

# Advent

A COLLECTION OF DEVOTIONALS FROM  
CROSSPOINTE CHURCH



# Hope

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL  
KELLY CHESNUT

## Scripture Reading

Noah was God's friend (which was odd in those days because no one else was). Noah listened to God. He talked to God. He just loved being with God, like you do with your best friend.

"Noah," God said. "Things have gone wrong. People have filled my world with hate instead of love. They are destroying themselves...And each other...and my world. I must stop them. First, we'll build an ark." (Do you know how to build an ark? Neither did Noah. But God knew and he would show him.)

"A storm is coming," God said to Noah. "But I will rescue you. I promise." The storm was going to wash away all the hate and sadness and everything that had gone wrong, and make the world clean again. God had thought up a way to keep Noah safe, but Noah would have to trust God and do exactly what God told him. **THE JESUS STORYBOOK BIBLE**

*I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit. ROMANS 15:13, NLT*

## Reflection

What is something special that you've had to wait a long time for? Maybe a birthday or Christmas present, or a trip to somewhere special. How long did you have to wait? Did you do anything to make the wait go by faster? For example, did you make a "countdown calendar" and mark off every day that passed? How did you feel when you finally got what you hoped for?

Have an adult read the following commentary below.

Noah and his family were in the ark for a loooooong time! They had to wait for the rain to stop - and that took 40 days and 40 nights! Then they had to wait for the water to go down and for the earth to appear so they could live on dry land again—that took another 338 days! Noah and his family were on the ark—with a lot of stinky animals—for 378 days! That’s a loooooong time to wait for something!

Ask: What do you think it felt like for Noah and his family to wait all that time?

They had a lot to do while they waited—just imagine feeding and caring for all those animals! After a while, Noah sent out a dove to see if the water had gone down. But the dove came back because it couldn’t find any place to land since the water still covered the earth, including the mountains and trees.

Ask: How do you think Noah felt when the dove came back without anything to show that the waters were going down and the earth was drying up?

Another week passed—seven whole days!—and Noah sent the dove out again. This time it came back with an olive leaf in its mouth. That meant the water was going down and the trees could be seen. And more importantly, it meant that they could leave the boat soon!

Ask: How do you think Noah might have felt seeing the dove bring back a leaf?

Noah must have felt excited to see that green olive leaf! For the first time in many, many months, Noah was filled with hope that their time on the ark would soon be over! But he knew he had to wait a bit longer still. Noah waited another seven days and sent out a dove for the third time. And this

time, the dove didn't come back! That meant the water was gone and the earth was drying up. The dove was able to find a place to rest and make a nest. But Noah and his family waited in the ark for two more months before the land was dry enough for them to walk on!

Ask: Noah and his family were about to leave the ark—after more than a year! What do you think they looked forward to the most?

Can you imagine how excited Noah and his family were to run around outside? Hike the nearby mountains, skip through fields of wildflowers, toss a ball around, watch the animals run around and play... They had a long time to think about the things they hoped to see and do again! And every day that passed brought Noah and his family closer to the day they could leave the ark and settle on dry land again. This must have given Noah and his family great hope!

Ask: What does the word "hope" mean to you?

In the Bible, the word for "hope" has two meanings: 1) "to trust" and 2) "joyful and confident expectation of eternal salvation". Kind of hard to understand, huh? This means that because God is good and perfect, we can trust Him to do all that He has promised.

"Waiting" and "hope" are two words that go hand-in-hand. As we wait for God to fulfill His promises, we are filled with joy and confidence because God always comes through! Even when the wait is long and hard.

Noah watched and waited for God to fulfill His promise. And no matter how long it took, he could wait with joy and hope in God because he trusted God.

Advent means "the arrival of a notable person, thing, or event". For Christians, Advent is a time of celebrating the arrival of the most important person the world has ever known—Jesus! The Bible tells us that Jesus will



come again. Today, just like Noah, we too are waiting and preparing for God to fulfill His promise of Jesus' return. And because we know God, we can trust Him to do this—in His perfect timing!

## Prayer

*Close in prayer by praying Romans 15:13—Lord God, You are our source of hope! Thank You for filling us with joy and peace that comes as we trust in You. May our lives overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit, as we wait for Jesus' return.*

## Song

As a family, sing (or listen to) *Joy to the World* to celebrate the first advent of Christ. Listen to Chris Tomlin's song, *Even So Come*. *Explain any hard words or phrases and discuss what it means to be a "bride waiting for her groom, we'll be a church ready for You".*

### ***EVEN SO COME***

*All of creation  
All of the earth  
Make straight a highway  
A path for the Lord  
Jesus is coming soon*

*Call back the sinner  
Wake up the saint  
Let every nation shout of Your fame  
Jesus is coming soon*

*Like a bride waiting for her groom  
We'll be a Church ready for You  
Every heart longing for our King  
We sing  
Even so come  
Lord Jesus, come*

*Even so come  
Lord Jesus, come*

*There will be justice  
All will be new*

*Your name forever  
Faithful and true  
Jesus is coming soon*

*Like a bride waiting for her groom  
We'll be a Church ready for You  
Every heart longing for our King  
We sing  
Even so come  
Lord Jesus, come*

*Even so come  
Lord Jesus, come*

*So we wait  
We wait for You  
God, we wait  
You're coming soon*

*So we wait  
We wait for You  
God, we wait  
You're coming soon*

*Like a bride waiting for her groom  
We'll be a Church ready for You  
Every heart longing for our King  
We sing*

*Even so come  
Lord Jesus, come*

Publishing: © 2015 sixsteps Songs // Worship Together Music // S.D.G. Publishing (BMI) (Admin. by CapitolCMGPublishing.com) // Vistaville Music obo Itself / Go Mia Music / Chrissamsongs Inc. (ASCAP) // Sony/ATV Timber Publishing // Open Hands Music (SESAC)  
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## **Family Activity**

Parents, predetermine a fun Christmas activity that you know your children will love—for example, watching a favorite Christmas movie, decorating cookies together or driving around looking at Christmas lights and ending

with a trip out for ice cream. Whatever you decide, promise your kids that you are going to do something special together to celebrate Advent—something they will love—but don't tell them what or when. Plan for it to happen within the next week—the later the better, as this will remind your kids what it was like for Noah to “wait”. Throughout the week remind them of your promise and give them hints as to what it might be. Let their expectation and excitement grow throughout the week. Use this opportunity to remind them of Noah's “wait” for God's promise to be fulfilled and the joy and hope we have as we wait for God's ultimate promise to be fulfilled—that of Jesus' return!



# Hope

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL  
MARK ANTHONY FERRER

## Scripture

*“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.” - Romans 8:18-25 ESV*

## Devotional

In this ancient letter from the apostle Paul to the church of Corinth, he writes in verse 18, “that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” What do your present sufferings look like right now? They could range from aging to Alzheimer’s, from anxiety to bipolar disorder, from death and dying to depression, from divorce to money problems, what do your present sufferings look like right now? The fallenness of our world has affected your everyday life in innumerable ways. From the moment you woke up this



morning, till the moment you lay your head on your pillow tonight, you will be tempted to find hope in someone or something other than your Creator. But let's not stop here. Let's bring Him into the conversation. Are you listening to the voice of your Creator during your present sufferings? In fact, did you know that God has spoken? He has not left you in the dark, aimlessly grasping your way for the lightswitch. He has spoken. And he has spoken in a clear and compelling way through the Scriptures. But I ask again, are you listening to God's voice during your present sufferings? Are you listening to the Word of God alongside your fellow sufferers as its preached on Sundays? Are you reading the Word of God in those contexts where you are tempted to feel most alone - at the kitchen table, in your bedroom, at your nightstand? And most importantly, have you listened to the Word of God incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ? He is the Word made flesh, God's final and full explanation in the midst of suffering. In fact, Jesus is the One who suffered finally and fully for sin. Have you turned to him by faith for the forgiveness of your sins? If you do, you will never experience the eternal suffering you deserve. He took the suffering of his people, so they would never have to. It's good news for sufferers like you and I. In other words, he's your hope.

But let's move outward. Jesus is the hope of the world. He's not only your hope. He can give your spouse, your kids, your co-worker and your friend hope too. Hope for everyday life and hope for eternal life. How are you walking alongside others during their present sufferings? Furthermore, are you pointing them to God's voice during their present sufferings? You can read the Bible with your spouse. You can listen to a Bible app as it plays Scripture aloud for you. You can read Christian books to your kids. You can meditate on a passage from the Bible with a co-worker. You can memorize a biblical passage with a friend. You can post images of Bible verses on social media. Get creative. Think outside the box. Find tangible and

compelling ways of walking alongside others during their present sufferings with the hope of God's voice. God has indeed, finally and fully spoken in the Scriptures. And Jesus is the center of it all. Let's listen to His voice during our sufferings. Let's walk alongside others in their sufferings and point them to His voice. He's the hope of the world.



# Hope

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL  
JOSIAH POTTER

*“Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.”*

(Luke 12:35-37 ESV)

*“Nothing will come of nothing.”*

Shakespeare

*King Lear*

## THE WORST FOOTBALL PLAYER IN MARYLAND

I don't think I had thought it through when I decided it was a good idea to try out for the junior varsity football team at North Harford High School in the fall of 1997. I had never played football on a team before. I had never been hit by another player. I had never even felt what it was like to put on pads and try to play the game I had seen on television and played for fun in the neighborhood.

Despite the naiveness of my youthful mind, I tried out and made the team. It's not incredibly important to tell you that everyone who tried

out, made the team. All that mattered was that I made the team. It was exciting to dress for games, warm up on the field, and then stand waiting to hear my name called to go into the game. I wasn't very good, and I didn't play much that year, but every time my name was called to enter the game, I was ready. I was ready because I had practiced. I had prepared. And I was waiting.

Waiting is something we often deem as boring. We think of waiting in line at the DMV or the school car line. We envision long lines at Disney World, waiting to meet our favorite characters or take our children to ride their favorite rides. But that isn't the type of waiting that Jesus is talking about in Luke chapter 12. This type of waiting is an active waiting. It's an anticipatory type of waiting. It's the type of waiting I experienced as a young freshman on the football team as I sought my time to enter the game.

Jesus tells His disciples that they are to be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from a wedding feast and to be so prepared that they open the door at once when he knocks. This type of waiting paints a picture of a believer who is looking, who is awake, who is paying attention, like a child at the front window watching every car closely to see if Daddy has come home from work yet.

The truth is, Jesus is coming back and no one knows when, but we do know it's going to be amazing. He's going to come back and make everything that's wrong, right. He's going to undo all our hurt and pain, and wipe every tear from our eyes. This is the event that begs the world to wait expectantly for, and we have the opportunity to wait every day.



## KING LEAR

There are a lot of ways to wait well. The quote above from Shakespeare's King Lear is a simple but profound one. It comes at a point where King Lear is telling his daughter Cordelia that she will gain what she gives as they dialogue about her love for him as her father. The idea is that she will gain nothing if she invests nothing.

Isn't that true about a lot of life? We get what we give? If we eat too much, we'll gain the weight we don't want. If we work out we can see healthy results. If we spend time with our loved ones or friends we see our relationships and trust grow, but if we ignore our loved ones or friends, we can see our relationships suffer. What you invest your time and energy in, yields results to the extent you invested. What if we invested in waiting on Jesus?

The best news about what Jesus has done is that it's finished. We don't need to earn God's approval as we are already approved fully by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. So, it frees us to live our lives in worship and praise and expectant waiting of His return. So, let's take a moment to ask ourselves some questions as we reflect on waiting for Jesus today.

## REFLECTION

1. Am I actively waiting on Jesus today
2. If Jesus came back today, would He find me ready for His return or distracted?
3. What would it look like to live life daily waiting on Him.

## RESPONSE

If your responses to the above questions weren't the greatest, don't beat yourself up. We all have days where we find ourselves waiting expectantly on Jesus and other days where life has us distracted by worry or busyness. There's grace for both days and Jesus isn't more impressed with you on your waiting days versus your non waiting days! Here's a few ways you can wait today.

1. Read Luke chapter 2 either alone or with your family and talk about how excited the shepherds must have been as they went to see the newborn Savior of the world.
2. Take a few minutes to pray and ask God to show you how you can be waiting with hope and expectancy today.
3. The next time you're waiting in line today, instead of pulling out your phone to check social media or text a friend, look around and pray for the people around you in line, that Jesus would save them so that they could begin waiting for His return as well!



# Love

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL  
ORLANDO ASNA

## Scripture Reading

*“Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.” -*

Malachi 3:1-4

## Reflection (Parents)

The book of Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. The content of this book leaves us with a sense of incompleteness, as if the story isn’t finished. That’s because as we know, it wasn’t. Thankfully we can read this portion of the scriptures within the full scope of redemptive history in its correct context and find ultimate hope in the fact that Jesus is coming back once and for all to make all things right through the gospel. As for our passage of meditation we can surely relate to God’s people during this time. During this time, some were keeping the faith and persevering amid being in bondage to the Persians, while others fell away and some were

merely walking through the religious motions. In the midst of our current social and political context we can clearly see some of the same attitudes towards God and His church today as we await the return of the messiah, but praise the Lord He hasn't left us void of hope! We have ultimate hope. Hope not just in the death but the life of Christ. Hope in the one whom through all things were created. Hope in everything Jesus fulfilled for us. During the time of Malachi still centuries away from the incarnation, God gave His people hope in the coming messiah by speaking of the one who would come beforehand to prepare the way for Him "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts." God's Word is true and His promises are sure. Malachi is the last book before the 400 years of silence until we see the fulfillment of these promises through our Lord Jesus Christ in the book of Matthew, when John the Baptist steps into the scene. 400 years! Many lived full lives waiting for the coming messiah and died still anticipating. Their waiting was surely not in vain, God was still at work in their sanctification using this time to purify His people and separate the wheat from the tares. God fulfilled His promises in bringing the Messiah to fulfill the plan set from eternity past to redeem those who would repent and believe and place their faith in the work of Christ. How much more knowing how the story ends should we keep the faith and persevere living every day in light of what Jesus has accomplished through the gospel in such a way that it encourages believers and challenges those who don't believe and communicates to all our hope is not found in our current circumstances but the in our Lord Jesus Christ. As you go through this week remember where your hope is found. Remember Christ's promises. Remember that your salvation is not based on your works but Christ's. As we look back to the birth of Jesus during this season, let us also look forward to His return! Even if we don't



see the fulfillment in its entirety within our lifetime, God's Word is true and we can trust with full confidence and assurance that He will stay true to His Word as He always has and sing with confidence!

## For Children

Read pages 170 - 175 in the Jesus StoryBook bible. The chapter is titled "Get Ready!" and it is a reflection from *Nehemiah 8 - 10, Malachi 1, 3 and 4 and Ezra 7*. It communicates to children the anticipation that God's people had for the coming savior. After reading through the previous reflection in Malachi read this chapter with your children and provide them with the overarching context that this chapter is within redemptive history. If you don't have the Jesus Storybook bible no worries! Simply read Malachi 3:1-4 to them and communicate what it must have meant to have to wait patiently for Jesus to come and what God was teaching His people while they were waiting and how we can apply those things today. Be sure to keep the focus on Jesus!

## Song

### *In Christ Alone*

In Christ alone my hope is found  
He is my light, my strength, my song  
This Cornerstone, this solid ground  
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm  
What heights of love, what depths of peace  
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease  
My Comforter, my All in All  
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, who took on flesh  
Fullness of God in helpless babe

This gift of love and righteousness  
Scorned by the ones He came to save  
'Til on that cross as Jesus died  
The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid  
Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay  
Light of the world by darkness slain  
Then bursting forth in glorious Day  
Up from the grave He rose again  
And as He stands in victory  
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me  
For I am His and He is mine  
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death  
This is the power of Christ in me  
From life's first cry to final breath  
Jesus commands my destiny  
No power of hell, no scheme of man  
Can ever pluck me from His hand  
Till He returns or calls me home  
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand

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## Family Activity

During this time of year, it is common for us to prepare wish lists consisting of the things we want to receive. Even if we don't receive all of these items it is our hope to receive some of them. With Jesus, we have full confidence that we will receive all of the riches he has for us. Instead of a Christmas wish list have everyone in your family make a list by writing down one or two things every day that God has given you (Parents, encourage your children to think outside of material things). At the end of the week after you have made your lists share it with one another during family worship.



# Love

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL  
MELISSA PAREDES

Jesus is our jealous lover who will destroy sin through refinement and judgement both thoroughly and severely. There is in a sense an acceptance we must have in this to carry out the great commission as we trust in Him to do his refining work and judge all.

*"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
for he has visited and redeemed his people  
and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David,  
as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
that we should be saved from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us;  
to show the mercy promised to our fathers  
and to remember his holy covenant,  
the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us  
that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
might serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.  
And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,  
to give knowledge of salvation to his people  
in the forgiveness of their sins,  
because of the tender mercy of our God,  
whereby the sunrise shall visit us from on high*



*to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

**Luke 1:68-79 (ESV)**

Then John went from place to place on both sides of the Jordan River, preaching that people should be baptized to show that they had repented of their sins and turned to God to be forgiven. Isaiah had spoken of John when he said,

*“He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!  
Clear the road for him!  
The valleys will be filled,  
and the mountains and hills made level.  
The curves will be straightened,  
and the rough places made smooth.  
And then all people will see  
the salvation sent from God.”*

**Luke 3:3-6 (NLT)**

**The Promise of Love**

It all started in the beginning, when everything God made was good and perfect. And out of all creation, we—humanity—were made in his image. In the very image of God. But it wasn’t enough for Adam and Eve. They were tempted by the one thing that God had forbidden them to partake of, and in that moment of weakness when they ate of the fruit, sin entered the world. God’s perfect world was marred and tainted—forever. And with that, God had to banish Adam and Eve from the garden.

If that’s where the story ended, we’d likely feel upset and hopeless, outraged even! Where’s the love in this situation?

In that moment, when sin first entered the world, God made a promise—that one day He would redeem us through His own Son, and all things would once again be restored. And that’s where God’s great love is broadcast to mankind for all history, because through this sacrifice, perfect love would be lived out for all mankind. Salvation would be sent from God and the darkness that had entered into the world would once and for all be shattered through His eternal light.

## Preparing the Way

Throughout the Old Testament, God promised His people time and again that He would one day send a Savior who would save them not only from their enemies, but from themselves—from the sin that so easily entangles mankind. In the meantime, we would have to pay the price for our sin.

Near the end of His time on earth, Jesus shared with His disciples, “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33b, NLT). And it’s true—war, famine, poverty, strife, disease, hatred, animosity, racism, and so much more plagues our world as a result of our fallen nature. It would be easy to lose heart, just as Jesus warned against; it would be easy to feel overwhelmed and overcome by the hardships, suffering and horror that we can experience on earth. But hope is not lost, because we have a Savior who came to fulfill God’s promise and the ultimate act of love by laying down His own life so that we might live forever with Him. And we have been given the task to proclaim the fulfillment of that promise to all mankind.

Yes, John the Baptist is the voice “shouting in the wilderness” that we read about in Scripture, preparing people for Jesus’ arrival. But we are that voice, too. As sons and daughters of God, we are commissioned with telling the whole world about His love that is so generously and freely given to all who will receive it.

And that's the reason we celebrate Advent—to not only remember the fulfillment of God's promise to us through the birth of Jesus Christ, but to remind ourselves that there are still people all over the world who haven't yet heard the Good News for themselves. Jesus is the hope of the world, and through Him, the darkness that threatens to overwhelm our souls will be eradicated forever.

## Reflection

Think about the fact that God made you in His own image (Gen. 1:27). You and I, and all of mankind, are made in God's very image! As such, what response does that stir within you?

Within a short period of God creating the world, everything that He deemed to be good became tainted with the weight and darkness of sin. If God hadn't promised to redeem us through a Messiah, we'd be lost for all eternity. How does it make you feel to think about the significance of God's promise, which has been long since been fulfilled by Christ's first advent? Are you struck by the weight of your sin, or do you somehow think that you are deserving of a Savior?

God reveals a lot about his plan for mankind by His promise of a Messiah. And although it would take thousands of years before Jesus was born, God continued to remind His people of that promise. Are you in a season where you are waiting for one of God's promises to be fulfilled in your own life? What might you be learning about God and His plan through this time of waiting?

## Response

As we enjoy the Advent season and get close to Christmas, be mindful of the reason why we celebrate this holiday—not just to enjoy the good foods, fun parties, time with our loved ones, or even the gifts. Rather, we celebrate Christmas as the fulfillment of God’s promise made thousands of years ago.

Pray for yourself and those around you, that you would experience the light and hope of Christ in new ways this Advent season.

## Reminders of Christ’s Love

*This Is Amazing Grace*

*Oh Holy Night*



# Love

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL  
BILL KOLLAR

## Passages for meditation

*Malachi 3:1-4; John 1:14*

## Devotional

John says that Jesus came into the world full of grace and truth (John 1:14). We welcome his grace. Who doesn't enjoy God's undeserved, lavish kindness? But we bristle at the truth he brings into our lives. We don't like to be challenged. We don't like him to point out our faults, shortcomings, and the dark places of our hearts.

Malachi 3:1-4 emphasizes the truth his presence brings into our lives. It purifies us. It refines us. Malachi 3:2 asks who can stand before the refining fire of Jesus' presence. No one can. But here is the beauty of the gospel: Jesus walked through the fire of God's judgment that we deserved so that the divine fire can purify and refine us instead of consume us.

## Reflection

- How has Jesus brought his grace (his undeserved goodness and kindness) into your life in the past week?
- In what ways have you seen yourself bristling in the past week as Jesus has exposed your faults, shortcomings, and the dark places of your heart?

## Response

- What is a step you can take with God's help to be more mindful of the grace Jesus brings into your life?
- What's an area in your life that you sense Jesus wants to refine or purify? What would it look like for you to cooperate with what he wants to do in your life in this area?
- What difference does as you trust Jesus to refine and purify you to know that he experienced the fire of God's judgment on your behalf?

## Creative Tools

- "But Who May Abide the Day of His Coming" from Handel's Messiah
- "He Shall Purify" from Handel's Messiah



## Scripture Reading

*Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. - Hebrews 8:1-2*

The point of the book of Hebrews is that Jesus Christ, God's Son, has not just come to fit into the earthly system of priestly ministry as the best and final human priest, but he has come to fulfill and put an end to that system and to orient all our attention on himself ministering for us in heaven.

The Old Testament tabernacle and priests and sacrifices were shadows. Now the reality has come, and the shadows pass away.

## Reflection

Suppose you and your mom get separated and you panic and don't know which way to go, and you run to the end of an aisle and just before you start to cry, you see a shadow on the floor at the end of the aisle that looks just like your mom. It makes you really happy and you feel hope. But which is better? The happiness of seeing the shadow, or having your mom step around the corner and seeing that it's really her? That's the way it is when Jesus comes to be our High Priest. That's what Christmas is. Christmas is the replacement of shadows with the real thing.

The meaning of Christmas is that the substance belongs to Christ. That is, religious rituals is like a shadow of a great and glorious Person. Let us turn from the shadow and look the Person in the face (2 Corinthians 4:6). My little children keep yourselves from religious idols (1 John 5:21).

2 Corinthians 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:20-21 And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

## Prayer

Advent is for adoring (hoping & waiting) Jesus – It is a season of preparation for that special day when we mark Immanuel's arrival – the coming of our eternal God in frail, human flesh. We pray that God would use this to deepen and sweeten your adoration of Jesus this December and keep Him as the center and greatest treasure of your Christmas season. We adore Jesus above all. Amen

\* Good News of Great Joy Daily Readings for Advent – John Piper Publishing: © 2013





# Joy

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL  
CHRIS DUBOIS

## Scripture

*“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*

When the angels proclaimed the birth of Jesus to the shepherds, it was “good news of great joy that will be for all people” (Luke 2:10). This declaration was given in great joy because it set in motion what was to happen at the cross years later: Jesus dying for our sins. The beauty of the gospel can cause us to live a life of joy no matter what our everyday lives look like. Yet, it doesn’t always work out that easily. The various struggles we face distract us from pursuing Jesus and finding our ultimate joy in him. Earlier this year I went through a period of depression that caused me grief. This grief made me think that joy in Christ wasn’t something I could obtain. However, as the Holy Spirit worked in my heart and mind, I learned what it means to have joy in Christ. This joy is definitely not something temporal, but a common thread in life meant keep our eyes fixed on the cross.

In Psalm 16:11, we learn that in God’s presence there is fullness of joy. That’s an important, but tricky concept to comprehend. It’s hard because you have to first know what it means to enter God’s presence. Entering God’s presence involves consistently seeking after him and growing in your understanding of the gospel. Our response to a deeper grasp of what Jesus did for us on the cross leads to a fullness of joy as we dwell more in his presence. Again though, that’s easier said than done. When I was dealing with my depression I didn’t know how to find that joy. The problem I was facing was that I tried to do it on my own apart from any

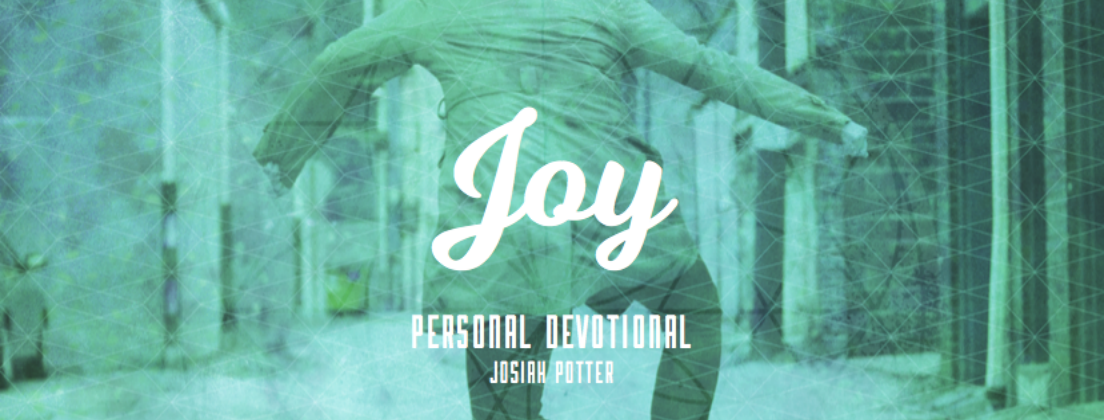
acknowledgement of what Christ did for me. Returning to that first love through reminding myself of the gospel, began to open my life to the joy that only comes from Christ. As you experience the Advent season, do so with the gospel in mind. Keep in mind what Christ did for you at the cross. Out of that focus comes a joy that surpasses anything else.

### **Reflection**

1. What are you currently turning to for joy?
2. How does Christ bring full joy?
3. What part of the gospel can you pray through to help show you what joy is?

### **Prayer Response**

Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal areas you look to current circumstances to bring you joy. Pray that through the power of the Holy Spirit they will be replaced with further devotion to the gospel.



*For you make him most blessed forever;  
you make him glad with the joy of your presence.*  
(Psalm 21:6 ESV)

*Joy, unspeakable joy  
An overflowing well  
No tongue can tell  
Joy, unspeakable joy  
Rises in my soul, never let's me go*  
Chris Tomlin

## **RUBY JOY**

My wife and I have four little girls, which means my house is covered in pink, we own every Disney princess dress in existence, and I'm going to need to get a male dog to try and even out the estrogen levels that permeate my existence. While all of that is true, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. Especially boys. I would never trade my girls for boys. My friends have boys and they smell and break everything they touch, so I'll stay right here in my pink palace.

We named our third daughter Ruby Joy. It seemed fitting at the time and we loved the way it sounded, but little did we know how true her name would come to be. Ruby is truly a joy to our family. She's so full of life. She's independent. She's hilarious. She loves her sisters with all her heart,

and she continually fills my heart with so much joy that I sometimes wonder if I'll burst.

You see, Ruby brings me joy with her presence. Not with what she can offer. Not what she can do, but who she is. I reflect on this as I reread the Psalm above and think, if this little girl can bring me this much joy with her presence, how much more can an infinite and perfect God bring me unspeakable joy with His perfect presence.

## THE JOY OF THE LORD

*Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

(1 Peter 1:8-9 ESV)

Something happens in the believer when they experience the presence of God. Though they may not be able to see him, as Peter says in the excerpt from his first letter above, they believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible. This is such good news because this means we get to experience the joy of the Lord here and now. While we do wait in anticipation of His return, part of the joy of waiting for Him is experiencing His presence which leads us to inexpressible joy!

Can you imagine if every person who walked through the doors of our church, experienced the presence of God in such a profound way that it led them to joy that was so grand that they felt they could barely express it!? Imagine a congregation of worshippers overflowing with joy! What a service that would be! What glory that would bring to the name of Jesus!

## REFLECTION

I don't know about you, but thinking about that makes me excited and sad at the same time. It makes me excited because there is a great possibility that the Holy Spirit could move in such a way that we could see that type of

revival and renewal in the hearts and worship of our church. It makes me sad because there are so many Sundays where I can see the complacency and disinterest in the faces of worshippers in our congregation. I can see the pain of sin, disease, dysfunction and brokenness. It makes me long for the Spirit to move sooner and quicker and with great power to see us worship with joy in the midst of what we're going through.

As a pastor, it weighs on me because of my love for our church, but as a person and a worshipper I have to ask myself these questions that help me stir my affections in hope of seeing joy in the midst of life and hardship. Maybe these questions could help you in your own journey to experiencing the presence and joy of the Lord.

1. Even though I haven't seen Jesus, do I love Him?
2. Even though I don't see Him now, do I believe in Him?
3. What is keeping me from worshipping Him with joy right now?

## RESPONSE

This week, as you prepare for worshipping with the church on Sunday, ask yourself those questions. I find that a lot of times the thing keeping me from worshipping Jesus with joy, is myself. It tends to be wrapped up in how I feel, or what someone has said to me, or whether or not I like the song set we're doing that week. (Yes, even I don't get to sing my favorite songs every Sunday!) When you find yourself unraveling what is keeping you from worshipping the Lord with joy, enter into prayer and take those things to Him. Ask Him to help you focus on Him and who He is and what He's done. There's no better call to worship than to meditate on the One we worship.

Take some time right now to write down the things that stir your affections for Jesus and the things that steal your affection from Jesus. This is an exercise I learned from Pastor Matt Chandler several years ago. Write down 3-5 things in each category and then go DO the things that stir your

affections for Jesus and STOP or limit your time spent doing the things that steal your affections for Jesus. (I say limit, because it can sometimes be a good thing that we've made a god thing; like social media or tv etc.)

Even better, before you and your family come to worship on Sunday mornings, pick one of those things that stirs your affections for Him and do that before you come, praying that Jesus would fill you with unspeakable joy.



# Peace

FAMILY DEVOTIONAL  
JUSTIN A SERRA

Before engaging in family worship this week

Parents,

Your home isn't as clean as you'd like it to be, your kids are going to bed later than they should, they are more mouthy than they ought, you and your spouse haven't dated in quite some time and work is immensely stressful at the moment. I understand this feeling more often than I'd like to admit. There are soooooo many moments where I don't feel gracious and peaceful and this often plays out in my home.

Stop. Breathe. It's all good.

The Apostle Paul often opens and closes his letters with "grace and peace to you" as though it is assumed grace and peace are going to abound in your life. It's prophetic in a sense. Ever wonder why this is so? Why does Paul assume the Christian reading will be one in a state of continual grace and peace. Does he not know my life?!

If you're like me, you immediately argue back. I sometimes say to myself "Paul had the gift of singleness so he ain't have two babies under 3 years old crying all day because they dropped their PJ Masks toys in the potty" (Yeah, thats a real situation in my house). But the Apostle Paul isn't wrong in addressing us this way. The act of receiving grace and peace are assumed from Paul because it is so! In the midst of the frantic mess of life, God keeps us in a state of grace and peace that renews every day. Peter

takes this a step further when he says "may grace and peace be multiplied to you".

John Piper says, *"Paul and Peter never assume your present experience of grace and peace cannot or should not be increased. They assume the opposite. They do not say, or imply, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you, unless you have all there is to have." You never have all there is to have. That's why this prayer is at the beginning of every letter. You always need more grace, more peace."* This is a glorious truth. Hold tight to it this Advent season. Before you get up in the morning remind yourself that the apostles prayed on your behalf for new experiences with God's grace and peace.

### **Family Worship:**

Get the family together in the living room and put on a song to worship to together. I recommend a song by Sovereign Grace Music called *"Grace and Peace"*. If you have younger children I would sing along with them to Sovereign Grace Music's *"God Always Keeps His Promises"*.

### **Readings:**

*Ephesians 2:11-22*

*Jesus Storybook Bible, The Captain of the Storm, pg. 236*





# Peace

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL  
STEVE MCKENZIE

## PASSAGE FOR MEDITATION

*"Glory to God in the the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased"* - Luke 2:24

## DEVOTIONAL

Adapted from Joni Eareckson Tada's *'A Christmas Longing'*

As the civil war raged, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow penned the words for the Christmas carol, *'I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day,'* on December 25, 1863. He just received word that his son was severely injured in battle, adding to the grief of the recent death of his wife. The song closes with these honest words:

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!"

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead, nor doth he  
sleep; The wrong shall fail,  
The right prevail,  
With peace on earth, good will to men.

We long for peace, beyond a temporary calm, that will ultimately establish an everlasting peace between God and man and between all peoples.

In another of man's wars, in 1914 on Christmas day, 100,000 armed men expected another day of bloodshed and destruction in the trenches of France and Belgium. WWI Private Frank Sumter wrote, "The devastation looked terrible in its true colors - clay and mud and broken brick - but when it was covered in snow it was beautiful."

As the snow fell and before shots were fired, some unarmed German soldiers left the trenches and began singing, "Silent Night." Soon both trenches were emptied as Christmas carols rang out and opposing sides met in middle. The bloodshed stopped on Christmas day as the fighting ceased and humanity was temporarily restored. For that moment, the heralding of a different kind of peace treaty rang across those trenches.

The war between heaven and earth, God and man, ended with the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the beautiful thing was this: It wasn't just for a day. The war had not simply been suspended. It wasn't a temporary truce. You see, when Christ entered history, He didn't come waving a white flag. His coming was not simply a lull in the battle. It was more than a temporary cease-fire.

When the angels sang, "peace on earth, good will toward men," they were announcing an armistice. It was V-Day. An end, not just to the battle between God and man, but to war. Jesus signed the peace treaty with his own blood. Our longing for peace finds its fulfillment and rest in Jesus.

## REFLECTION

Consider the questions asked by so many when we see the pain of this world. How does God address the suffering that we face in the midst of the wars fought in battlefields around the world and in the hearts of every man?

Think about what we truly long for when we pray for peace? Are we satisfied to be safe and comfortable or do we seek the Prince of Peace even at the price of suffering?

## RESPONSE

How does the knowledge and understanding of God's future and permanent peace impact the situations you face today that need a peaceful resolution?



# Peace

PERSONAL DEVOTIONAL  
SCOTT & LINDA REAVIS

## Passage

Judges 6:23-24a

*But the Lord said to him, "Peace be to you. Do not fear; you shall not die."  
Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord Is  
Peace...*

## Devotional

This passage is about Gideon's call. When he realized it was the Angel of the LORD who was speaking to him, he was afraid. Many scholars believe Old Testament references to "the Angel of the LORD" can refer to God himself, specifically the Son of God. In any event, Gideon's fear was because he encountered God or an Angel face-to-face - too awesome and wonderful to remain calm. His fear was justified - scripture states that to see God is to die (Judges 13:22). But God pronounced peace to Gideon. In fact, God's name is used, "the LORD is Peace", or "Jehovah Shalom"... literally "the self-existent one is peace".

God is faithful to His pronouncement of peace through His promises. Isaiah 9:6 contains the beloved Christmas prophecy... "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."

When individuals encounter God, the right and only response is fear. But God speaks "do not be afraid" (Luke 1:13, Luke 1:30). The very words of the Prince of Peace dispels fear - even ultimate fear of the Almighty God.

We also see declarations in the New Testament... "Grace and peace to you"... an endearing and oft-used greeting by the Apostle Paul to the churches. Our God is an awesome God, but His glory is also that He is merciful and gracious (Exodus 33:18-19).

## Reflection

Make a list of what you have been anxious or afraid of lately. What are some fears from outward circumstances? For example, changes in government, financial instability, sickness, marriage and family struggles, singleness struggles?

Even deeper and more importantly, what are some fears from within? For example, guilt of past sins and mistakes? How about struggling with knowing or missing the will of God for my life? Or the nagging fear "does God forgive and accept me?" Be sure to list these as well.

## Response

It is easy to get our eyes, hearts, and minds on temporal things when they clamor for our service and attention. Confess to God the fears that you listed. The awesome God, who is to be feared, has come to us in Jesus Christ. And He bids us to come to Him. He has made atonement for our sin on the cross, and has thus purchased and bestowed God's forgiveness and acceptance upon us. (Ephesians 2:13-16)

Questions for Meditation:

1. We see the consistency of God's character from the Old to the New Testament. He is "The LORD is Peace" to Gideon and "The Prince of Peace" to His church. How does knowing God's Name (nature and character), Jehovah Shalom help to transform your response to the fears from outside your control and from inside your own heart?

2. How will you respond to God in the diverse excellencies of His character? In other words, how will you embrace both the fear of the LORD and receive His declaration of peace to you? It is not in the power of your will, but in the finished work of Christ, consistent with His character of love, grace, and peace. Behold His beauty, and come to Him!

3. Pray and ask Jehovah Shalom, (the LORD is Peace), to fill you with grace and peace in the areas you listed as your fears. Believe His character and receive His mercy!

4. How can you be an agent of grace and peace and encourage others to come to Jesus, the Prince of Peace?

## Song

Watch, listen to and sing to "Prince of Peace" by Hillsong United.

*My heart a storm, clouds raging deep within  
The Prince of peace came bursting through the wind  
The violent sky held its breath  
And in Your light I found rest  
Tearing through the night  
Riding on the storm  
Staring down the fight  
My eyes found Yours  
Shining like the sun  
Striding through my fear  
The Prince of peace met me there  
You heard my prayer  
Hope like the sunlight piercing through the dark  
The Prince of peace came and broke into my heart  
The violent cross, the empty grave  
And in Your light I found grace  
Tearing through the night  
Riding on the storm  
Staring down the fight  
My eyes found Yours  
Shining like the sun  
Striding through my fear  
The Prince of peace met me there*

*You're always there  
And You hear my prayer  
Your love surrounds me when my thoughts wage war  
When night screams terror, there Your voice will roar  
Come death or shadow, God I know Your light will meet me there  
When fear comes knocking, there You'll be my guard  
When day breeds trouble, there You'll hold my heart  
Come storm or battle, God I know Your peace will meet me there  
Again and again  
Oh, be still my heart  
I know that You are God  
Oh, fear no evil  
For I know You are here  
And my soul will know Your love surrounds me when my thoughts wage war  
When night screams terror, there Your voice will roar  
Come death or shadow, God I know Your light will meet me there  
And my soul will know When fear comes knocking, there You'll be my guard  
When day breeds trouble, there You'll hold my heart  
Come storm or battle, God I know Your peace will meet me there  
Oh, be still my heart  
And my soul will ever know that You are God  
And You heard my prayer*

Songwriters: Dylan Thomas / Joel Houston / Matt Crocker  
Prince of Peace Lyrics © Capitol Christian Music Group