



2022

Advent

with *Ministry Architects*

AN ADVENT INVITATION

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

a different kind of
WAITING

I have two sons. Liam is seven, and Jack just turned five. My wife Debbie and I are out of the season of pureed food and poopy diapers, but we are still well within the season of “artwork” on the living room walls, mostly broken furniture, many feelings, and SO MANY decibels. We still collapse exhausted into bed at an hour so early my grandparents would’ve laughed, and we still find ourselves having to say things that I never thought professional grownups should have to say (*“Please don’t put any more centipedes in the refrigerator” comes to mind.*)

That said, we are also in that magical season of themed pajamas, lots of contagious giggling, impromptu dance parties, bedtime snuggles, and a general willingness to laugh at my jokes.

Lately, I have begun to accept the reality that this season of parenting is a very short one, and that realization has permitted me to better appreciate some of my boys’ extra energy. With fresh eyes, I have noticed most recently the endearing implications of their utter inability to wait patiently. Asking them to wait for dessert, or their birthday, or to play outside with friends, is a lot like how I imagine it feels to be a rodeo clown keeping that gate closed just before a cowboy climbs on a bull.

But as Advent is upon us, I’ve begun wondering if that’s the kind of waiting God had in mind for us. Not the quiet, passive waiting that I keep hoping my kiddos will eventually figure out. I wonder if God was more imagining the way my youngest will “wait” for dessert by climbing on top of the refrigerator where we keep the sweets and then holding a melty chocolate chip cookie in his hand until it’s finally dessert time. It’s the passionate, active, hopeful kind of waiting that assumes good things are coming and that we should position ourselves to participate in all that goodness. . . even while we wait.

At Ministry Architects, that is our prayer for you this Advent season. May you wait for the goodness God is bringing into this world, but may you wait on your toes. May you wait with the fierce anticipation of a 5-year-old and when the time comes, may you get a glimpse of the Christ child, God with us. In the meantime, our hope is this little passion project, a compilation of Advent devotions written by the Ministry Architects team, is a gift to you and yours.

In love and hope,

Trey Wince



Hope Faith Joy Peace Light

2022 ADVENT DEVOTIONAL



Why a devotional?

Because we know.

Everyone on the Ministry Architects team knows what it's like to lead a church through Advent to Christmas. We know it's not always easy to take a breath and make space for personal reflection or spend real time with Jesus during this season.

That's why this gift is meant to be just that: a gift. There are a few writings each week, meant to connect you with an experience of the Messiah.

What will I find?

We hope you find encouragement. We hope you find a chuckle here and there and frequent reminders of the hope, faith, joy, peace, and light this season brings.

We hope you find a story or two to share - or the spark for an idea that helps you draw closer to the Holy One.

Lastly, we hope you're reminded you're not alone in your life of calling. And we're here for you and your community.



2022
advent
DEVOTIONAL

week one

Hope

hope /hōp/
a feeling of expectation
and desire for a certain
thing to happen



durable HOPE

One of my favorite Christmas carols is one that is a little less commonly sung and not as well known:

I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day

I love it because it always surprises me!
It starts out like a “normal” Christmas carol:

*I heard the bells on Christmas day, their old familiar carols play;
And wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good will to men.*

But a few verses later, things take a jarring turn:

*And in despair I bowed my head: “There is no peace on earth,” I said,
“For hate is strong, and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.”*

The poem which the song is based on was written during the American Civil War, and you can hear how painful that period was for those who lived through it.

In recent years, it has been more common for me to look around and see things like “despair” and “hate” than to see things like “peace” and “good will.” Maybe it’s the same for you.

But what I love about the song is that it retains hope even while taking full stock of the brokenness of the world. There is a resilience and durability to the hope represented here. You’ll find the explanation for this kind of hope found towards the end of the song:

God is not dead, nor does He sleep.

This parallels an incredible passage in [1 Corinthians 15:20-22](#):

“But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.” (ESV)

Even though our world is still broken, our hope remains because we know that through Jesus, death is ultimately defeated.

**Hope was born when He was born,
and hope is alive because He is alive!**



the source of H O P E

“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with all joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. (NLT)

I love how this verse tells us that God is the source of **hope**. He is **HOPE**.

Hope is His essence. He can't help oozing with **hope**. God is an immense ocean of **hope**, fathomless, and overflowing with **hope**. God's **hope** is excessive and beyond measure and given to us in abundance.

What a wonderful reminder in this day. In a time when all that is going on around us makes life seem hopeless, we have the true source of **hope**. . . God Himself.

God is the source of **hope** and the reason to rejoice. He won't leave us in despair. He shares His gift of **hope** with us.

Advent calls us to hope in the promise that God is calling us to greater things and will be with us as we live them.

Hope is the recall of the good in the past, on which we base our expectation of good in the future, however bad the present.

It digs in the rubble of the heart for memory of God's promise to bring good out of evil and joy out of sadness and based on those memories of the past, takes new hope for the future.

Even in the face of death.

Even in the fear of loss.

Even when our own private little worlds go to dust, as sooner or later, they always do.

Joan Chittister

To top it all off, God gives us overflowing and confident **hope**. This is a wonderful image of God filling us with His **hope** and confidence. I don't know about you but as we enter this Advent season, knowing God is readily available to fill us to overflowing with His **hope** is a welcome gift. Because Advent is about the future, we live in **hope**. Anticipating a better tomorrow even when we struggle with the realities of today, we keep our eyes on the God of **hope**.

Father, you are our glorious God of hope, and we thank You that this is not the doubtful hope of the world, but the definite, overflowing, confident hope that is securely found on Your unchangeable Word. Enable us to share this truth with those whom we will come in contact. Amen.

a simple HOPE

"All the great things are simple, and many can be expressed in a single word: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope."

Winston Churchill

The Advent Season brings up a host of different emotions and memories, ranging from the nostalgic Christmas morning gift to the grief of a loved one. But Christmas also reminds us there is someone in whom to discover, or rediscover, hope.

Hope is one of those power-filled words that can drive us onward in life through the hardest of times. Although hope can be difficult to define, we all know it well, especially if we have experienced a hopeless situation. The power of hope cannot be denied. In this season, we remember where our true hope lies:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written...

ROMANS 15:8-9, 12 (NIV)

And again, Isaiah says, "The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope."



Our hope is simple... it's Jesus. The root of Jesse, Christ, became a servant to "show God's truthfulness" and "confirm God's promises" so that "all people may glorify God." Because the Messiah came, hope was realized. Because the Savior has come, hope for all people can be known. Hope of better days (*Jeremiah 29:11*). Hope of eternal life (*John 3:16 and 17:3*). Our hope is simple... it's Jesus.

This Advent Season, let hope swell within you because the Messiah has come. No matter what you are facing this Advent season (*joy, hope, sadness, disappointment, excitement, grief*), may we stop, pause, and know He is with us, giving us true hope. Hope because He lives. Hope for better days and eternal life. Hope for all.

hopeful anticipation



After college, I spent about 4 years working for a short-term missions/education organization. We were a startup company, and we all worked hard to make the organization successful. I was on the road six months out of the year and when I was home, I was often at the office until late. Luckily, the paychecks were huge... Just kidding. The money was really, really bad.

It had been an amazing way to see the world and an opportunity to work with great people, but after four years, I was thinking about my next steps.

Without boring you with all the details, I set out on a *weeklong* wilderness fast in the Canadian Rockies to do some hiking, prayer, and discerning of my next steps [FYI: *Zero stars. Not safe, rough go, do not recommend.*]

I didn't hear a voice from the sky, but by the time I got back to civilization, I knew it was time to move into the next vocational season of my life. This was problematic, as I had no real job leads and had just signed a yearlong lease to live near the office with a friend in Dallas, TX.

Two days later, I met with my boss and shared that it was time for me to move on. As I walked down the long hallway back to my office, I got a call from my soon-to-be roommate explaining that the homeowner had called to say they had changed their minds and couldn't rent us the house.

I hung up the phone and wrote an email to a pastor in Nashville, TN named Mark DeVries. He had written some great books on youth ministry, and I had connected with him while leading two of his youth group's mission experiences. My email went like this:

Dear Mark,
I'm homeless and jobless.
How was your week?
Love, Trey

Against all better judgment, he wrote back less than an hour later, saying he had just lost a youth director and I should come for an interview.

I spent my next six years of ministry at that church in Nashville. I loved it. Even more, I loved telling that story any chance I got because something about it conveyed that God was really paying attention to my life and really had a hand in getting me to this church in Nashville. I still believe that, by the way.

After awhile, it felt like God might have been getting a little tired of hearing that same story. What I mean is that after a few years, it started to become clear that I was running on old stories. My ministry had become backward-looking. I had forgotten, or maybe more honestly, I was afraid, to write a new story. It all came together when I was reading a little passage in **Isaiah 43:16-18**:

Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down; they cannot rise; they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. (NRSVUE)

This passage starts with a reference to that old story of the Red Sea, right? **But then there's this curveball.** Here's my very unofficial translation how the conversation when down:

"Hey Israelites."

"Yeah, God?"

"Remember back in Egypt when I got you out of captivity and parted the Red Sea and took out Pharaoh's army?"

"Are you kidding, God? It's like all we can talk about!"

"Yeah, I know, stop it."

The next verse (19) is all about God doing a new thing.

I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

The stories of God's faithfulness in the past are crucial, foundational to our ability to stay the course when things get tough. But sometimes we need to turn our eyes to the horizon for the next thing that God is up to. Because good stuff is still happening. Lately, I've even tried setting a little reminder on my phone to pop up at random times during the day. It simply says "look up!" to remind me to keep an eye out for the new thing God is doing.

Bottom line: we're in a season when we Christians tell our best hits, our foundational stories. But don't forget that Advent is a time of hopeful anticipation, because God is still writing good stories. Keep an eye out.

holding onto H O P E

"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful"
HEBREWS 10:23 (NIV)

Like many people across the globe, my wife has an annual Christmas tradition where she reads Charles Dickens's novella, 'A Christmas Carol'. My level is more watching 'The Muppet Christmas Carol', which we do every Christmas Eve with our children.

In Dickens's story, the two main characters, Ebenezer Scrooge and Bob Cratchit, couldn't be more different. Impacted by the various struggles he has experienced in life, Scrooge has become mean, bitter, cynical, and hopeless. Cratchit, however, despite a life lived in hardship, poverty stricken, and with a gravely ill son, lives a life full of hopefulness and joy.

As much as I want to be like Bob Cratchit, joyful about the present, hopeful about the future, and always seeing the best in people, I realize that I, for the most part, am more Scrooge than Cratchit. Perhaps it's just my personality, or maybe there's something in my Britishness that makes me look for the worst case scenarios in situations. Whatever it is, I've not always looked at life this way. And I'm pretty certain I'm not the only one who feels like this now.

Maybe, just as Scrooge was shaped by his experience, we, too, have been shaped by the stress and abnormalities of life over the course of the past two and a half years with the need to adapt to pandemic life. Add to that the seemingly relentless need to return to 'the way things were', the same numbers attending worship as before the pandemic, the same level of giving (*the list could go on*). Maybe this has led me, and others like me, to a more cynical, negative way of life and work. I'm not sure. But I know that hope has been harder to find and, when it has been found, harder to cling to.

Scrooge's story doesn't end with him living out this cynical, hopeless, existence, though. One Christmas Eve he encounters the spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Future, and his life is redeemed. Realizing what he has become and who he should be, Scrooge wakes up on Christmas Day as a man transformed, a man full of generosity, hope, and joy.

The longer the first advent went on - that wait for the coming of the Messiah, promised to the Israelites by the prophets - the harder it must have been for the Israelites to remain hopeful. I'm sure they became cynical towards the promises that God had made to them.

Just as Dickens's story doesn't end with a hopeless Scrooge, so the story of God's promise doesn't end with His people endlessly waiting for the Messiah. The story of the first Christmas, the birth of Jesus told in the nativity story we know so well, is the outworking of God's faithfulness.

Then the author of Hebrews writes, "Let us hold onto hope, for He is faithful" (*paraphrased*). We can be a hopeful people because God is faithful.

Advent, and waiting for the coming of the Messiah, is our annual reminder for us to be less cynical and more hopeful. As we journey through Advent towards Christmas, and the celebration of the coming of the Messiah, as we take part in family traditions, singing carols proclaiming the birth of Christ, and as we are reminded, once again, of the faithfulness of God, let us be a people who hold unswervingly to hope, transformed by the faithfulness of God.



2022
advent
DEVOTIONAL

week two

Faith

faith /fāTH/
complete trust or
confidence in someone
or something



songs of faith

READ: Luke 1:67-79



Today's reading features Zechariah's song of faith. If you read the entire first chapter of Luke, you quickly realize how surprising Zechariah's words are given his last several months of life—months that he was forced to spend silent as apparent punishment for doubting that his wife would bear a child.

What does one say after months of silence?

No matter what words you might expect Zechariah to utter, the text is clear: he doesn't just speak, **he sings**. And he sings a song of faith.

We see this kind of sung witness to faith repeatedly throughout Scripture, but it is especially noticeable as it relates to Jesus' miraculous birth story. Theologian Walter Brueggeman calls this a "**Theology of the Impossible**" – it must be done in song.

If you are from a liturgical tradition, then you may be familiar with something that has become an almost annual, second week of Advent debate. It goes something like this:

"We want to sing Christmas songs!"

people



"But it's not Christmas yet. It's Advent. We are waiting and hoping and preparing our hearts for Jesus, the greatest of all gifts, to be born."

pastor



"I literally don't care. These Advent songs are terrible. It is Advent not Sadvent...!"

(smiles, internally agrees, but feels a need to stand for the party line): "I promise I'll share your perspective with the worship planning team."

While I understand the party line, I 125% stand with the parishioner on this one. So many Advent songs are depressing and dirgey. I'm also convinced that underneath the surface, our love for Christmas songs is not only due to their catchy tunes, but the ways they have shaped our faith along the way. We sing them at home, in the car, while working out, and (eventually, in some cases) at church.

For our family, this year finally represents a semi-return to "normal." Mask requirements in schools and churches have been lifted. Delayed weddings and funerals finally have taken place. And our toddler has even learned to love, just like her Mommy, a shopping trip to Trader Joe's and Target. I truly enjoyed a return to these familiar places and experiences, but I was also surprised to find myself, at times, disoriented and exhausted. Or, as Barbara Brown Taylor puts it, feeling like I was "walking in the dark."

I expect this holiday season will herald even more of these moments. Moments when it is hard to find the right words to describe the present and even harder to see God in the middle of it all. If Advent dirges are where you are, that is understandable. If you find yourself struggling this holiday season, know that you are not alone. Remember that **God is with you, always**. But if you need a little Christmas music, even before the big day, sing a little Christmas music. **Why keep silent? Zechariah couldn't.** And sometimes these songs of joy offer us precisely the words we need to sing.



faith: what I learned from my church's rummage sale



I'm good at organizing things. I organize my church's rummage sale and earlier this fall, we held our first one, post-pandemic. Through this work, there are two things I have learned:

1 *have faith*

One week before the sale I was experiencing every church member or staff member's anxiety of not having enough volunteers. I wasn't surprised, given this is the challenge in ALL churches in our post-pandemic world. My breath prayer that week was "don't be afraid, it's going to work out." And it did!

2 *affirm people's stories*

We collected items the four days leading up to the sale. It was interesting to me to hear bits of people's stories throughout the week. I heard comments like, "I hope you can use these things," and "I've been collecting stuff for a few months."

But for some, the story was a little different. Many were cleaning out their parents' homes or downsizing. So many people wanted to show us what they had brought. It was imperative to them to share the story about a crystal vase that they got as a wedding gift, or a piece of jewelry they had bought from an artist, or a rocking chair they'd had for 25 years, or a flawless set of Wedgewood china that their mother had so carefully taken care of for 60+ years. I realized it's not the actual items that were valuable but the stories that came with them.

AND, UNDERNEATH THEIR STORIES, I HEARD FEAR.

It seemed that for many, when sharing their story, they were sharing a piece of themselves. They were sharing part of their identity. What they once held so dear they were now having to let go of. The same is true of most people. Letting go of that which we think shapes some part of our worth requires faith. And the fear that creeps in needs to be reminded it doesn't get the final word. Over and over again in scriptures we hear the words "do not be afraid". This is especially true in Luke's version of Jesus' birth:

Luke 1:13

"Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John."

Luke 1:30

"An angel came to Mary and said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God."

Luke 2:10

"An angel appeared to the shepherds, but the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people."

In looking back, I wish I had said, "Don't be afraid. You are not losing your value when you give this away. You are still precious in God's eyes."

Those who gave away their belongings and shared a piece of their life did so with some trepidation, not knowing what life might be like - what they would be like - without that thing. But they are not less. And they can walk in faith, without fear. And maybe they needed that reminder. Maybe, we all do.

PRAYER

Gracious God, I pray that I may have the faith of Zechariah, of Mary, and the shepherds. May I be reminded to not be afraid, for you are Emmanuel, God with us, in all things and in all time.

faith: it all happens in the waiting



I hate waiting. I just want to get to my destination, whether it's the front of the line, a fun vacation, or the end of a long week. I struggle with stillness and, sometimes, stillness is required. After it passes, I don't regret the waiting period. The waiting allows questions to abound. Questions that can cause our faith to grow. In the waiting is when faith is most present. The presence of faith doesn't require the absence of doubt and questions. In fact, growing faith must engage doubt and questions. Just like we need resistance to build muscle in our bodies, questions provide a resistance that can help to strengthen our faith. Unanswerable questions provide the strongest resistance. If I'm still waiting and questions are unanswered, I can be sure faith is growing. Faith is wrestling with doubt. Faith is getting stronger. Faith is being tested. Faith is drawing us closer to the One in Whom we trust.

because God faith

READ
READ
READ

Joshua 4

The numbers didn't make sense. Again.

Frustrated would be an understated way to describe how I felt. Hadn't You called us here, God? Hadn't we given up everything to follow that call? We sold all of our possessions, moved to another country, left our oldest child behind, and said goodbye to so many friends and family.

My faith was dwindling.

The dream God had put in our hearts decades ago still hadn't come to pass. Oh, I know the timing isn't mine to choose. But just a tiny glimpse into God's timeline sure would be nice!

God doesn't always work that way, though. More often, our faith is bolstered, not by a glimpse ahead, but by a deliberate look back.

Where have I already experienced God's faithfulness?

Just like the memorial stones that Joshua and his men pulled out of the river Jordan and placed on the bank after the miracle of passing through dry land, I have my own reminders of God fulfilling promises in my own life.

- Prompting the seller to accept our low offer on the property when he had rejected multiple offers above asking price.
- Sending a buyer for our home at just the right time so we didn't have to find temporary housing before moving out of the country.
- Providing in a myriad of ways throughout the pandemic, allowing us to keep paying our team, though our business was crippled.
- Connecting us to people who have been following our journey and now want to join us in it.
- Opening the door for financing this dream in a way we never thought possible.

The numbers didn't work. But God is faithful.

When the numbers don't work, the future looks dark, and things don't make sense, your faith doesn't have to wane. Take the opportunity to look back and see God's faithful hand cradling you through the highs and the lows.

Because God is faithful, I have faith.



f a i t h : a place to belong

In her story “A Different Christmas”, Susan Sieloff Bunker tells of Sue, a young woman cast out of her home by an uncaring mother, left to fend for herself, withdrawn into a shell, having become a vagabond of the foster care system – always wanting to be “one of the family” wherever she lived. . . but it just never seemed to “work out.” Sue had learned to not trust anyone and to never dare to get close to anyone because a next move could be just a moment away.

Things had been different since she moved in with the Kleffners though – it really seemed like they wanted her to feel like “one of the gang”. Mom Kleffner even spent hours talking with Sue about the great questions of life, but they never really talked about Sue’s place in the family. Sue was afraid to ask and afraid that the day would come when she would be just another memory.

The thing that reminded her most of her guest status was a family set of wooden napkin rings. Each family member had a brown wooden ring with his or her name painted on it, but Sue always got the plain, leftover one. When it was her turn to set the table, she never used those napkin rings, and she was sure no one noticed.

Christmas at the Kleffners was different from most of the places she had lived – they celebrated the birth of Christ, gathering as a family by the fireplace on Christmas Eve for the familiar reading from Luke, and then going to midnight mass. The next morning it was a madhouse as all eight kids dumped out their Christmas stockings and sorted through the little serendipities spilling out onto the floor. Their presents were simple little necessities – toiletries for the older kids, candy and little toys for the younger ones.

Sue had emptied her sock, too, and gone through the contents when she noticed something stuck in the toe. She reached in and worked it loose. It was a brown, wooden ring with SUE painted in big red letters. She sat, turning it over in her hand with her head tilted so that no one could see the tears. It was a gift she couldn’t have asked for; a gift that helped her experience the love that had been missing from so many Christmases past. When she finally looked up, blinking away the tears, she saw Mom Kleffner, smiling at her knowingly. Sue clenched her napkin ring tightly and smiled back. It was Christmas, and she really belonged somewhere – it was the greatest gift she’d ever been given.



Lord, thank you for making a place for me at your Table. While there was no place for you on a Christmas night, help me to prepare a place for more and more of You in my life this Christmas. Amen.

2022
advent
DEVOTIONAL

week three

Joy

joy /joi/
a feeling of great
pleasure and happiness



lasting JOY



We were in a long line at the airport, and the guy next to me asked what I did for a living.

"I'm a youth pastor," I said.

"Hey, whatever makes you happy," the guy said. "That's the goal, right?"

"Oh, gosh," I thought. "I hope that's not the goal."

Surely the goal is something deeper and lovelier. Something less ephemeral. The pursuit of happiness is as American as it gets, but that seems to be shooting too low. When I picture the people I admire, they do smile a lot, but calling it happiness seems to sell it short. There's something more substantial in the warmth and radiance of these people.

Maybe that's why scripture gives us the word "joy." Joy has substance. Joy lasts. Ironically, when I think of the joyful people in my life, they don't seem to get joy by pursuing it. Nor does it seem to drop in their laps. Instead, they seem to pursue God and the things God loves – and joy is the ambient light that emanates from that sort of living.

If you search the Bible from head to toe, you will find the word "happiness" about ten times. The word "donkey" gets more play than happiness. But look for "joy," and that's another story. Joy shows up over 400 times. If we look at the words that surround joy, we start to get a feel for where it comes from. As often as not, joy shows up in the same sentence as words like "sacrifice" and "affliction" and "generosity." In fact, if I think of the joyful people I know, they don't seem to spend a lot of energy trying to make themselves happy, but they do spend a lot of time making others happy.

Joy also rubs shoulders with faithfulness.

"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." (Galatians 5:22-23 NLT)

"Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you." (Psalm 5:11 NLT)

I just discovered this great line from Psalm 4 that draws a pretty stark comparison between happiness and joy:

"You have put more joy in my heart than they have when their grain and wine abound." (Psalm 4:7 NLT)

So this Christmas, I do wish you happiness - like pine needles sparkling on a bonfire. But more than that, I wish you joy - like the big, glowing logs underneath.



JOY in a cape

My daughter's allergies have flared up again, so along with that comes a runny nose and a lot of sneezing. Since she's just shy of three years old she just recently learned how to blow her nose. It's a big celebration around here when she blows her nose. She places one arm on her hip, throws the other one up high in the sky and with pure joy and delight exclaims, **"I'M A SUPERHERO FOR BLOWING MY NOSE!"**

Then takes off sprinting throughout the house with one arm raised valiantly. We all smile with delight watching our snot blowing superhero daughter run proudly around the house for doing the simple task of blowing her nose.

My daughter reminds me to find joy in every moment. Even in those runny nose moments, she keeps me in check. She's watching to see how I'll react in certain situations and if I'll choose joy.

The people we shepherd are watching us, too. Those within our church contexts are wondering if we're going to respond with joy instead of anger when things don't go right for us.

Fullness of joy, my friend.

All thanks to Jesus, who is our superhero. He came to rescue us from sin and rebellion and He, in His goodness, offers us His joy to delight in. Whether it's a runny nose, a deep loss, or a disappointment, remember:

The Psalmist says,
You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 16:11 (ESV)

THERE IS JOY FOR YOU IN JESUS.

You, too, can have a childlike faith and bring a smile to others by practicing joy, even when life is less than perfect. Go ahead, put one hand on your hip and throw that other hand up in the air and run fast and free in the goodness and joy of Jesus. Joy is deeply contagious, and you can offer hope and joy to someone today by letting your light shine out to them.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Philippians 4:4 (NIV)

Lord may your light shine in me. I want to be a person full of joy, because you offer it for me each day through Jesus. No matter what life brings my way I pray I might choose joy so that I can be your hope to every person that I meet, in Jesus name, Amen.

prayer





Speak JOY

My wife and I have a teenage daughter who, thankfully, is a delight to be around. She is so much fun and great to engage with. But this has not always been the case. When she was just a few years old, my wife and I thought we might be in for some tumultuous years. Our daughter was frequently agitated, hard to deal with, and quite difficult in many ways. We had heard that often the personality your kids develop in their younger years would simply be amplified in their teenage years. If that was true, we were going to be in trouble. We jokingly said we had an emerging “mean girl” on our hands.

We were also learning a lot about parenting and how to lead our kids in the direction we wanted them to go. We decided to be intentional in the way we were dealing with our daughter, and we started to use a word when we talked to and about her. The word was “joy.” We were going to speak joy into her and her life, and we were going to trust God as she grew and developed. We believed that God could bring her to a place where she was truly joyful and lived her life from that place. Years later, we believe that speaking joy over her and putting her into God’s hands has had a real influence on who she is today. When I think about her, I smile. She is full of a joy that comes from God, and it now naturally spills out of her onto others.

If we’re honest, we all want to have joy in our lives. Our daughter did not want to grow up grumpy. She was just stuck in some patterns, and she didn’t know better. As we move through life, we often chase a faux joy that we call happiness. We look to be happy in our relationships, happy in our jobs, happy with our financial situations, and we look to achieve happiness through our experiences in life. At some point, we learn that this type of happiness won’t fill us up in the way we were meant to be filled. **Only Jesus can do that.**

Jesus is Emmanuel, God with us, and we celebrate His entrance into the world at Christmas. Not only has Jesus come to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God, but in **John 10:10**, **Jesus says that He has come that we may “have life and have it to the full.”** That sounds like a joyful life to me. We have the opportunity each and every day to both embrace the joy He gives and extend that joy to those around us. We can both receive and speak joy. When we receive this joy ourselves, we can live a life of peace that can only be sourced from God. When we speak this joy to and over others, God can move in incredible ways in them.

Do you need to take some time to embrace the joy that God offers through Jesus? Are there areas of your life where you need to speak joy? Are there people or situations that you need to intentionally offer to God and ask Him to take control and change the tone?

Living in the joy of Jesus and speaking this joy can truly make a difference and lead you to the full life that God has for you. Take some time to meditate on how you can live in the joy of Jesus and **let that joy spill out of you as you walk with Him.**

JOY: lining the manger

LUKE 2:6-7 (NRSVUE)

While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

Laura and I were reflecting on the bills from last Christmas, amazed once again at our extravagance and our unnatural willingness to incur debt so that the “Ghost of Christmas Trash” could visit yet once again. It’s not that we MEAN to be so consumer-ish; we just get caught up in the hustle and bustle of the season.

Isn’t it so easy to get caught up in the mad dash for Christmas?!? At first we are entranced by tinkling bells, Christmas carols (*even the ones sung before Thanksgiving*), and the sight of candy canes. But before it comes and goes, many times we find that we’re living to get it over and done with! It seems to take control and eventually wipes us out – financially, physically, totally. . . that is, if we’re unprepared.

The best preparation for Christmas does not take place in the cleaning of houses and the buying and wrapping of gifts. It doesn’t take place in the decorating of trees and the baking of cookies and cakes. The BEST way to prepare for Christmas is to “line the manger,” i.e. to prepare a place for the Christ child to live amongst us, once again.

This Christmas, how will you prepare to receive the gift of a Christ you cannot buy?

In the first chapter of Luke, the angel Gabriel appears to Zechariah, the soon-to-be father of John the Baptist. Gabriel describes the coming work of John and summarizes it in verse 17, that John will work “...to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”

Will WE be ready? Or will we pray that it will simply be over and done?

PRAYER

Slow me down, Lord, and show me how to “line the manger” in this season of Advent, that the gift of Christ may come even to me. Amen.

Christmas JOY

Wide-eyed delight
At the first glimpse
The child takes
Of the lights and sparkle
Christmas morning

Eager anticipation
Of the child's reaction
Brings the same delight
To her parents on
Christmas morning

A difficult journey
With meager accommodations
Is forgotten with
The birth of our Savior
That first Christmas morning

Wonder and celebration
Burst from the heavens
As angels proclaim
Good News for all
Christmas morning

Wide-eyed delight
As the Father beholds
The redemption of His children
Through the Savior born
Christmas morning

Eager anticipation
Of His children's response
To the ultimate outpouring of love
Given to you and I
Christmas morning

May this Christmas season bring you the ultimate JOY.

2022
advent
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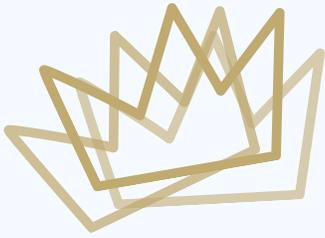
week four

Peace

peace /pēs/
freedom from disturbance;
tranquility



Prince of PEACE



In the Bible, the word peace takes on a few different meanings.

The Hebrew word for peace, as it is translated from Isaiah 14:27, is **shalom** (*shaw-lome*). In this translation, shalom means **completeness** or **soundness**.

So for Isaiah, Jesus is the Prince of **Peace**. The Prince of **Completeness**. The Prince of **Soundness**. In other words, Jesus is the ruler of our completeness. The foundation of our wholeness.

In John 14:27, peace in the Greek is translated as **eirene** (*i-ray-nay*). I read one scholar define eirene as **“the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, fearing nothing from God and content with its purpose on earth.”** In essence, the translation in the Gospel of John most likely means “complete” as well.

This changes the impact of the text a bit, doesn't it?

During the Christmas rush, it can be so easy to take the peace of Jesus for granted. It can be easy to see peace as a nice slogan and familiar theme for how we are to feel during this season. But peace is more than a feeling. More than a theme. Peace is our reminder that we are complete beings, made whole by the grace of God.

When we remember that we are already complete, we are freed up from trying to make a perfect Christmas happen or go broke by overspending or burn out by over-doing. This season, create space to welcome the peace of Christ into your everyday life. Even into the hustle and bustle of Christmas.

Take a pause during your day.
Close your eyes.

Inhale a deep breath, while visualizing the words,
“**I am complete in Christ**”

Exhale through your mouth, while visualizing the words,
“**The peace of Christ is with me**”

Repeat as much as needed.

Isaiah 9:6 (NIV)

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.

John 14:27 (NIV)

**Peace I leave
with you; my
peace I give you.
I do not give to
you as the world
gives. Do not let
your hearts be
troubled and do
not be afraid.**

Completeness I leave
with you; my
completeness I give
you. I do not give to
you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts
be troubled and do
not be afraid.

And he will be
called Wonderful
Counselor, Mighty
God, Everlasting
Father, Prince of
Completeness.

prayer

**Creator God, thank you for
the opportunity to live in
your peace and find my
wholeness in you. Amen.**

heavenly PEACE



*Silent night,
holy night,
all is calm,
all is bright.*

yea, right!

Don't get me wrong, I love this song. It communicates all that is beautiful and sacred of the Christmas season. But, if I'm honest, I think sometimes the chaos of the season causes me to miss the peaceful tranquility of the season.

Being a mom to my three beautiful kids is one of my greatest joys. I have also served in children's ministry for over 20 years. Seriously, I'm surrounded by kids. As a parent and ministry leader, my role is to teach the children. But, as you've probably experienced too, God often uses the children to teach me. Take Christmas, for instance.

As soon as the calendar hits December 1, the countdown begins, "24 days until Christmas!! 10 days til Christmas!!" the kids exclaim with excitement. I say the same thing in my head, but *my* tone is kin to dismay seasoned with a bit of anticipated exhaustion—a big confession for someone who has joyfully served in ministry for so long.

Why the difference in my view of the Christmas season vs. the children's?

I believe the difference is their anticipation of everything Christmas brings, while I am weighed down by the expectations. It's not just the gifts children anticipate. Kids view the entire Christmas season with such anticipation and joy.

Maybe this is why Jesus tells us we should become like little children.

I love everything about the Christmas season leading up to the celebration of the greatest gift, Jesus coming to earth to offer us salvation. Somewhere along the way in my adult world, however, I filled the season with more expectation than anticipation. Not the expectation of the coming of Jesus, but the expectation of overfilled calendars and to-do lists. I don't know about you, but between regular ministry schedules and the expectations of extra Christmas festivities, parties, shows, and family obligations, nothing feels peaceful, calm, or reflective.

Then I read through Luke 2 and a different picture emerges.

**READ
Luke 2:4-19**

Mary, a new mother, full of anticipation of things to come, but her expectations were certainly not met:

We find her...

- Not where she expected to give birth, but in a barn.
- Not surrounded by family, but surrounded by animals and strangers.
- Not in calm or quiet to welcome this new child, but in a bustling city that was so full, there was no place for Mary and Joseph to stay.

And yet, Mary has a still, quiet moment where she sits back and takes it all in. After the birth of Jesus and in the presence of shepherds we read, "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."

I read this verse and take a deep breath as I experience the peace of this moment. For me, this verse is the epitome of the words we sing in "Silent Night". A heavenly peace, pondering and treasuring up Jesus.

Can you see Mary? Surrounded by strangers and animals, and far from home. Can you see her as she looks at her child? I can. I see her sitting back quietly, listening to the amazement of all who heard about the birth of Jesus, taking it all in. She quietly praises God as she treasures all that Jesus will mean to the world.

What a reminder that expectations are typically not the most important part of the story! It's our anticipation, not our expectations, that allows us to stop, be still, and reflect on the peace that surpasses all understanding brought to us by the Prince of Peace.

rest and PEACE

My wife and I are in the stage of life now where we get to relive the magic of Christmas through our son. And, boy, is it special.

This will come as no surprise to you, but there is a stark difference between how my son experiences Christmas and how most adults experience Christmas. As I have grown up, I have learned three things about Christmas that my son does not yet understand.

As I look at these realities, I can't help but wrestle with the idea that this is not how it was supposed to be. The prophet Isaiah was clear that Christmas was about the coming of the Prince of Peace. But many times, Christmas is anything but peaceful.

As I look at these realities, I can't help but wrestle with the idea that this is not how it was supposed to be. The prophet Isaiah was clear that Christmas was about the coming of the Prince of Peace. But many times, Christmas is anything but peaceful.

As I have found myself in seasons where I do not have a spirit of peace and rest, there are two questions I ask myself. I pray these are helpful for you, this Advent Season.



1 Have you surrendered the thing that is stealing your rest and peace?

Even the most devoted Christ followers struggle to surrender the things that are closest to them at times. I think part of the challenge, especially around the holidays, is that we struggle to surrender things out of fear that God does not understand them.

Here are some things that commonly steal our peace around the holidays but that He understands, deeply:

- Dysfunctional Family** / *Jesus was not accepted in his hometown (John 4:44), and his family thought he was crazy (Mark 3:20-21)*
- Illness & Loss of loved ones** / *Jesus lost his friend and wept, He was so sad (John 11)*
- Broken Relationships** / *One of Jesus' 12 closest friends betrayed him, resulting in his crucifixion (Luke 22:1-4)*
- Financial Problems** / *Jesus was homeless (Matthew 8:20)*
- Loneliness** / *Jesus felt forsaken by God (Matthew 27:46)*

2 Who is God?

So often, the moments that I can't find peace are the moments I lose sight of who God is and how He has shown himself in the past. In those moments, if I can stop and remind myself of those things, it helps put everything else back in perspective. Here is my standard list of reminders of who God is:

- HE IS THE GOD WHO IS**
- infinite** (Psalm 147:5)
- all powerful** (Psalm 33:6)
- omnipresent** (Psalm 139:7)
- good** (Psalm 34:8)
- gracious** (Psalm 145:8)
- loving** (1 John 4:7-8)
- holy** (Revelation 4:8)

So if your Advent season is lacking the peace and rest that come from the Prince of Peace, spend some time today with your Heavenly Father. He created you and loves you dearly. Wrestle with the two questions and listen, as He guides you into a place of peace.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

unthwarted P E A C E

The world can be a dark place. We often don't understand it. A lot of things happen that are anything but good. In the face of life's deep darkness, it can be hard to see how anything good can come of it.

In the *Silmarillion* (*the Genesis story of the Hobbit and Lord of the Rings*) there's a creation account of that world where God, called Eru Iluvatar, creates a beautiful world, only to have it vandalized by a Satan-figure, named Melkor. Melkor gloats in the thought that he undermined all that God made good and I think our world can feel that way.

But Eru answers Melkor.

Listen to how Cory Olsen, "The Tolkien Professor," summarizes what Eru says:

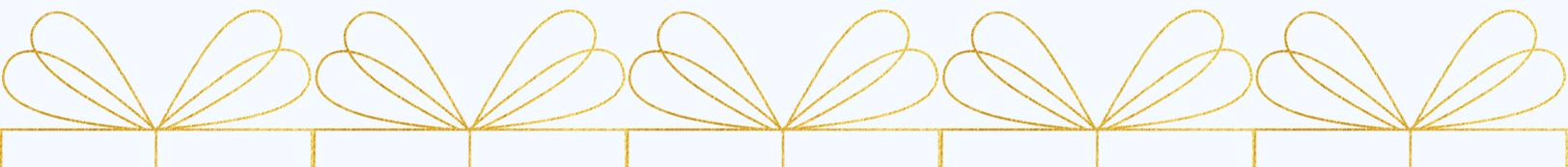
There is nothing you can do that will ultimately mess up my plan, and you will find that everything you have done will only end up contributing to the ultimate glory and beauty of my creation.

That last line really strikes me. How can "all things" (*to use the Romans 8 phrase*) – even evil things, ultimately contribute to God's glory and the beauty of his creation?

Then I think of valor. Sacrifice. Bravery. Compassion. Forgiveness. Mercy. Patience. Unconditional love. Aren't these the things we hold most dear? Aren't they what move us most? Yet, all of these are born out of life's darkness. The working of good in response to the presence of evil. Even the worst evil – killing Jesus, God's own Son – becomes a triumph over darkness and redemption for the world.

No. Not even the worst evil can undermine God's final plan. And even the worst evil will unwittingly display God's light. God works for good even out of the worst darkness. The darkness does not understand it and the darkness cannot overcome it. And the darkness flails in futility before God's ultimate plan.

**MAY THE GOODNESS OF GOD SHINE
LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS AND BRING YOU
PEACE, JOY, AND HOPE THIS SEASON.**



Christmas Eve

PEACE

You came to this devotion looking for a reflection on peace. I have a Christmas Eve story for you, but I'm not sure that it is a story of peace. In fact, it may be closer to war. Ok, that's a little dramatic, but when I was a teenager, my pastor tried to have a Christmas Eve service without the Silent Night candles finale.

This may not be a major tradition for you, but it was the only way of doing Christmas Eve that I had ever known. At the end of the service, everyone would walk down the center aisle singing Silent Night. Someone would turn off almost all the lights as we carried our unlit candles to the front, receiving the light from the pastor. Once your wick was lit, we'd fan out to the left and right to form a big circle around the outside edge of our sanctuary. The cherry on top was looking around the nearly 100-person circle formed around the sanctuary walls with tears streaming down the cheeks of about a third of us. One of those cheeks MAY have belonged to a young teenage version of myself. My mother's cheeks were most certainly glistening in the candlelight each year.

But then there was that one year when Pastor David and the choir director decided that we would do a cantata for Christmas Eve. The program had Silent Night earlier in the service so they decided we would skip the candlelight ending for one year. I don't know exactly how I found out about this master plan, but I do remember my response. ***"What?!?! Have they lost their minds?!?!"***

Since it was just 10 minutes before an early December Sunday worship service, the plan I conceived was simple: I convinced the whole youth group to use the church's new "prayer request cards" to request the return of the Christmas Eve candles. We each filled out as many as we could grab from the pews before the offering was collected. The result was two poor ushers juggling overflowing offering plates to the front of the church, each with its own awkward pile of folded blue prayer cards. As Pastor David witnessed their struggle coming down the center aisle, he turned his head sharply to meet my eyes with a stare that felt like it was meant to burn off my salvation. Mercifully, the fiery eyes cooled to an eye-roll and then a smile. Weeks later, the worship committee announced that the Christmas Eve Cantata would be ending with our traditional Silent Night candles ritual.

Several years later, I returned to the church on Christmas Eve during a college winter break. They were still doing the candles. When I got up to the front of the line to receive my bit of Christ's light, Pastor David pulled back his candle so I had to really lean in to get my candle lit. As I did so, Pastor David smiled, leaned forward, and whispered in my ear, "You know, we are doing this just for you." I said, "I know, Pastor David. And I love this church for it."

This isn't a great theological story. This is a story of a high school church brat. This is also the story of a little church that allowed the youth to speak and be heard. I was spoiled all those years ago. I have felt the church and God spoiling me in many ways since then. I guess the theological version of getting spoiled is receiving grace. Grace makes me feel loved and that love brings me peace.



2022
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week five

Light

light /līt/
the natural agent that
stimulates sight and makes
things visible





God with us LIGHT

I remember one December 25th so vividly. It was the early 80's and a hard time for our little/huge family. We were flat broke with no money for extra anything. Feeding 7 kids (*from the bounties of a church's Christmas dinner box and other help from a local food pantry*) was a challenge. Our car had been decorating the driveway for a few weeks in all its inoperative glory. Christmas decorations were minimal, no cookie baking happened, and thank God – the kids had grandparents to fill in the gift-giving.

I know. This is starting to sound like a Dickens novel or at least a sad holiday country song.

Steve was sad. Being the sensitive soul he is, he felt he'd let his family down with the sparseness of it all. The kids were at their grandparents' for the afternoon and evening.

It was just us.

A gentle snow began to fall. It was stunning; we sat on the couch all afternoon watching and wondering. We drank coffee and had beans with leftover ham for Christmas dinner. (*Steve still talks about that meal to this day.*)

Life, kids, what's next, our blessings, and more were on the menu of discussion. Steve opened his Bible that snowy, holy day and read me Scriptures about the birth of the Christ Child. He'd not done that before for me and I'll never forget it. Christ was with us that December 25 and we were so blessed by the day God put together for us.

Now my sweet husband doesn't have the energy to remember much. But if you ever have the pleasure of sitting by his bedside and ask him his favorite holiday memory, he'll tell you this same story. Emmanuel – God with Us – then and now. Always.

Merry Christmas

read
Luke
2:1-20



LIGHT: take off the sunglasses

Everything about Jesus shines a light on our lives if we allow it. Jesus' love, compassion, grace, wisdom, power, and transformation work.

How often do we shield our eyes when we encounter a bright light or hide our face to protect ourselves from the scorching sun?

While we may be tempted to shield ourselves from His light, we must remember that this light is healing, not scorching.

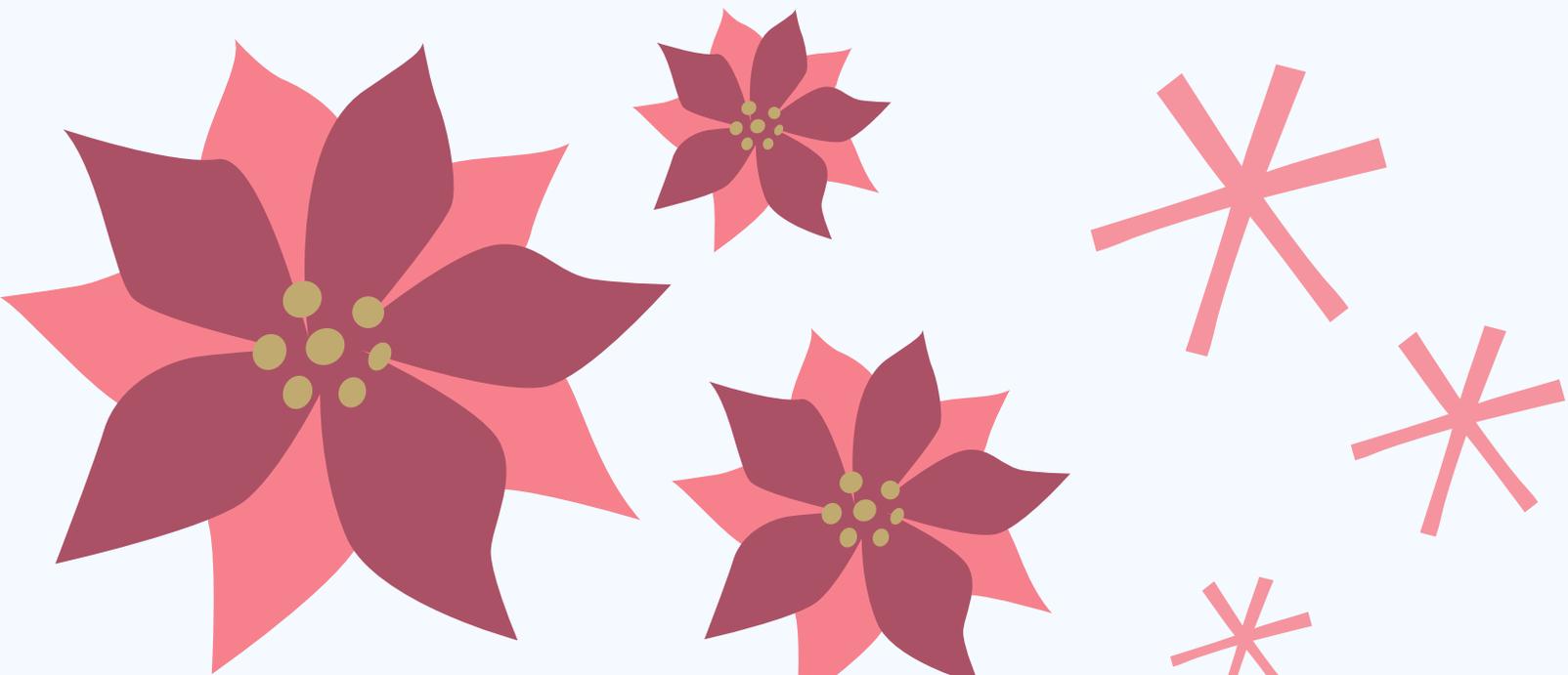
The Light will change us, if we let it.

WHAT PARTS OF YOU ARE YOU SHIELDING FROM THE LIGHT?

Sometimes we shield ourselves out of fear, stubbornness, shame, or just because we can't imagine what transformation this Light will bring to us.

I challenge you to remove your sunglasses, your visor, or whatever is standing between you and the Light and let it shine for your grace, your growth, and your transformation into God's image.

IN HIM WAS LIFE; AND
THE LIFE WAS THE LIGHT
OF MEN. JOHN 1:4 (KJV)



LIGHT

in action



J O H N 8 : 1 2 (ESV)

“Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

Imagine a national celebration taking place – families exchanging gifts and food baskets, songs being sung, instruments being played, and people dancing and having a great time. As part of the celebration, four golden lamp stands are lit, each 75 feet tall. They shine so brightly, they illuminate the entire city – of Jerusalem!

This celebration is called the Festival of Tabernacles. It provides valuable context for Jesus’ statement, “I am the light of the world”. Jesus truly is the light of our world, and with that declaration He also promises that whoever follows Him will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

As I reflect on Jesus’ words, I think about three things that light does in a natural sense that Jesus does for us in a spiritual sense.

CHASES AWAY DARKNESS

Darkness is often associated with fear and the unknown. It acts like a bully, but it’s really just the absence of light. When light shows up, darkness has no choice but to run away. When the enemy tries to remind me of all the dark areas in my life, the Holy Spirit reminds me of the love, grace, and mercy of Jesus! His light chases all of those dark thoughts away!

ENABLES US TO SEE

I didn’t know anything about driving in the dark until I drove in rural New York. As expensive as it is to live there, can’t they afford at least one street light every 1,000 yards? Praise God for headlights because otherwise you can’t see a thing! In the same way, I was completely blind to most of the sin in my life, headed for a collision with eternal separation from God until Jesus. The Light of the World illuminated truth to me and by His Holy Spirit He has enabled me to see sin, righteousness, and judgment.

BRINGS ABOUT JOY

As I mentioned earlier, darkness is often associated with fear, but light is often associated with hope, happiness, and joy! A dark, gloomy day doesn’t generally inspire us, while a bright sunny day is very motivating. Knowing that I’m walking with Jesus, the Light of the World, and knowing that His Holy Spirit is an ever-present companion gives me unexplainable joy. Even when circumstances would suggest hopelessness, the Light of the World always gives me hope.

I pray that during this season, you’ll invite the Light of the World to chase away your darkness, enable you to see truth, and bring you unspeakable joy. And as you exchange gifts this season, I pray you will accept the always available gift of eternal life made available through Jesus Christ.

whole family LIGHT

NEW YEAR CHALLENGE

Check out one new place each month with the goal of meeting - *and getting to know* - new kinds of people.

Prayer time at my sister's house is one of my favorite times. With both of us having been camp counselors and working with children and youth for years, we're all too familiar with the creative ways to excite kids to pray. So right now at my sister's house, there's a 7-year old and a 4-year old and almost every prayer is a "tag prayer."

Tag prayers go like this: the first person prays then closes their prayer with a "Tag ____!" and they fill-in-the-blank with the person they want to go next. The prayer keeps moving until everyone has had the opportunity to pray or pass. (*Yes, you're allowed to pass. You just can't pass all the time.*)

When my niece was younger, she really liked to go last. And when I was there for prayer, and her usual family of four expanded, she would end prayer time with, "*And thank you God for my whole, whole family. In Jesus' name, amen.*"

"MY WHOLE, WHOLE FAMILY"

The first time she said it, I repeated it quizzically and my brother-in-law said, "*that's what she says when more than just us are around. Otherwise it's, 'and thank you God for my family.'*"

This kid – this kid has known her entire life that she's loved by more people than just those she lives with. And, for now, the people who come with titles (*Aunt Nay, Pop Pop, etc.*) make up her "whole, whole family."

The joy my heart experiences with those four little words is indescribable. Because what *I* know, and what *you* know, and what, I pray, my favorite 7-year old continues to know, is what Jesus knew. **READ: MATTHEW 12:46-50**

This story holds one of my *favorite* responses from Jesus because, first, he gets a bit sassy by rejecting the premise of the prompt and responding with a question and second, He makes it abundantly clear who makes up his whole, whole family.

Think about what good news this is! In a world being defined by preferential isolation and a multitude of shallow connections, Jesus says, "*No, wait! What I have to offer is so much more! It's a whole, whole family!*"

For those who sit in the despair of loneliness, the relational distance mental health struggles can create, the darkness that accompanies rejection or mistreatment... what good news the Light of Christ can be! That there's a whole, whole family, much bigger than some have ever encountered or believe to be possible!

And we who know Jesus, we get to be that light, guiding the way. We get to open our arms and our hearts and our homes and our churches and we get to be that good news to anyone and everyone seeking and searching. **We get to be the whole, whole family somebody - everybody - needs.**



music & LIGHT

"The best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear."

Elf

QUESTION

Do you think the writers of the movie 'Elf' knew their words would be quoted by Christmas-lovers of all ages?

Probably not. But, then again, who does? As we dive into scripture, read the analyses of academics, or share the stories of our faith with others, it's quite remarkable what phrases get passed along generation after generation and which verses stay with us.

As Advent draws to a close and the celebration of Christmas fully commences, the Psalmist captures a sentiment of the heart frequently experienced this time of year. The author probably had no idea that centuries after these words were scribed, followers of a rabbi named Jesus would be considering their truth. Yet, consider we must! For the Lord has come! Unto us a Savior has been given! Hallelujah!

READ: PSALM 98
then consider...

Psalm 30:11-12 (MSG)

You did it: you changed wild lament into whirling dance; You ripped off my black mourning band and decked me with wildflowers.

**I'm about to burst with song;
I can't keep quiet about you. God, my God,
I can't thank you enough.**

- **Sing** is the first word of the first verse. If you love to sing, why? If you don't love to sing, why - and how does this resonate with you?
- Who does the psalmist encourage us to sing to? And why does the psalmist encourage us to sing? (*make a list.*)
- Verse 4 brings new response options to the table. Think on each one. When was the last time you interacted with the Lord in any of these ways?
- What's **light** (*good news*) from the last verses that stands out to you?

PRAYER

Lord? I pray we can't keep quiet about you! I pray all those who know you can't help but burst with song and shout with joy and lean in to every opportunity we get to talk about YOU. *amen*

2022

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To connect with any of the contributing consultants in this resource, please visit our team page at ministryarchitects.com/ourteam

Thank you for spending part of your Advent journey with us,

Ministry Architects

