second, we're challenged to reflect God's nearness by being gentle in our conduct towards others. Third, we're compelled to pray over every situation in our lives with thankfulness. If we commit to these spiritual practices, we are promised the transcendent peace of God; a peace which helps us finally arrive at who God created us to be.

Over the next four weeks as we celebrate the manger, anticipate the Kingdom, and worship the Lord of both, I challenge you to these three tasks. Whatever your circumstances, rejoice! Offer praise for the unceasing love and faithfulness God has freely offered. Whoever you interact with in this busy and stressful season, be gentle! You never know how your warm display of God's love will change someone else's life. And every day, connect with your Savior in prayer and thankfulness. It's incredible how

having honest conversations with God each day will improve your outlook on life, turning your fear into hope and grumbling into gratitude.

For many, the Christmas season brings stress, exhaustion, or sadness. May we be the Advent Light in this season—a holy collective of God’s people, fully arrived, whose persistent joy, gentleness, and gratitude reveal the good and coming King who invites all people into this same arrival.

***Practice:** Today, call two friends and commit together to rejoice, be gentle, and pray during this Advent season. Send them the electronic PDF copy of this Advent devotional and invite them to read along each day with you. Throughout the next four weeks, encourage one another in these practices.*

*Week 1: Hope*

Sunday, December 3

# My Eyes Have Seen Your Salvation

*Miriam Billing*

*Student Ministry Associate*

**Scripture:** *Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:*

*"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.*

*For my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
and the glory of your people Israel."*

*The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: "This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.*

***Luke 2:22-35***

Has God ever asked you to wait for something that seemed impossible? Simeon received a promise through the



Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. The centuries of oppression and subservience that the Jewish people had undergone leading up to Simeon's life made God's promise to him seem unlikely at best, if not impossible. Yet in faith, Simeon trusted that God would keep his promise. He believed against his doubt in God's divine plan, and that however unlikely his own inclusion in that plan seemed, that God would bring about in his timing the fulfillment of this promise.

God's timing. That is an easy label to slap onto a problematic situation or a season of waiting, but for us in our finite understanding—subjects of time—it is certainly not an easy reality to grapple with. When God says something will happen “soon,” that doesn't mean it will come to pass by our conception of “soon.” Months, years, or even our lifetime may pass without us ever understanding what God is doing in our lives and in our world.

The questions begin to arise. Why did God ask me to do that? Why am I, a faithful follower of Christ who is doing my best to walk in line with the Spirit, finding myself in a place that seems stagnant—like what I am doing is futile and insignificant, or even harmful to those around me, instead of being glorifying to God? How is this life I'm living

a life of faithfulness? I see no fruit. I don't see evidence of God working in my life.

These questions are ones I and the people I'm closest to have asked. They're not easy questions, but they're well worth wrestling with. Questions like these that make the story of Simeon meaningful to me, because they're the questions that I believe he shared with me; so when I read this story and am reminded of God's faithfulness, I have hope.

What a special privilege Simeon had to be so connected with the Spirit. And yet, for many many years, Simeon saw no fulfillment of this promise that he was sure he'd heard. I imagine there were days when he doubted and questioned. Days when he came to God and asked why there was no answer. And especially as more of his life passed him by, he wondered whether there would ever be an answer. Matthew includes the detail of Simeon being an "old" man in this story. This fulfilled promise was a long time coming. But it came. *Jesus came.*

What a beautiful story of hope—of a hope fulfilled in time. Let this story be always a reminder for us that whether or not we see our hope realized, God is working. God has not forgotten his promises to us, and he sees us, even if we experience what feels like God's silence. There is purpose in waiting patiently for God, and there will be joy to come.

**Prayer:** *Father, I know you hear me, and I know you care. Sometimes it is hard to remember these things while I wait for you to move, and it is easy for me to doubt your goodness in those seasons. I acknowledge that openly before you, and I ask that you give me a faith like I see in this story, a faith that perseveres. I trust you with the unknown future, help me to wait with eagerness and joy, because my hope is in you. Amen.*

Monday, December 4

# Born of God

*Cade Doherty*

*Junior, Foster High School*

***Scripture:*** *Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. **John 1:12-14***

As this advent season arrives, you're guaranteed to be preoccupied with Christmas and the holidays. These festivities could include decorating, cooking, sharing meals with your family, or gift giving. During this busy, festive time it can be hard to keep the true "meaning" of advent and Christmas at the front of our minds. This time of advent is not only about preparing our homes for Christmas—we have to prepare our hearts for the coming of our Savior.

It can be easy to allow busyness to create a sense of distance between us and God, but advent challenges us to refocus and strengthen that relationship. We should take this time to truly approach God not as a dictator or distant ruler, but as our Father. During this time, God draws near to us

and encourages us to approach him personally. John reassures us, saying we are “children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.” God desires your heart, your company, and even your problems. Don’t hesitate to go to Him both in times of joy and in times of hardship.

In this holiday season, celebrate joyfully with your family, but also remember to devote time to your Heavenly Father. Spend time in prayer each day as you journey closer in relationship with him. Finally, this passage says, “he gave [them] the right to become children of God,” showing that the ultimate gift of the holiday season is the gift of becoming a child of God. As the holiday seasons blow by, enjoy the gifts you receive from friends and family, but always remember that being welcomed as a child of the one true Savior is the greatest gift of all!

*In a **journal**, write down your response to this question: What does it mean to be a child of God? Then, **reflect** on your answer and this great truth.*

Tuesday, December 5

# Reason to Hope

*Katelyn Croft*

*Sophomore, Logo Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*

**Romans 8:18-25**

My parents got divorced almost two years ago. That was a time in my life when I had no hope whatsoever as I struggled to navigate through many changes including disagreements, alternating weekends, and moving away from the house I grew up in.

Mickey Daigle, a famous mentor in the Juice Plus+ Company, often speaks about the four “D’s”—death, debt,

divorce, and disability. I am sure you can think of more, but whatever it is that you have gone through or are going through, you have probably felt extremely hopeless, just like I did. This is because all of creation is groaning under the unbearable weight of sin.

However, the Bible offers us many reasons to hope. Paul writes, “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Think back to the most wonderful thing you have ever seen, gift you have received, or food you have tasted. Imagine something infinitely greater than all those things. In Heaven, the glory we will receive will outshine every single bit of suffering we face in this life. One day, “creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.” Our job is to wait for, “adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope, we are saved.” That is why Jesus was born in a stable for you. That is why he died on a cross to save you, and that is why he is coming back for you. Until then, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, and faithful in prayer” (Romans 12:12).

We end every Wednesday night Surge event singing these words, which I want to share with you, “May your peace be an anchor in stormy tide, may your hope run like a river that will never run dry. May your burdens grow light,

and your worries subside. This is my prayer for you,” this Christmas, and every day of the year.

***Prayer:*** *Lord, thank you for giving us reason to have hope in this broken world. Thank you for the hope that one day you will make everything right. Help us wait patiently for that day. In your name we pray, Amen.*

***Now, listen*** to the song “Home” by Chris Tomlin



Wednesday, December 6

# Living Out Hope in Our Daily Lives

*Abigail Keasler*

*8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Briscoe Junior High*

***Scripture:*** *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 1 Peter 1:3*

In the dictionary hope can be defined as “a feeling of expectation and desire for a certain thing to happen.” It is true, we can have hope that God will help us do good in a sports game or event and we can have hope God will help us get a good grade on a test, but hope goes a lot deeper. Notably Peter 1:3 talks about having a living hope. What Peter is saying is that we should rejoice and be glad that because of Jesus’s death on the cross we are born into a new life through him.

Peter was a faithful apostle of Jesus and he stood by him with hope knowing that even though he would die, Peter could trust the plans God had for him. Reading further into the passage Peter writes, “And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.” Our inheritance is heaven.

By living out and faith and hope filled life our prize at the end of this is to live in peace and joy with God forever.

No matter what hardships we go through in life we can always have hope that God knows what he's doing and will never let us astray. We can hold firm, knowing God has good plans for us, and we can have hope that he will always be with us as we go through the Christmas season.

We can rejoice in the hope and trust Jesus had in God when he died on the cross for us. We can celebrate the amazing miracle God has done for us. We shouldn't lose help because Jesus and Peter never did.

***Prayer:*** *God, we ask that you guide us through our days. Give us patience and hope. Bless us with the ability to tangibly feel your presence and your love. Help us remember that you will never leave or forsake us. Amen*

Thursday, December 7

# Hope in the Waiting

*Dena Batarseh*

*Junior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

***Scripture:***

*Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,  
for his compassions never fail.*

*They are new every morning;  
great is your faithfulness.*

*I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion;  
therefore I will wait for him."*

*The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him,  
to the one who seeks him; **Lamentations 3:22-25***

I don't know about you, but one thing about me is I hate waiting. I hate waiting in any circumstance—amusement parks, test scores, or results from a doctor's visit. A season of waiting can be really hard for me to handle, but Advent reminds me that my entire life is a season of waiting.

Our scripture today says "the Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." Our whole lives are spent waiting for Jesus to return and take us home to himself. But until then, we can place our continued hope in the Lord. And we don't hope in vain—because of God's great love, we believe his promises will come true.

One of those promises is this—“The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him.” We know that God is working for our good even in the waiting. God loves you so much and will continue being good to you. Our response, then, is to mirror that love back to him as best as we can. One way we continue to express our love to God is to have hope and believe in this good promise.

Maybe you are in a season of waiting. Let me encourage you that “his compassions never fail. They are new every morning!” If God woke you up this morning, he is not done with you. Every day we can wake up in confidence that the Lord is with us, working in and through us. And we continue to hope that in our waiting, God is preparing a glorious homecoming for us at the end of our lives; that’s a promise!

***Pray out loud:*** *Dear God, great is your faithfulness! Thank you for loving me and continuing to love me. Your mercies are new every morning no matter how faithful I am or when I fail. Please help me to keep hoping in you. I love you. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*

Friday, December 8

# Waiting in Hope

*Ava Bennetsen*

*Senior, Foster High School*

## Scripture:

*A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;  
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.  
The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him—  
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and of might,  
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—  
and he will delight in the fear of the Lord.  
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,  
or decide by what he hears with his ears;  
but with righteousness he will judge the needy,  
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.  
Righteousness will be his belt  
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.  
The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
the calf and the lion and the yearling[a] together;  
and a little child will lead them.  
The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
  
The infant will play near the cobra's den,  
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.  
They will neither harm nor destroy*

*on all my holy mountain,  
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea. **Isaiah 11:1-9***

In this life, we all go through hard seasons that in the moment can feel hopeless. We face hardships of various kinds—mental, spiritual, physical, and so on. In times of darkness and uncertainty, we long for an escape, relief, and the healing we so desperately need. But sometimes, finding peace of mind and heart can take longer than we expect, and the solution we desire doesn't present itself according to our timeline. Our season of hardship is then amplified by a season of waiting. Without a foreseeable end to our pain or a promise of resolution, waiting through hardship can lead us towards hopelessness and heartache.

But this is where faith combats the darkness. In Isaiah 11:1-9, the famous prophet offers God's beautiful words of assurance and hope. He describes a descendant of Jesse that will have the Spirit of the Lord resting upon him and "the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord." This promised Savior is gracious, just, powerful, and trustworthy. But perhaps most beautifully, Isaiah describes a new world overcome with peace; a world in which there is no pain or suffering and all people live together in harmony with each other and the Savior. The Kingdom of God, fully realized here on earth.

Sounds nice, right? It's perfect. And guess what? This is the promised solution to the world's problems, the promised peace that is to come, and God made this promise to us as Christians. Isaiah reveals the character of Jesus and the beautiful future he ensures us—a future of joy, peace, healing, and harmony for all people.

When you're overwhelmed by struggle or feel adrift in the sea of waiting, keep these promises of God in the forefront of your mind. Allow the hope of God's coming Kingdom to pull you through. We don't wait in vain, but in confidence that this perfect future is ours. While this world may lead you to feel hopeless, remember that an eternity of pure joy and peace with your Savior is waiting for you as you wait for it in perfect hope.

***Read 2 Corinthians 4 and find a friend or family member to encourage with its message.***

Saturday, December 9

# Ever Praise You

*Miriam Billing*

*Student Ministry Associate*

***Scripture:***

*For you have been my hope, Sovereign LORD,  
my confidence since my youth.*

*From birth I have relied on you;  
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.  
I will ever praise you.*

*I have become a sign to many;  
you are my strong refuge.*

*My mouth is filled with your praise,  
declaring your splendor all day long. **Psalm 71:5-8***

The psalmist speaks of his relationship with God as being deep and full of trust. As Christians, it is important that we take time to come to God in praise, remembering the ways that he has been faithful.

Songs are a good way to call to remembrance this truth. Maybe the psalmist didn't always feel like God was reliable or worthy of his trust, but his response in this psalm is to come to God despite that and sing what he knows is true. He was ready to trust, and over and over again as he sings, he renews his hope, reminding himself to take heart in all circumstances. It is through this remembrance that he finds hope.



Just like the psalmist, we must call to mind times God has been faithful, embracing hope through speaking the truth that God is faithful.

What do you place your hope in? I have it often found it challenging in hard seasons to believe the words that the psalmist says that God is, “his hope, strong refuge, and reliable.” I struggle not to turn inward and try to be self-sufficient, being almost afraid to go to God in faith and trust. It is psalms like these that I need most of all during those times, to help remind me of all the ways God has provided for me and continues to care for me.

I love the line that reads, “I have become a sign to many,” because it reminds me that through my story, others will see Christ’s work, and that my life ultimately points to him. Even my struggles and failures are covered by God’s endless love, and he will always be with me. I hope that you can embrace this truth too, and that you can reflect on this psalm with a renewed sense of hope rooted in remembrance.

***Spiritual Practice:*** Take 10 minutes to think of and journal:

1. *Something that happened this week that you can look to, however small, to find trust.*
2. *Five things that have happened over the last year in which you saw God’s faithfulness*
3. *Three of the biggest things/ways you’ve seen God come through in your life.*

## *Week 2: Peace*

Sunday, December 10

# Peace Came Into this World

*Robert Cocheu*

*Legendary Middle School Sunday School Teacher*

***Scripture:** This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.*

***Matthew 1:18–25***

Peace—such a simple concept, yet something that eludes us at every turn. Here are a few of the ways that the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the noun peace:

- Freedom from civil disturbance or disorder

- Freedom from disquieting or oppressive thoughts or emotions,
- Harmony in personal relations
- Peace can also be a verb meaning to become, or keep silent or quiet.

Today's world is filled with anything but peace.

There is conflict and war in Europe and in the Middle East. In our country, we live in disagreement and disharmony. Even in the Church at large, a place intended to be the epitome of peace, there is great division and conflict. All of this, along with the daily busyness, tension, and negativity included in our professional and personal lives, leads to a general sense of unrest and chaos—the opposite of peace. This world is no different from the world Christ was born into. During this time, the Jewish people were being oppressed by the Romans. Their religion had become a shell of its former self, focused on power and maintaining the status-quo. Into that world, much like ours, was born the Christ Child.

Matthew 18:23 quotes Isaiah 7:14— “The Virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” Shortly after that verse Isaiah writes in Isaiah 9:6— “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called

Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,  
Prince of Peace.”

Into a chaotic world the Prince of Peace was born. He came to be the Counselor amid the disorder, the Everlasting Father in our disheartening world, the mighty God for our lost souls, and the Prince of Peace in our stress and disorder. In this messy chaotic world, we are called to share his love, especially during this Advent season, and to proclaim peace to a lost and dying world. In this time, allow Christ’s peace into your heart. Take time to rest in the reassurance of his presence and prepare yourself to celebrate his coming. Finally, listen and obey his instruction so that you, too, can show the peace of the Lord to others.

***Prayer:** Lord, in our chaotic world, bring us peace. Help me look to you for my personal peace and reflect that peace to those around me. Amen.*

Monday, December 11

# God Wants it All

*Danielle Sellier*

*Senior, Foster High School*

***Scripture:*** *The Lord gives his people strength.*

*The Lord blesses them with peace. Psalm 29:11*

“When you hit hard times, let the Lord be your strength.” How often do you hear those words of encouragement and accept them with subtle acknowledgement instead of confident belief? When you go through hard times or struggles, do you really trust enough to rely on God’s strength? Or do you only give Him some of it and try to handle the rest on your own? What really happens when you rely on God’s strength instead of your own?

Last fall, I hit a very low place. I was physically struggling to balance cross country and soccer, mentally struggling to keep up with schoolwork, and faithfully struggling to remain active in my relationship with Jesus. I was constantly stressed and worried about “the next thing,” and I began to fall short and fail in many of these places. Sure, I sought God’s help spiritually, but I didn’t ask for physical or mental help or strength because I didn’t believe

there was a way for God to help me. I thought, “How can God make me run faster?” or “God can’t do my homework for me, so what’s the point in asking?” I realized that I wasn’t allowing or trusting God to strengthen me because I didn’t think what I was struggling with was “important enough” to bring to God. Through this mindset, I never found rest, peace, or comfort.

When God promises to strengthen us, God means to do so in every aspect of our lives. God’s intention as a **Good Father** is to help us when we need it. And that encompasses all aspects of our lives, not just those we deem “worthy” of His aid. God seeks to invade our lives with His love, strength, and help. And when we allow God to fight our battles and make up for our weakness, we are met with the rest he offers, the care he gives, and the peace he wants for us.

Now, I want you to think about your own life. What is stressing you right now? Where are you struggling to keep up? Where are you failing, and where are you weak? Whether you thought of a math test or a sick family member, finances, sin, or even your own faithfulness, God wants it all. Offer every struggle to him and genuinely surrender yourself to his strength, and in that surrender, you will find the peace of the Lord.

**Prayer:** *Father, it is so easy to think that there are things in our lives we have to do ourselves. Help us remember the truth—that you desire us to come to you with everything, that you care, and that you love to listen to us. Give us confidence to approach you boldly with our requests, and in you, help us to find rest. Amen.*



Tuesday, December 12

# Source of Peace

*Trent Smith*

*Junior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

***Scripture:*** *For us a Child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. **Isaiah 9:6***

Isaiah is a collection of prophecies. Isaiah 9:6 is talking about Jesus Christ prophesying His birth and his role in taking up the cares of the world. In verse four of the same chapter, it reads that God would send them light and joy through the birth of a child who would break the “yoke of [their] burden”. This verse gives us hope that Jesus will take up our burden if we offer it to him. This verse shows us that there is an ultimate source of peace.

In the first sentence of the verse it says the government will be on his shoulders. In a time when we are faced with the fearful realities that seem to be controlled and orchestrated by different forces higher than us, when poor choices are made that are beyond our control, we need this verse as a reminder that Jesus is above all of the highest powers, and that he has the final say and will keep us in the palm of his hand. It is through remembrance of this hope

that we can trust in God, and I know that although this is very hard to do. To trust Jesus' plan begins with coming to him with our prayers, being honest with him about our worries, and entrusting him with the things that are too much for us to hold.

A prayer that you can use to pray peace over yourself and our world is called the peace prayer. The Peace Prayer is a very popular prayer written by St. Francis of Assisi, and it offers a place to begin coming to God. Read it aloud below.

***Prayer:*** *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon; Where there is doubt, faith; Where there is despair, hope; Where there is darkness, light; Where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen*

Wednesday, December 13

# Stress

*John Curtis Sandlin*  
*Junior, George Ranch High School*

**Scripture:** *These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

**John 16:33**

For many, the holiday season is a very stressful time. Students prepare for finals, work becomes more demanding, and people are desperately shopping to find gifts for everyone.

For me, this time of year means swim season is coming to an end, which causes me more anxiety than anything mentioned above. Everything I've worked for all year comes down to just one race. In less than 30 seconds, my season could be ruined; at least that was my mindset last year.

John 16:33 says "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." In this verse, Jesus acknowledges to his disciples that they have faced and will continue to face hardships. However, Jesus

also tells them that by putting their faith in him, they can be at peace no matter what challenges come their way.

The things that stress us out probably aren't as serious as the challenges that faced the disciples; my anxiety over swim can't hold a candle to religious persecution. All the same, every one of us will struggle in life. May we remember that despite our stresses or hardships, we can find peace in knowing Jesus has overcome the world and its troubles.

So for me, as I near the end of my swim season, I won't stress about the outcome. I will be at peace knowing Jesus is greater than anything that brings about anxiety.

***Reflect:*** *What is causing you stress during this time? Give those things to God. Ask God to guide you through this season so that you may be at peace and not be anxious.*

Thursday, December 14

# The Peace of God

*Ryan Hiegel*

*Senior, Fort Bend Christian Academy*

***Scripture:*** *You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you. **Isaiah 26:3***

Throughout our lives we will face many times of hardship and have to deal with things such as stress, anxiety, depression, or whatever else may be plaguing our minds. But God will always be there for us in those times.

In Isaiah 26:3, it says that those whose minds are steadfast will be in perfect peace because they trust in God. We just need to be steadfast by having our eyes fixed on Christ, believing in his word, and knowing that he is our Savior. Ways to keep our eyes fixed on Christ could be reading scripture daily, spending time in prayer, journaling, and being in community, and these are several ways that the Spirit of God can use to strengthen us in our faith.

Jesus will be with us to comfort and keep us in peace through hard times. He provides a way for us to commune with him, and it is through this communion that we begin to find peace and grow in our ability to trust God. This verse

reminds us that God is there to help us in our times of struggle. Although trusting in God may be hard during difficult times, and we may be challenged in our faith in many ways, we need only remember that God is watching over us and that he is a loving father. In such times, we must turn to scripture and use it as a guide to help us find the way to get through. God offers us peace in the words it contains, and the story of Jesus will help us remember what it is we hope in.

***Prayer:*** *Thank you for giving us the scripture which we can always turn to in times of need. Your Word is a constant comfort and reminder that you walk with us through times of trouble, and that you will never leave us.*

Friday, December 15

# Peacemakers

*Lucia Payne*

*Senior, Houston Christian University*

***Scripture:*** *Never pay back evil with more evil. Do all things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live at peace with everyone.*

***Romans 12:17-18***

We live in a time of conflict. In the age of social media, we have access to just about everything going on in the world; new inventions, wars and politics, discoveries in medicine, oppression, all of the highs and lows. Anyone and everyone who is online can see all the great things that are happening, but also all of the hurt and brokenness of the world. The injustice makes people angry. In this age where anyone can post anything online, so many people argue over how to respond to injustice. Even in the church, we get so caught up in the different ways people react to the hurt and brokenness that we forget we share a common goal. We want the wars, the hunger, and the hurting to end.

Our hope is in the coming of Jesus and that he will restore and heal all brokenness. In his letter to the Romans, Paul says to “Do all that you can to live at peace with everyone.” We must take a step back and look at the bigger

picture. While you may disagree with other Christians when it comes to topics such as politics or other controversial problems, remember that at the end of the day, our shared hope is in Jesus. There are times where, for the sake of peace, it is better to set aside our opinions and pride so we can better love those around us. Don't get me wrong—it is still so important to remain strong in your beliefs and be able to defend them, but in some cases if you have to pick between a relationship and being right, it is usually better to keep the relationship. In Romans 12, Paul goes on to say that we are called to love our enemies, and trust God to enact justice. In a time of so much conflict, in a time where everyone wants to be heard, let us be peacemakers and live to love those around us.

*Read **Romans 12** and choose several practices from it (for example, **showing hospitality** or being **faithful in prayer**) and find intentional ways to incorporate them into your daily rhythm this week.*



Saturday, December 16

# Jesus: The Ultimate Peacemaker

*Hadleigh Helms,  
Senior, Houston Christian High School*

***Scripture:*** *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Matthew 5:9*

When I think of peacemakers, my thoughts turn to a school cafeteria scene on TV. Imagine it with me—a disagreement has come about, and suspense builds between two characters, until finally someone throws the first punch. The crowd of students builds and a circle forms around the two characters in the fight. Suddenly, a friend or a police officer breaks through the mob and inserts themselves between the combatants. Though I have never witnessed a school fight in real life, the “peacemaker” reminds me of the one in the fight who breaks the characters apart and quells the violence.

Jesus doesn’t specifically talk about the friend that runs in between school cafeteria fights, but he does talk about peacemakers. Today’s verse comes from the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus is teaching “the beatitudes,” a series of character attributes his disciples should embody. Jesus

states that it is the peacemakers who will be called children of God.

A peacemaker is someone who reconciles adversaries. Peacemakers don't join the conflict, but bring about resolution. In our broken world, peacemakers can be hard to find. Whether it's violent wars around the world or culture wars on our screens, peacemaking can feel like a tall task for God's people. But Jesus came to earth as the ultimate peacemaker, to reconcile the conflict between us and God. Through the cross, Jesus broke the barrier between humanity and God, giving us access to friendship with God.

Just as Jesus came to be the ultimate peacemaker, he calls us to be peacemakers in our everyday lives. It is easy to lash out, take sides, or become prideful when conflict arises, but God commands us to bring about peace amidst disagreements. Though it is surely difficult, may the example of Christ inspire you to get out of your seat and insert yourself between the cafeteria brawlers, seeking to bring peaceful reconciliation to even the most tense of situations.

***Prayer:*** *God, thank you for sending Jesus as the ultimate peacemaker in the world. Help me be faithful to bring reconciliation to the situations lacking peace in and around my life. Amen.*

*Week 3: Joy*

Sunday, December 17

# Joy Can Be Surprising

Rebecca Chappell

2022 Student Ministry Summer Intern

**Scripture:** *And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, 'Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.'*

*Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,*

*'Glory to God in the highest heaven,*

*and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.'*

*When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.'* **Luke 2:8-15**

Joy can be surprising.

I have been joyful in the most unexpected times.

Recently, I went to see the Acadiana Symphony Orchestra play Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. I had the pleasure of sitting next to a kind gentleman and we had a conversation that stayed with me. He was at the symphony with his wife and daughter, but they'd purchased a last-

minute extra ticket so he had the honor of sitting in the seat behind his family next to me. We talked about our tastes in music, experiences at LSU, and his career as a dentist before the performance started. During intermission we discussed the show, but then he asked the question almost every soon-to-be college graduate dreads: “so what’s next?” I responded with a smile and told him I had no clue. I explained that I have some options and ideas but I have no clue where I will end up. No one knows what the future holds. I trust that when the time comes God will close doors and leave one open. He shot me a surprised face and said, “it is amazing you are so joyful in such uncertainty.”

In Luke 2, it seemed like an ordinary night of work for the shepherds. They were minding their own business until they were frightened by the angel’s presence. I can imagine how overwhelmed they felt. But the angel’s message for the shepherds was of good news of a newborn baby and a promise of great joy. I can only assume that the shepherds were full of confusion and fear. I often feel that way when it comes to planning my future.

During this advent season, I encourage you to look for joy in the unexpected times. Be like the shepherds and trust in the Lord’s promise for joy because he is faithful.

***Prayer/Reflection:*** *What areas in your life present the biggest unknowns right now? Journal through some of those areas, and then prayerfully surrender them to God. Practice trusting him wholly with those things, trusting that he has a plan and will see you through.*

Monday, December 18

# Rejoice and Encourage

*Savannah Garner*

*Sophomore, Homeschool*

***Scripture:*** *Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.*  
***2 Corinthians 13:11***

Paul's farewell to the Corinthians makes me think of the book *The Hiding Place* by Corrie Ten Boom. In this book Corrie shares her life story and provides amazing examples of Christian maturity. Corrie recounts the horrible events that her family went through during World War II. Corrie and her sister Betsie were imprisoned at the Ravensbruck concentration camp, and even during their impossible circumstances they gave powerful examples of rejoicing in all circumstances, encouraging one another, and living in peace.

One story that sticks out the most to me is when Betsie encourages Corrie to give thanks for the fleas which kept the German soldiers from inspecting their barracks and discovering their bible. Corrie and Betsie read the bible aloud every night to encourage each other and the other woman in the barracks at Ravensbruck. And eventually,

through the amazing love of God at the end of the war Corrie finds a way to forgive a former S.S. soldier whom she encounters from Ravensbruck. The faithfulness that Corrie and Betsie demonstrate is an example for each of us.

Paul reminds us to give thanks for the easy things, but also for the “fleas” in our own life. Even during tough times, we are still covered by God’s love. When we rejoice and encourage each other, we will find true joy in our hearts no matter the circumstances. If you have not read *The Hiding Place*, I highly recommend it. This book continues to be an inspiration to me in my faith.

***Prayer:*** *Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for everything that you have graciously given us: all of the wonderful, good things but the hard things as well. Please use the difficult situations in our life to help us depend on you. Help us to encourage others and to live in peace with our family and community. Thank you for this joy filled advent season. Amen*

***Action:*** *Encourage someone today.*



Tuesday, December 19

# Joy is Coming

*Cullen Portier*

*8<sup>th</sup> Grade, Billy Baines Middle School*

***Scripture:*** *Sing the praises of the Lord, you his faithful people; praise his holy name. For his anger lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may stay for the night, but rejoicing comes in the morning.*

***Psalms 30:4-5***

One of my favorite songs that I listen to every day is “Joy in the Morning” by Tauren Wells. I was introduced to it by my dad, and it has stuck with me ever since. One of the lines from it is, “If it's not good, then He's not done. No, He's not done with it yet.” That line is something I hold on to.

Psalm 30:4-5 talks about singing praise to God even in hard places. I have had my share of success and then failure and falling into dark places even at a young age. It feels like being on a mountain at a high place and then the next moment it just collapses from right under you.

This Psalm is saying that we will be mourning at times, but we need to remember that God is still there even if we feel like he isn't.

The line from that song I shared with you is a reminder that God has a plan for you and me. Those dark times are just going to stay for the night—meaning that they will be there for some time, but joy is already on its way to overcome that darkness.

It is a struggle to find joy in dark places. Joy, one of the fruits of the spirit, is something that is easy to have on the mountaintops, but is so much harder to have in those moments when life comes crashing. What we must remember is that God is there. He is present in every moment in our lives. He is with us. That is our comfort in the storm.

Worship is something that is a key to our faith. We sing to God in joy, proclaiming how much we love him. So when our joy is taken by the devil, we need to keep singing to God. The devil hates when we sing because that weakens him. It shows that we are strong and that he will have to try harder than that to mess with us. So sing to the almighty God, for he is the only One that we need in this world. He is with you right by your side. Waiting for you to take the next steps in your faith in him. So, what are you waiting for? Take that step.

***Reflect:*** Play a song that reminds you of how much joy we have as children of God. Then pray that God would show

*you your next step and that he is there with you in those dark places.*

Wednesday, December 20

# Joy in Waiting

*Trinity Capello*

*7<sup>th</sup> Grade, Fort Bend Christian Academy*

***Scripture:*** *Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. We wanted very much to come to you, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what will be our proud reward and crown as we stand before our Lord Jesus when he returns? It is you! Yes, you are our pride and joy.*  
***1 Thessalonians 2:17-20***

To wait on God is to be confident that he will show up no matter how grave our situation may appear to be; to believe that he will be good to us and take care of us. But waiting on God is not for the faint-hearted. We must be strong and tell our hearts to be courageous, even when we're tempted to give up.

The Bible is filled with stories of people who waited on God and were rewarded with joyous riches: Abraham and Sarah waited 25 years to welcome a baby boy. Joseph labored for 13 years in slavery before being promoted to Pharaoh's second-in-command. Jesus waited 30 years before starting his earthly ministry.

What is it that we are eagerly waiting for? We have been separated from God's glory for long, and some have grown impatient. But the ones who hold strong will receive great joy with His coming in the last days. Hold firm and joy will come down to you.

Whatever the case, wait on the Lord. Be strong. Tell your heart to be courageous. Remind yourself of all that God has done for you in the past. Remember the ways he's taken care of you. God is good, and you will experience his everlasting joy soon.

***Prayer:*** *God, may we have the patience to wait for you, as we know you will come down with great joy for us all. Bless us and give us strength to hold firm. Amen.*

Thursday, December 21

# Having Joy Through Trials

*Gabriel Cole*

*Junior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” James 1:2-4*

I have this friend at school—I’ll refer to him here as Brody. Brody loves running, and quickly became a track and cross-country star at our school. Tragedy struck over the summer when an enormous piece of warehouse machinery fell over directly onto his right foot, causing severe injury. After the doctors stitched the foot back together, they told Brody he wouldn’t be able to walk on it for months or run for almost a year. But the craziest part of this whole story is that every day of school during third period, I would see him smiling and laughing, despite the horrible circumstances.

My friend Brody displayed something I often struggle to do. Despite losing the ability to do something he loved, he bounced back and responded with perseverant joy. In our passage for today, James invites us to do the same. He tells us that the trials in our lives are “testing our faith.”

This is actually good news! Our trials help grow our faith and “produce perseverance.”

What is your trial right now? Maybe it’s a challenging class at school, a difficult person you have to deal with, or some kind of loss. These difficulties are not joyful, yet we can tap into God’s joy despite our circumstances. God’s joy helps us overcome adversity.

This week, no matter your trial—big or small—try to see it as a way God has given you to grow. Be like my friend Brody and face your difficulties with joy. And know that in all of this, God is producing something beautiful in you.

***Practice:** In a spirit of prayer, **name** some of the trials you’re facing to God. Then, **pray:** God, thank you for offering me joy in any circumstance. Help me see these difficulties as opportunities to grow my faith in you.*

Friday, December 22

# Understanding Verses

*Katin Moore*

*Freshman, Homeschool*

***Scripture:*** *"Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart."* ***Psalms 37:4***

In the Bible, wisdom lies covered up, waiting to be understood by the reader. One of the many ways through which we understand the deeper meanings and truth is by dissecting each line with reflection and reverence. Let us embrace the first line of Psalm 37:4, "take Delight in the Lord." To take delight in the ways of the Lord takes more than just words: it beckons a communion through prayer and the cultivation of an existence entwined with the Lord's presence. True delight in the Lord comes from purity of intention. Our hearts must be filled with genuine love so that we do not seek to exploit the Lord's kindness for selfish gains.

In the next line it says, "and he will give you the desires of your heart." When the psalmist speaks here he is speaking of the part of oneself that is turned toward God and his aspirations for us. Our hearts and minds present a baffling contradiction, though, because our minds often



think things that are not for our benefit or can be even sinful! So how do we tell the difference between the fickle mind and the true desires of the heart?

Desires tainted with sin and selfishness come from the hidden parts of the mind, driven by cravings and impulses. On the other hand, desires that are pure, kind, and unselfish come from a heart touched by the Lord. The heart's desires, when pure and ethical, align with the will of the Lord. One way to learn how to discern our desires is through contemplation and communion with God, which will clarify to us who God is, and in turn, who we are in relation to him. When we combine the lines into the full verse of Psalm 37:4 we get a great message about how we are to worship the Lord and what we get out of it. By having genuine delight in the Lord, we pave the way for our heart's desires to align with the Lord's plan for us. This alignment creates a life of fulfillment and peace with God. Leading this life of contentment and worship is what leads to true communion with our Lord, which enriches our existence.

***Activity:*** Try taking apart some verses line by line and understanding each line, then putting them together once you understand them as standalone verses to see the fuller meaning.

Saturday, December 23

# What's in a Name?

*Will Gibson*

*Freshman, Foster High School*

**Scripture:** *“Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”*

**John 16:24**

We all have things in life we want. People desire all kinds of things; maybe for you it's a particular car, a better job, or a certain relationship. Maybe you believe that if you want something, you can just pray to God and receive it. However, in this verse, Jesus tells us that if we pray in his name, then when we ask we shall receive.

I don't think Jesus means that we just have to say “in God's name we pray” or “in Jesus name, amen” as if those magical words will give us anything we want. What Jesus really wants us to do “in (his) name” is what he articulated in the Lord's Prayer; Jesus wants us to pray for God's will to come true in our lives, for the benefit of our relationships with God and others. Jesus wants us to desire what he desires.

When you ask God for something materialistic, like a new phone or a computer, you aren't praying correctly.

But when you pray for something on behalf of God's will or others' benefit, Jesus says, "your joy will be complete."

When you're building a puzzle and can't find the last piece, what happens? You get frustrated—because the entire puzzle could be finished, but if one piece is missing, it's not complete. When we pray in Jesus' name, we receive that last piece of the puzzle. He makes our joy complete and thereby makes us complete. Without praying in his name, for what he wants, we won't have complete joy. But when our desires align with God's, even if we don't get everything we want, we will have complete joy. And ultimately, in that joy, we should not only ask for God's will, but go on to live by God's will in every moment too.

Today, put down your phone and look around. Look for the good things happening in your family, neighborhood, and church. Look at the good work God's doing in the world. Pray for that. And pray to be part of it. That's what it means to pray in his name.

***Practice:*** *Reflect on something you think God wants for your life. What's an action step you can take to carry out God's will? Then **pray the Lord's Prayer** found in Matthew 6:9-13 and ask God to help you follow through.*

## Week 4: Love

Sunday, December 24

# Vulnerable Love

*Jamar Mitchell*  
*Student Ministry Associate*

***Scripture:*** *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*

John 3:16 illustrates how freely God loves the world. God looked down on our broken world and His heart broke. He watched humanity hurt, manipulate, use, and kill one another, and could've easily left us to our destruction. He would have been right to turn away in disgust. Instead, He drew near. God is not merely sentimental, but a God of action. God the Father gave his one and only Son as a savior for all people in this broken world.

In his book *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis states, "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements." Fortunately for us, Jesus was so willing to be vulnerable that he died in the world's place, bearing all of humanity's sins. His body was broken as

well as his heart; but he didn't hesitate to make that sacrifice on our behalf.

When you trust in Jesus as your personal sin-bearer, divine judgment is removed and eternal life is freely given. Sometimes believers like you and me struggle to fully believe this glorious truth. How could God love sinners and rebels so vulnerably? The Bible makes it clear that no one is righteous—none of us deserve this gift. We cannot earn God's love. Yet because of Jesus' vulnerable love, everyone can have a relationship with God by simply having faith.

So here's how you can respond—make yourself vulnerable to receive God's love and to give out love. Instead of hiding from God in your shame, accept his love. Instead of hoarding goodness for yourself, offer sacrificial love to all people. Love, and vulnerability, come with costs. But God paid the ultimate cost for us. May we, too, choose vulnerability over comfort in how we receive and offer love.

***Prayer:*** *God, thank you for this reminder that true love is vulnerable. Defeat my shame and fear so I may receive your love without doubt. Give me courage to love freely and sacrificially as you love me. Amen.*

Monday, December 25

# The Lord Never Shifts

*Luke Keasler*

*Junior, Foster High School*

***Scripture:*** *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows"* ***James 1:17***

Think of all of the good moments that have happened in your life. The times where you have been the most happy and alive. That feeling was given to us from our Heavenly Father, God. We must cherish those moments that God has blessed us with in our lives.

The Disney movie *Inside Out* is a story about a girl named Riley, and how her emotions all play a role in her life. Notably, she has core memories—the most important moments throughout her life that define her character. Just like Riley is defined by her experiences and memories, the memories and gifts that God gives us shape who we are. But what about when the bad moments or memories emerge? James tells us that God, unlike shifting shadows, is unchanging and trustworthy. He stays by us through all the events that occur in our lives, and James wants to stay strong and remember that God's love is always there.

Even when we feel alone and confused in the world, our Heavenly Father is right by our side. Sometimes it's hard to grasp this idea, because we can't see him physically next to us. Yet, we must trust in him and put our faith in his plan.

Everything good gift in life is from God and all sources of goodness stem from him. Who God is does not change does not change when our circumstances do. Remember to stay faithful in the Lord when trials and tribulation occur in life. He will lead you out of the waters like he did for his disciples. Put your faith in the Lord for he will be all the good we crave and all the good we need.

***Practice:*** Read Psalm 18:1-6 and think of a time when you felt bad... it can be helpful if you do this by remembering it through your five senses. Imagine one of the images from these verses and how it would apply to the memory you thought of. Using your imagination, bring God into your memory through the imagery in this psalm.



Tuesday, December 26

# Embracing the Call of God's Love

*Trinity White*

*Senior, Foster High School*

***Scripture:*** “My command is this: Love each other as *I* have loved you.” ***John 15:12***

Love is presented in the Oxford Dictionary as “an intense feeling of deep affection.” In John 15:12 Jesus says, “My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.” Jesus loved us so much that he positioned himself in a situation where he would suffer a horrific death on the cross. Jesus paid us the ultimate ransom for us out of pure love. I wonder often how I could imitate such an amazing act of love. I know that imitating Christ doesn’t always mean we have to experience death on a cross for the ones we love, however, as Christians we are called to try our hardest to show love to everyone, in spite of their sin—even their sin against us. This does not always mean that when someone has hurt us deeply that we trust them again, but what we are called to do is forgive them, and come to God in that space, asking him to let us have the perspective on those people

that he does. Sometimes the closest people to us are the hardest to love sacrificially, because that intimacy creates a space where we see them at their worst, as well as their best.

All of us have sinned, which causes a separation from God, and hurts the relationship we have with him. Even so, he chooses again and again to forgive us and show us unconditional love. Jesus sacrificed himself to save us and calls us his beloved friends. So in the same way we should go and show our friends love as freely as we can, practicing forgiveness and reconciliation towards those in our lives. As Jesus offered himself up as a sacrifice to restore our broken relationship with him, so we are to take initiative in creating and maintaining healthy relational closeness with others. As the Christmas season is approaching, we have so many opportunities to show love to others. We can get gifts for others, volunteer, share the gospel, invite friends to the Christmas Choir performance, and so many many things. I hope that you take this opportunity to reflect on the relationships in your life, and ask God what ways he might be calling you to step towards those people in Christian love, seeking relational health and love.

***Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father,  
We want to thank you today for the abounding love you have provided us and for never leaving our side. You are the king above all kings, yet you still choose to love us and call*

*us your friends. Help us this season to not only receive the love you give us, but to also show love to the people around us. Help us to imitate you in a way that people will be able to see your love through each and every one of us. Give us the strength to show love to the people that it's hardest for us to love. Help us to remain steadfast in you, and know that you are good and you are God. Thank you, Lord! Amen!*

Wednesday, December 27

# God is Love

*Faith Gardoni*  
*Junior, Fort Bend Christian Academy*

***Scripture:*** *Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 1 Peter 4:8*

As teens and adults, we tend to make assumptions about people before thinking. When someone is rude to us or looks at us in a certain way, we see it as negative and take offense. If someone doesn't acknowledge us, we make assumptions about them and get upset. In these cases of hurt, we can get caught up in our own emotions and make quick judgements about these people. Our self-centered view is amplified by our emotions and blinds us from seeing the full picture. The reality is: when we don't know others' struggles or personal life, it's easy to brush them off and allow animosity to grow. But the instruction we get from Jesus is far different. 1 Peter 4:8 tells us, "Above all love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

Peter writes this letter to reinforce the truth that love covers us. He reminds us that Jesus died because of his love for us. He died to overcome our sins and through this act of

Perfect love, we are covered by his grace. What an amazing gift! But Peter also reminds us that because we have received the grace of God, we must then share his love with others. “Above all” means we must love everyone despite differences and without judgment. Furthermore, Jesus tells us in Matthew 5:43-45 to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

One thing that I ask, is that when we go through this advent season is to take the time to show everyone love through prayer, grace, patience, and forgiveness. This advent, learn to love like Jesus—unconditionally and without judgment.

My plan is to show love to others so that they see Jesus through me. So, the next time someone treats me in an inappropriate, negative way, my first reaction will be a positive one: to pray for them. To pray, for whatever struggles they are going through, to pray that they get to know Jesus, and to pray, they feel the love of God.

***Prayer:*** *I pray that everyone puts their focus on Jesus. I pray that we, as Christians, remember that when we mess up or get knocked down, God, you are still there waiting for us with open arms. You are so good to us in every way. When we choose you, our life won't be easier, but it will definitely be purposeful and covered in Your Perfect love. I pray we find peace in Jesus and know that no sin or struggle is TOO big for Him. Finally, God, I ask that you*

*guide us in showing your love to others so that they may be brought to you. It's in your name I pray, Amen.*

Thursday, December 28

# The Depth of God's Love

*Ivonna Lloyd*  
*Junior, Episcopal High School*

**Scripture:** *Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.*

**1 John 4:7-11**

In 1 John 4:7-11, we find a sincere message about the nature of love. John, the apostle, reminds us that love is, itself, the core of our faith. He opens the passage by urging us to love one another, “for love comes from God.” The very center of God's character is love, and it's by drawing from His unlimited well of love that we're able to love others.

The verses also highlight the ultimate expression of love: “God sending His one and only Son into the world to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.” This selfless act is the greatest example of love we can ever find. It's a reminder that God's love is not found solely in words or emotions, but

action. Love is demonstrated through sacrifice, and Jesus gave the ultimate sacrifice for us.

John further emphasizes that if God loved us this way, we ought to love one another. Our love for one another should mirror the love God has shown us. In our everyday lives, we can practice this love by showing kindness, compassion, and forgiveness to our friends, family, and even our enemies. It's not just about what we say, but how we act and serve one another.

In a world filled with division and hatred, 1 John 4:7-11 is a beacon of hope. It calls us to embrace the love that flows from God, to remember the sacrifice of Jesus, and to reflect that love in our interactions with others. Love is not just an emotion; it's a transformative force that can heal wounds, bridge gaps, and draw people closer to God. So let's take these verses to heart and make a conscious effort to love one another as God has loved us. In doing so, we participate in a divine love story that has the power to change the world, one act of love at a time.

***Spiritual Practice: Love Letter.*** Now to help us implement Love into our daily lives, I want you to get out a piece of paper and write down the name of five people that have been giving you a hard time this week, and I want you to pray over those people. The next time you see them, find a way to show them love. It can be as simple as a hug, pray out



*loud with them, or even a smile and wave as you pass them by. Just show them the love that God shows you every day.*

Friday, December 29

# The Spirit of Christmas

*Olivia Carlo*

*Junior, Logos Preparatory Academy*

**Scripture:** *Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. 1 Corinthians 13:4-13*

In the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, it's easy to get caught up in the materialistic aspects of Christmas. However, amidst all the festivities, it is important to remember the true meaning of this joyous occasion.

The passage from 1 Corinthians 13:4-13 beautifully encapsulates the essence of Christmas—love. During this special time of year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus

Christ, let us reflect on these words and strive to embody them in our lives. As we exchange gifts and gather around festive tables, may we remember that love should be at the center of all our actions. Christmas reminds us that God's greatest gift to humanity was His Son Jesus Christ—a manifestation of His immense love for us. Just as God's love for us knows no bounds or conditions, so should our love for one another be unwavering.

So in the spirit of Christmas, let's apply this text to our lives. In this season filled with joyous carols and twinkling lights adorning street corners, I challenge us to commit together to:

- Practice patience and kindness towards those around us during this time that often promotes weary impatience.
- Let go of envy and pride; instead, let's focus on genuine celebration of others' successes and achievements.
- Honor one another by putting others' needs before our own desires.
- Remain slow to anger and quick to forgive; after all, forgiveness lies at the core of why God sent Jesus at Christmas.
- Rejoice in truthfulness and righteousness.

- Seek out opportunities to spread goodwill among friends and strangers alike.

Remember, this sort of love protects—it shields us from harm and guides us towards righteousness. Have hope, for God’s love is the never-failing foundation on which we build our lives.

Love is not a fleeting emotion; it is an effort and commitment. Let us persevere in its pursuit. Just as Christ's love for us endures through all trials and tribulations, so should our love for one another.

***Practice:*** Go through the bullet points above line-by-line and ask God to help you implement each in your daily living. Write down practical ways you can embody these objectives at work, at home, and with your friends.

Saturday, December 30

# Holistic Love

*Ambree Swingler*

*Professional Youth Pastor's Wife*

***Scripture:*** “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.*”

***Deuteronomy 6:5***

Moses was 120 years old when he spoke these words to the Israelites. The people were on the banks of the Jordan River, eager to cross into the Promised Land they had so long awaited. This new generation of Israelites had been raised up in the 40 years of wandering in the desert. The book of Deuteronomy captures Moses as he educates this new generation on their history and exactly what they are to believe, to do, and to obey so that they will thrive in the land that God has prepared for them. Moses goes on to tell the Israelites to remember these words by whatever means necessary—repeat them in the morning and at night, say them when you are traveling or headed home, write them on your doorposts, your gates, tie a sign to your wrist, he even suggests the people write them on their forehead, or right between the eyes. A biblically accurate tattoo!

Jokes aside, we learn in the New Testament (Luke 10:27, Matthew 22: 37, Mark 12: 29-30) that Jesus points

backwards to this exact moment in history when a Pharisee attempts to trap Jesus in his words. This lawyer asks, “What is the greatest commandment in the law?” Jesus responds by quoting Moses from nearly 1500 years prior—“To love the Lord your God with your whole mind, your whole person, and your whole might.”

But... is it possible? To love God with *all* my being? With *every* moment of my life? It doesn’t take much reading of the Old Testament for an accurate conclusion: No, it doesn’t appear possible. The Israelites continuously fell into sin and idolatry, using their mind, heart, soul, being, strength, and might to do everything **BUT** devote themselves to God, and we often find ourselves in similar situations.

That is exactly why the world needs Jesus, and why we expectantly look toward the birth of Jesus in this advent season. Once we understand our inability to follow God’s commands perfectly all the time, we understand our need for a Savior who takes away our sin through his perfection. When we come to know Jesus personally and ask him to be Lord of our life, his Holy Spirit is gifted to us and helps us follow his commands with our whole mind, person, and might. He made a way by grace through faith. Praise God!

***Prayer:*** Thank you, Jesus, for saving me when I was incapable of saving myself. Help me love you with my everything. Amen.

Sunday, December 31

# New Year, Same Love

*Scotty Swingler*  
*Student Pastor*

***Scripture:*** *For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*  
***Psalms 100:5***

Happy New Year's Eve! We have a unique opportunity to conclude this Advent season while reflecting on the year past and dreaming about the year ahead. Although the possibilities of a new year can excite and inspire us to make positive change, they also frighten us. The world seems to spin faster and faster each year, leaving us disoriented and gasping for air. As we wrap up our four weeks of Advent remembrance and anticipation, and as we turn the page on 2023, what hope can we carry into 2024? In what refuge can we rest amidst life's inevitable uncertainties and storms?

The God of the Universe loves us so much more than we can comprehend. No matter how many times we hear this message, it never ceases to overwhelm our understanding. Paul wrote to Christians in Ephesus that the love of Christ “surpasses knowledge” in “how wide and long and high and deep” it reaches (Ephesians 3:18-19). God's

love for you is wider than your journey of wandering astray, longer than your seasons of distress, higher than your loftiest dreams, and deeper than your most intimate hopes. After all, God Godself is Perfect Love (1 John 4:8–18).

What Psalm 100:5 promises us is that this love of God endures forever. It is never ceasing. No matter what you went through this past year or what may come this next year, God’s love for you will not falter and God’s faithfulness remains for all generations. In the good times and bad, in the rainy seasons and droughts, God is steadfast and indeed our refuge in times of trouble (Psalm 46:1).

Advent teaches us to remember and anticipate. As we conclude yet another Advent season while simultaneously celebrating and ushering in a new calendar year, may we apply this lesson. Tonight, maybe before you go to the party or shoot off fireworks with your family, find a comfortable space and take some time to sit with the Lord. First, remember—think of all the ways God has remained faithful to you in every season of life. Receive that faithfulness in your story as displays of God’s unconditional love for you. Once you’ve taken the time to remember and thank God for this mercy, think about 2024, and dare to hope. Look forward to the ways God will prove faithful, again and again, in the coming year. Take heart! No matter what may come in the year ahead, God will continue to love you fully and



completely. God will be with you, closer than your own breath. And God's faithfulness will prove ever true once again in your story.

Believe it. Trust it. Remember, and anticipate.

Thanks be to God.

***Practice:*** Write a note to yourself about how much God loves you, and hang it on your mirror. Leave it up for all of 2024. Every day when you get ready, remind yourself that God loves you more than you can imagine, and that his love will never leave you.