



2022

Advent Devotional

Boone Advent Christian Church

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Day 1

Be Ready in Hope

by Cynthia and Richard Townsend

According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary hope is “to cherish desire with anticipation”. In Luke 1 the angel Gabriel goes to Nazareth and tells Mary that she will “**conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.**” (vv. 31-33)

After hearing this news Mary goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth. “**When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!’**” (Luke 1:41-45)

In response to Elizabeth’s greeting Mary says, “**My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me—holy is his name.**” (Luke 1:46-50)

Mary’s response to Elizabeth is praise to God her Savior! Mary is full of hope! She spends nine months waiting with anticipation for the birth of Jesus. We are now awaiting the return of Jesus Christ, this wait should be full of hope as well! **2 Corinthians 4:18** reminds us to “**fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.**” Is your hope set on what is unseen? On what is eternal? Mary couldn’t help but to share her hope, are you ready to share your hope with a hurting world? With your co-worker? With your neighbor?

“Always be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks you about the hope you have. Be ready to give the reason for it. But do it gently and with respect”.
1 Peter 3:15 NIRV

Day 2

Be Reflective in Hope

by Becky Haney

We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. Hebrews 6:19

A dictionary definition of HOPE is the feeling that what is wanted can be had; to believe, desire, or trust. We may feel at Christmas the hope of something we desire or anticipate receiving. Do you recall as a child having a special wish or hope of a gift at Christmas? For many, a bicycle comes to mind, or the latest Barbie, action figure, video game – even a BB gun? As we get older, we may have hoped for other material things, even an engagement ring or a car! Perhaps more desired may not have been a material gift, but more deeply the longing for the physical healing of a loved one or for a family member to come to know Christ.

When hopes go unfulfilled, it is easy to become discouraged. Sometimes we may hope for something specific that God does not give us, and we wonder why? But His ways are not our ways, and He works for our good in all things. Fortunately for a Christian, we are never without HOPE because of God's promise of eternal life through Jesus.

Being able to reflect on Christmases past is a gift from God. We can recall the many blessings and happy moments when God has worked in our lives, and times when Jesus has walked with us – and carried us – through good times and bad. We find HOPE in this knowledge that God is with us!

This Christmas, may we be a reflection to others of the HOPE we have through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Day 3

Be Reverent in Hope

by Sara Speed

There were not too many things that I looked forward to as a child more than the Sears Christmas Wishbook. As soon as it arrived my brother and I would start looking at the toys and marking pages for the things we might want for Christmas. Our parents would smile at us, but we always knew we were not to be disrespectful or pushy when it was time to present our requests. We also knew that we should not continuously remind our parents of what we wanted.

This reminds me of Simeon and Anna (Luke 2:25-38). Both were waiting and longing to see the Messiah in their lifetime. They were faithfully and patiently waiting - not demanding, neither did they feel entitled - to see God's promise fulfilled. They waited in hope, dedicated their lives to the Lord and kept on worshiping God.

So it is with us. Do we treat God like the Sears Christmas Wishbook or do we live our lives in worship? Do we tell God our wants or do we respectfully bring our requests to Him? Do we try to push Him around or do we come before Him in reverence?

During this week of Advent - live in reverent hope. Worship in reverent hope. Walk in reverent hope before God.

“Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Savior, and my hope is in You all day long.” Psalm 25:5

Day 4

Be Real in Hope

by Alex Kraeft

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” Romans 12:12

If Christ were to have told us that life would be a quick and easy ride, then the Resurrection as we know it would be purely symbolic. Even as the enemy today remains at work-- alive and well-- we mustn't forget that God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. Therefore, *we do not lose heart, for those who remain steadfast will trust in Him, bearing fruit in every good work and by which the promise of His Holy Spirit will overflow with hope for those who are called according to His purpose.* Such aspects of the Christian believer are what we know better today as authenticity, planting seeds with the full assurance of faith that The Gardener's will be done. This, my friends, is how the world will know: As a tree is known by its fruit, so then will it become apparent that to whom those are given cheerfully, those who come after us will one day be able to reciprocate this same hope which was bestowed upon us by the firstfruits of the One True Lifegiver. **You were born to be real, not perfect.**

Day 5

Be Reactive in Hope

by Carole Ann Church

Being reactive means that we act in response to a situation, rather than creating, or controlling it. Despite knowing that God is our supreme and holy creator, we often react to situations by trying to control them, rather than reacting to them with hope, love, peace, and/or joy. Regardless of our circumstances, we can rest assured that what seems to be out of our control is all part of God's good and perfect plan.

How, then, can we reflect in ourselves, and share with others, the awe-inspiring gift that came to us in the form of a tiny baby in a manger over 2000 years ago?

Jeremiah 29:11 tells us, ***“For I know the plans I have for you”, declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope, and a future”***. God gave us the gift of hope, and the promise of an eternal future through Jesus.

Hope can be translated in Hebrew to the word, “yachal”, meaning to wait patiently. As Christians, we can display hope by continuing to wait patiently in God's timing, especially in situations that seem out of our control, or in which we are worried about the outcome. Relinquishing control isn't easy, but it is necessary to trust in God's goodness and react with hope rather than fear. **Romans 5:5** says, ***“And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”***

This Advent season, remember the gift of hope we've been given in Christ Jesus, and share it with those who may not truly know the hope that they can have.

Day 6

Be Redeemed in Hope

by Mitch Marlowe

“...but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel...” Luke 24:21 NIV84

This verse comes from Luke’s Gospel. It is the first Easter Sunday. Two of the disciples are walking down the road on the way to Emmaus. As they were walking they were talking of the events of the weekend. Jesus came up to them and joined in their conversation. They did not know who He was and He began to ask them questions about what they were discussing. The disciples shared what they had witnessed of their Teacher being wrongfully tried and then crucified. They told of how the women had gone to the tomb that morning but their Teacher’s body was not there. Then, Jesus told those disciples they were foolish and slow of heart. He asked them in **Luke 24:26**, ***“Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter His glory?”*** Little did they know that their Hope and their redeemer was indeed the Christ and He was present with them that very moment!

That first Easter was the culmination of the first Christmas! The Baby came from glory and was wrapped in swaddling clothes was born to die and yet He rose from the grave and returned to glory. He is indeed our HOPE REDEEMED!

Prayer: Father thank You for the gift of Jesus. Thank You for making Him our Hope and our Redeemer!

Day 7

Be Recharged in Hope

by Brittany Jackson

Let us hold firmly to the hope we claim to have. The God who promised is faithful. Hebrews 10:23 (NIRV)

Imagine with me: you see a beautiful, brightly lit Christmas tree, standing in the place of honor at the center of a room. It shines brightly out into the room and the shadows have no place to run from the light. And yet, the buzzing fluorescent lights in the ceiling are emitting a cold, harsh brightness, so that your eyes are drawn away from the rich beauty of the tree and to the glare from the ceiling, wishing you could just find the light switch and turn it off.

In the same way that we can't see and enjoy Christmas lights when everything else is brightly lit, we don't experience hope, true hope, until we are facing despair and hopelessness. G. K Chesterton wrote: "Hope is the power of being cheerful in circumstances which we know to be desperate... Exactly at the instant when hope ceases to be reasonable it begins to be useful."

Hope is what keeps us moving forward, searching for God knows what, when darkness overwhelms all our senses. It is what recharges our batteries, makes life worth living, and what fills up our emptiness in the midst of despair. Exactly where the world feels its darkest, that is where the hope of Christ appears. I love that the celebration of Christmas and the baby that brought Light and Life to our world shows up during the time of year when days are the shortest, and nights are the longest. Just when our last bit of energy and hope is gone, Jesus appears!

Prayer: God, thank you for your hope that arrives when discouragement abounds and when life seems too much for us. Thank you for sending your Life and the Light, Jesus, into the darkness of this world for us. Help me to share your Light with all those around me facing the darkness alone. Amen.

Love

Day 8

Be Ready in Love

by Cynthia and Richard Townsend

In **John 14:15** Jesus says, ***“If you love me, obey my commands.”*** Jesus makes it very clear that our obedience shows the world our love for Him. Joseph is a great example of loving obedience.

We are told in **Matthew 1:18-19** that ***“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.”*** Joseph was ready to obey the law, a demonstration of his love of God, by quietly divorcing Mary.

But before Joseph could act on his decision ***“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.’ ”*** (Matthew 1:20-21)

Joseph woke up from his dream and did what he was commanded. He showed his love of God the Father through his obedience.

Aren't we like Joseph? We often form a plan before we seek God. As we go through this season let us first seek His kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33) and be ready to obey his leading.

Joseph chose to love God and Mary even though it wasn't the easy path. This holiday season, be ready to choose love.

Day 9

Be Reflective in Love

by Becky Haney

We love because He first loved us. 1 John 4:10

The Hallmark Channel is a favorite TV program series for many, especially women, eagerly awaiting the newest episodes. Why the popularity? I believe it often takes one back to Christmases past, reflecting another time and a love story that, despite predictable obstacles, turns out happily.

But Christmas is not only about romance, but more about another kind of LOVE – when love came down from heaven! Our God, the God of Love, knew that sinful man could never be good enough to redeem himself of his sins – only a perfect sacrifice could do this. God in His great love for mankind sent the only perfect sacrifice for the job – His beloved Son Jesus.

God gave the greatest Christmas gift of all time, Jesus, who came to earth to save us. This great gift is ours – free for us, but not for God. It cost Him greatly – His perfect Son, sacrificed for the redemption of our sins.

How can we ever thank God for this great gift? He wants our LOVE! He desires for us to love Him and to love His Son Jesus. And he wants us to love one another. This is the gift we can give God – to reflect His LOVE through our loving one another.

Let us be a reflection of God's LOVE to a hurting world – not just at Christmas, but all year long!

Day 10

Be Reverent in Love

by Sara Speed

Love is a powerful thing. It can evoke some strong emotions and feelings. It can bring ruin if given to someone that doesn't return it or it can bring a lasting relationship of trust, respect and faithfulness if it is mutual between the right person. Love isn't something to throw around lightly or taken for granted. Love is something that should be cherished and treated with the utmost reverence.

God's love for us is truly beyond anything that we can comprehend. His love has been lavished on us. It is immeasurable! Because God has given His love - Jesus - we should love others as greatly as He has loved us. It is not something to do, then brag about it. Love is not something that we do in pride or arrogance or for our gain. Love is reverent. Love does not seek its own way. Love is holy.

This advent season and throughout the year, let us be reverent in love. As we worship Christ our King, let us be reverent in love before Him.

But I, by your great love, can come into your house; in reverence I bow down toward your holy temple. Psalm 5:7

Day 11

Be Real in Love

by Alex Kraeft

“Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.” 1 Peter 4:8

And who among us-- to be fully known and loved by our Heavenly Father-- would consider the inadequacy of our own shortcomings as being worthy of this lone act of selflessness, this act of humility and loving kindness that would later result in the opportunity to reside in the Highest Kingdom? The greatest commandment, as stated in *Matthew 22*, is that we not just love the Lord our God with all of our hearts, minds, and souls, but that we would love the lost as ourselves.

Galatians 6:2 emphasizes to us the importance of bearing one another's burdens, for this is what Christ envisioned as "laying down one's life for his friends" as highlighted in *John 15:13*. By imitating that humility which is written in the second chapter of the Book of Philippians, so then will it become apparent that a tree will be known by its fruit: For if we ourselves have so been overpowered by God's Holy Spirit, then, my friends, the time has come for us to pay it forward. **You were born to be real, not perfect.**

Day 12

Be Reactive in Love

by Carole Ann Church

1 Peter 1:3-4 states, “Blessed be the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in Heaven for you”. Both God’s greatest gift (Jesus), and greatest commands are centered around love! Mark 12:30-31 says “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind, and all your strength. The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these”.

Through God’s love we experience connection, trust, and a love that accepts us wholly, regardless of our flaws or sinful nature. The best way to react in love is to honor God’s commands and treat others with love regardless of our earthly perception of their worthiness. Genesis 1:26 tells us that all of humanity is made in God’s image, and John tells us in 1 John 3:2 that we are all God’s children.

This Advent season, remember to personify the love we have in Christ Jesus and treat others with love and grace, just as Jesus has modeled for us in scripture.

Day 13

Be Redeemed in Love

by Mitch Marlowe

“Rise up and help us; redeem us because of your unfailing love.” Psalm 44:26 NIV84

Isn't it just like God to hear the prayer of His people? That is exactly what happened in the context of this verse. The Psalmist praises God about past victories but then turns to lament about the current defeat. For 16 verses of Psalm 44 there is agony of defeat, there is mention of disgrace, and there is the questioning of why all these things have happened. Yet the last verse, the one written above, reminds us of two characteristics of our God. He redeems and He has unfailing love.

We may not always experience every day of glorious victory. We may have days, as the writer of this Psalm had, of shame and disgrace, even when we remain faithful to our Lord. However, we must remember, our God is faithful. Throughout history, He has had a plan of redemption. His love for us and His plan of redemption came to us in the flesh. Jesus was born out of love to redeem us from not just from days of questioning and experiencing shame and disgrace, but He was born to rise up, to help us, and to redeem us with and because of His unfailing love.

Prayer: Thank you Lord for being the God who redeems by giving us unfailing love through Jesus.

Day 14

Be Recharged in Love

by Brittany Jackson

***Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.
Lamentations 3:22 (NIV)***

What happens to your cell phone or tablet when you keep using it for hours and hours without plugging it in to recharge? It stops working entirely without getting its battery connected to a power source!

Even though we don't have a physical battery pack installed, we also slow down and eventually stop going when we go too long without recharging. People try many different ways to re-energize when they realize they are overwhelmed and tired: "mental health" days, long hot baths, taking a walk with the dog or a long nap. Any of these can make a huge difference in your mood. But one of the most powerful "charging cords" we can connect to is the love of God. Lamentations 3 says that it is because of God's amazing love that "we are not consumed" or exhausted.

Many times, the love we experience in our lives can feel like a half-hearted love. Love isn't just feeling warm fuzzies about someone else. It would feel very empty and lonely to have a partner who continually said "I love you so very much!" but never gave a hug, took out the trash or interacted with more than their words. But half-hearted love can also look like only doing things or taking care of the daily work, without emotions. We all can imagine a parent who works hard providing for the family, giving them everything except attention and affection. In both of these half-hearted expressions, the recipient of the "love" doesn't come away feeling recharged at all.

But the love of God isn't a half-hearted love. He loves us with both emotion and action, which keeps us from being utterly exhausted in our spiritual lives. We are refueled by being loved with the whole heart of Almighty God. He reminds us over and over throughout scripture of how he loves us. And he showed up, in the flesh, to show his love for us. Emmanuel, God with us, chose to be born in a dirty stable, chose to show us how to live through his perfect, sinless life, chose to suffer and die on the cross, and chose to return again to life, defeating Satan and sin forever. In all these actions and so many more he showed us over and over again that *He loves us. He loves us. He loves us!*

Prayer: God, your love for me is absolutely amazing. Thank you for all the ways you have proven your love to me in my own life. Help me to remember your love when I'm feeling overwhelmed and tired. Renew me, God!

Joy

Day 15

Be Ready in Joy

by Cynthia and Richard Townsend

I love the shepherds in the Christmas Story. They are out in the field watching their sheep and wondering what the night holds for them - will a wolf try to get the sheep? Will one of the flock wander away? Will the night pass peacefully? When all of a sudden, an angel appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord filled the place. The angel said to them: "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Then the heavenly hosts appeared praising God!

The angel announced great joy. Why? Because ***"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."*** (Luke 2:11-12)

The only thing the shepherds could do was to immediately go find Mary and Joseph! And, sure enough, it was just as the angel said. They found the baby. The sight of this baby Savior filled them with such great joy that they went and told everyone.

That's what happens when we are filled with great joy. We want to share those good things. During this Christmas be ready to share the joy of the season. That's what the shepherds did. If we take in the great joy of Christmas we have to share it. This spreads the emotions of great joy. Joy is contagious!

Shout for joy to the Lord, everyone on earth.

Burst into joyful songs and make music.

Make music to the Lord with the harp.

Sing and make music with the harp.

Blow the trumpets. Give a blast on the ram's horn.

Shout for joy to the Lord. He is the King.

Psalm 98:4-6 (NIRV)

Day 16

Be Reflective in Joy

by Becky Haney

But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.” Luke 2:10

When I reflect on Christmases past, I often get a feeling of Joy. Christmas is in many ways a happier time of year when we enjoy special occasions, being with loved ones we don't see as often, enjoying beautiful Christmas decorations, and of course, good food. One of the things I enjoy most is the music. “I'll Be Home for Christmas” has been popular for many years. But I especially love the Christmas carols. “Joy to the World” would be one of my favorites, but other carols sing of Joy. “How Great Our Joy”, verse 4:

**“This gift of God we'll cherish well, that ever joy our hearts shall fill.
How great our joy! Great our joy! Joy, joy, joy! Joy, joy, joy!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!
Praise we the Lord in heav'n on high!”**

Traditional German Carol

As you reflect on Christmases past, what things have brought you JOY? A special gift? A trip? Being a new parent? Seeing relatives you haven't seen for a long time? Maybe a special event – seeing the Carolina Snowbells at the Appalachian Theatre or singing in the Christmas cantata in church? For me, the first Christmas with my two small babies was a joyful time. Christmas Day 2005 when my granddaughter Brook was baptized in our church was a blessing that brought our family JOY! These are reflections of special times I felt God's love and JOY around me – and having JOY!

The salvation we receive when we accept Jesus as our Savior and become one of God's children brings GREAT JOY! Thanks be to God for bringing JOY into our world! May we look for God and His bountiful blessings to us in unexpected places, and may we reflect JOY to others each day.

Day 17

Be Reverent in Joy

by Sara Speed

Reverence is what we show to God for who He is and what He has done. Joy is a direct result of what God has done in our lives. For some it just doesn't seem right to be joyful in church. For instance, there are churches where you should never clap your hands. In others, you shouldn't even raise your hand in worship. If that is the case, does that squash joy or promote it? In some churches you are expected to enter quietly not talk to anyone and you sure wouldn't dare laugh even if something is funny. Where is the joy in that? Please don't misunderstand, we should show reverence in church. God is holy and we should not make a mockery of worship. However, because of what God has done for us, Christians should be the most joyful people on the planet.

Our worship should reflect the joy that we have. How it is possible to sing the praise of the Most High with a frown on your face is beyond me, but people certainly do it. How folks can read the scripture or talk about Jesus and not put some umph in it flabbergasts me. It's almost like we think we are doing God a favor by showing up to the service. Then we sit on the pew, arms crossed as if to say, "Okay Lord, I am here, move me, I dare You."

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.

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."

Can you imagine the shepherds going to worship baby Jesus as if they were going to a funeral? I am sure they had joy in their steps and their hearts as they approached the Savior. In reverence, awe and joy they worshiped Him - Christ the Lord.

In reverent joy let us worship Christ our Savior, Lord and soon coming King!

Day 18

Be Real 'in Joy

by Alex Kraeft

“This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 118:24

The same source of joy that is found in the scriptures is what we know better today as doing what we love in the name of Jesus, right? No, ALL THAT WE DO in the name of Jesus is to be in tandem with the will of God. The question then becomes: Is it life-giving? Is it wholesome? Is it for the greater good? Is it done with a vision (**Matthew 6:33**)?

For someone to utilize that spiritual gift in such a way that another person's life might be changed for the cause of Christ paints a clear picture: A good word gives health to the bones, signifying both an end as well as a beginning, for though we have not seen Him, we love Him. This we know better as believing in the unseen (*1 John 4*). That unbridled, unwavering joy isn't just powerful enough to penetrate lost hearts and broken spirits (**Matthew 11:28**), but so effective in its way that we not just make known to the world His great love-- but His good and perfect will of salvation. **You were born to be real, not perfect.**

Day 19

Be Reactive in Joy

by Carole Ann Church

In **Luke 2:10-11**, an angel appeared to the shepherds saying, ***“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.”*** When the shepherds then heard the multitude of angels singing in joy, it led them on a search for the newborn savior. Searching for, or looking toward the Savior, can also provide great joy in our lives today. Unlike happiness, joy is true satisfaction, and it is unique in that you can continue to have joy despite feelings of unhappiness. **John 16:22** says, ***“So also you have sorrow now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.”***

Joy comes from the holy spirit once we've allowed Jesus into our lives. **Psalms 16:11** says, ***“You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy, at your right hand are pleasures for ever more.”*** An example of being reactive with joy is found in Psalms. Although David experienced betrayal, loss, and shame, he continued to delight in God's joy by praising him with song and dance.

This Advent season, remember that although “Weeping may tarry for the night.” “Joy cometh in the morning.” Share the joy you have in Christ Jesus by praising him out loud and sharing your abundant joy with others.

Day 20

Be Redeemed in Joy

by Mitch Marlowe

“My lips will shout for joy when I sing praise to You- I, whom You have redeemed.”

Psalm 71:23 NIV84

Have you ever known anyone that shouted for joy? The Christmas story tells of the terrified shepherds that were visited by the angelic hosts. They were the first apart from Mary and Joseph that experienced Jesus. Can you imagine these gruff, smelly shepherds as they saw Him the first time? Did they take turns holding Him or did they just gather around that manger in awe? Did they remain silent at that crib side or did they laugh and carry on like they would have in the field? The Christmas Story does not tell us how long they stayed, but it does tell us that when they left they spread the word about the Baby born in Bethlehem. They were the first to tell the Good News of the Gospel. Don't you think that their lips shouted for joy because they knew they had been redeemed? What about you this Christmas season? Do your lips shout for joy because you have realized the Lord has redeemed you?

Prayer: Lord, forgive us when we do not realize the joy that comes from Your redemption. Help us to shout for joy for the gift of Christ!

Day 21

Be Recharged in Joy

by Brittany Jackson

For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 30:5 (NRSV)

When I think back to the wintertime when I was a child, somehow I remember there being more hours of light to play in the snow! The shortened days and long nights can cause the “winter blues” for many people. The blues aren’t only a figment of the imagination, they can cause Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD for short- how appropriate!) because of the lack of sun, the vitamin d it provides, the long hours of darkness and often being stuck inside at home because of snow and ice. Winter is often a time when it feels the hardest to live happily.

Luckily, “happiness” isn’t one of the fruits of the spirit. Joy is! The idea of winter can help us to better understand how joy can exist even in times of hardship, sorrow and pain. In winter, we see signs of death: the leaves are long gone; birds, bees, insects and other animals have left town, are sleeping or dead; bright colors are absent, leaving dull brown, gray and greens in their place; nature itself is barren and quiet.

But winter is never the end. It is because of winter and the cycle of the seasons that nature continues to have life. Just as we can’t see the seeds of life holding on to their essence under the frozen ground, waiting on spring to arrive, we don’t usually notice how God is working in silence to grow us into fresh seasons in our life. The difficult, quiet, sad seasons in our lives actually work to bring growth and life in us. Joy doesn’t come from clinging to the laughter and celebration of happy times, but from when we continue walking with God, even, and especially during, the most trying times of our lives. It is through the act of going through that discomfort and hurt that we experience the most growth, underground and in secret.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for using my darkest times to draw me closer to you. Help me to recognize the seasons in my walk with you, and to trust that you are working for my good in each one.

Peace

Day 22

Be Ready in Peace

by Cynthia and Richard Townsend

“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. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7)

Prince of Peace! No end to his peace! Isn’t peace what we all want? Peace isn’t the absence of conflict. Peace comes from the hope, joy, and love of being in a life-changing relationship with our Creator.

Author John Piper says, “peace is keeping together what the angels kept together: glory to God and peace to us ([Luke 2:14](#)). If you say, “I don’t have any interest in, love for, admiration of, treasuring of the glory of God; I just want the peace,” then you won’t get it. You can’t separate the two. The angels won’t let you. God won’t let you. God’s purpose is to give you peace by being the most glorious person in your life.”

Take time to glorify God, treasure God, cherish God, make much of God, and admire God, so you can enjoy the peace that leads you to openness and readiness to forgive. Be ready this season to keep your heart focused on showing the glory of God and you will know the peace of God.

Day 23

Be Reflective in Peace

by Becky Haney

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to Peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

A favorite song at this time of year is “White Christmas”. Why do people dream of a White Christmas? Is it the beauty of the new-fallen snow? The cleanliness it reflects? The quiet peace that surrounds a snowy evening? Maybe we think of the line from the hymn “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”

The mission of Jesus coming into the world is to bring us peace and love. Jesus is the source of PEACE. Without Jesus, our world isn’t peaceful, but in Jesus we have hope and peace. Through Jesus we can become peacemakers – to restore relationships, to love one another, to live a lifestyle that reflects peace, and have the assurance of our eternal destiny to be with our Lord.

Can others see PEACE in us? How can we reflect PEACE? Perhaps by a soft word, a caring smile, a concerned “how are you?”, a wish for a blessed Christmas, or “Jesus loves you, and so do I!”

Day 24

Be Reverent in Peace

by Sara Speed

In a world of chaos it is hard to find peace. I recently did an internet search for reverent peace. The results ranged from a music group, spa music, relaxation guides and various music stations. The top results did not mention how to get peace and it sure didn't mention that the only way to have true peace is through Jesus.

Jesus Christ is peace (Ephesians 2:14) and having a relationship with Him is the only true way to experience peace in your life. You can be going through trials, tests and turbulence but then you speak the name Jesus and a holy hush comes over you. Yes, that peace may come through hearing a song or just in the quietness of your living room. When that peace rushes over, you cannot help but to worship God in reverent awe.

The night Jesus was born, I can almost hear the reverent peace that was in the stable. Do I know that for sure? No, I do not. However, when Jesus is with you, all is peace! So I choose to believe there was a holy hush that surrounded that stable on the night the Savior was born. Even for a few moments I think that the animals were quite in wonder and worship of the newborn King!

***Peace! Peace! Wonderful peace.
Coming down from the Father above
Sweep over my spirit forever I pray
In fathomless billows of love***

from the hymn "Wonderful Peace" by W.D. Cornell and W.G Cooper

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 2 Thessalonians 3:16

Day 25

Be Real in Peace

by Alex Kraeft

“And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” Philipians 4:7

The New Testament emphasizes to us the importance of the unification of those who are in the body of Christ. And as we let the peace of God rule in our hearts, to the praise of His glory, we begin to embrace this opportunity-- an unrelenting, unyielding, and ever so revitalizing opportunity-- to engage in fellowship so as to glorify richly He who is able to do exceedingly more than we could ever ask or imagine. And even in the absence of what we might perceive as “peace”, from a mundane standpoint, this concept of biblical peace can be summed up in just a single concept which, in my estimation, sums up the Christian faith in its entirety, and that is *believing in the unseen*. **You were born to be real, not perfect.**

Day 26

Be Reactive in Peace

by Carole Ann Church

Philippians 4:9 tells us to practice the things that we have seen and heard about Christ, and that the God of peace will be with us. At times, our reactions to events that surround us may bring us stress instead of peace. Maybe we see that the kids have made a mess we have to clean, or see a terrible headline in the news that causes us to worry about the state of our world. Advent is a time to celebrate our Savior, also known as the Prince of Peace. He came not to bring us more stress or worry, but to bear that burden for us.

Scripture in John 16:33 tells us that we can have true peace through the Savior despite having trouble in the world, because God has overcome the world. How amazing that we can experience true peace in God, that transcends all understanding (Philippians 4:7). **Matthew 5:9** says, ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”*** In the Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals, being a peacemaker is described as “the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice,” or the “act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer.”

Reacting in peace calls for Christians to act with the radical love of Christ Jesus that is both big enough to set both the mistreated and the ones who mistreat free.

This Advent season, “Go in peace”, remembering that the peace you can experience through Christ Jesus, and react by sharing that peace with others.

Day 27

Be Redeemed in Peace

by Mitch Marlowe

O Lord, you took up my case; you redeemed my life. Lamentations 3:58
NIV84

Have you ever had to go to court? Perhaps there was some law you had broken, maybe a speeding ticket or someone had wronged you in some way. The days before the case was to be in court, you were anxious and worried. You perhaps were nervous about the possible outcome. The feelings were intense and real. There was no peace.

Now imagine the case was your life. The outcome of your case determined your place in eternity, heaven or hell. In all matters, you were as guilty as guilty could be. There was no hope and no chance of winning. You were doomed. Yet because of God's great love, He decided to take up your case. In fact, He took up your case, paid all your legal fees and court costs, and took on any punishment that was due to you. You were acquitted of all charges and in fact, you could never be charged again. Your life is totally redeemed. Would you now have peace?

Before the beginning of time, God initiated a plan. God took up your case and through Jesus, He has redeemed your life. This plan came into this world as a Baby and was laid in a lowly cradle. From that cradle to the cross, your case was taken up and as a result, your life has been redeemed. This Advent season, celebrate being redeemed and the peace that comes with it!

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:7 NIV84

Prayer: Thanks be to God for His indescribable and redemptive peace!

Day 28

Be Recharged in Peace

by Brittany Jackon

Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 (NIV)

We all do things that cause trouble in our relationships with others. We speak without thinking about our words, we act selfishly, we use the goodness of others to further our own wants and needs, and we let our emotions rule the way we live. Often, even without trying to do so, we hurt others and damage our relationship with them along the way. And the road is a two-way street; we are harmed by the words, actions and inaction of those we hold dear. The only way to restore our relationships is by admitting how we've messed up and working to repair them, that is, to make peace with one another. At least one person in the relationship must reach out in order to restore the friendship and bond that once was.

Perhaps the most famous method to share the gospel with others is through the "Steps to Peace with God" tract and method developed by Billy Graham. It describes the vast gap between us and God, caused by our sin, which can only be restored by someone reaching out to the other side to bring us back together. Humans certainly haven't found a way to cross that divide by ourselves, so God took the initiative to restore His relationship with us, through Jesus.

Jesus' death and resurrection allows us to connect back to God, the way we were before sin entered the world and became the immense divide it is between humans and God. Through his death and resurrection, we are again connected to the wisdom, strength, compassion and life God gives us. We aren't imprisoned to wallowing in our sin and chained to continuing to make the wrong decisions and following our own path. Because of the restoration Jesus provided us with his life and death here on earth, our minds can still, our anxieties can cease, and our peace of mind, body and soul returns to us as we reconnect to God.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for bringing us peace through Christ and restoring us to our relationship with you. Help us to truly connect with your peace today, allowing it to wash over our anxiety and pain and to heal our relationship with those we love.

Christmas Day

Christ:

Hope, Love, Joy and Peace Fulfilled

by Mitch Marlowe

Merry Christmas! What a wonderful time of the year! You have been reading different perspectives in this advent devotional with the themes of being ready, reflective, reverent, real, reactive and redeemed. Truth be known, all of these are elements of what our worship should be like. We should be ready to glorify God as we celebrate the birth of His Son. We should reflect on the love of God and why He gave us a Savior. That should compel us to come reverently before Him in our worship. As we do, we will need to be real, confessing the short-comings that we have and the sins that have separated us from our Holy God. Confession produces forgiveness and that should lead us to react in a way to have a life that is more godly and stronger in our faith. The by-product of all these acts is being reminded of the redemption we have in Jesus. Aren't you glad that the gift of Jesus redeems us today and forever more? Be encouraged this day to spend some time reading the Christmas Story from Luke 2. Take time out of the busy-ness to pause and spend time worshipping the Newborn King. Sing Joy to the World the Lord is come!

Prayer: Merry Christmas Lord! Thank you for giving us the greatest gift that has ever been given. Help us to glorify Your Name today and everyday! Help us to celebrate the birth of our Savior all the time and not just today.

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