



*A collection of devotions from
Friends & Family of
Wesley Chapel Church
December 2024*

Greetings friends and family of Wesley Chapel! .

As we enter the Advent season, I pray this collection of devotions will give you an opportunity to dive into scripture and perhaps be inspired by others personal testimonies. Take time daily to read and reflect on each message and be open to what it is that God may be saying to you. You may also see some writings from members gone but not forgotten! Please note that I may not always include the scripture verse. I do this in hopes that you take the time to open your Bible and personally study **God's word**.

I praise God for speaking to your hearts, and in turn moving you to share it with others. Thank you to all who contributed, it has truly been a blessing to type and read all these wonderful submissions.

Love & Blessings,
Shanna



Sunday ~ December 1

COMPASSION

Read: Colossians 3:12-13

In the Webster Dictionary, compassion is defined as a feeling of sympathy or pity or to have great sorrow for the sufferings or trouble of another or others, accompanied by an urge to help.



Recently, during my travels into New York City, delivering cabinetry and furniture to various stores for Jason; I have noticed a substantial increase in the number of homeless and destitute people. These people are there for a variety of reasons; it may be drug or alcohol addiction or mental illness, it may be ex-military that have not adjusted to civilian life after returning from the war-front, or it could be they just run upon hard times and in some cases, it is obvious, they are illegal aliens corralled and contained in specific areas.

Regardless of the “why” they are there, it is a situation that no one seems to have any concern. The people working and living in the city step over or walk around these people, laying on the sidewalks or in doorways; some covered with cardboard, tarps or make-shift tents or a few laying on and under all their earthly possessions and others laying totally exposed to the weather with no cover or protection at all.

Where is the caring nature of those that live and work in the city? Where is the consideration of governmental officials? Where is the empathy of our federal agencies with programs and funding? Where is the loving kindness of the churches to meet the needs of the poor and down-trodden? Where are you and I to show the compassion to those in need, as GOD and Christ have shown compassion to us?

Let me remind you, that we as a people of GOD and followers of Jesus Christ are called to search out those in need and provide to them as has been provided to us. This is emphasized in Chapter 25 of Matthew as

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Jesus is instructing the disciples and explaining the basis of final judgement; summarized in Matthew 25:45: 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me. "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

Colossians 3:12-13

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.

~submitted by Dave Henry

Prayer: Dear GOD, help us to show compassion to ALL. Help us to be aware of those around us that may be poor and needy and to show others the loving kindness and grace you have demonstrated to us. In **Jesus' precious name. AMEN!**

Thought for the day: As we celebrate Christmas and the birth of Jesus, let us remember, it was the compassion of God to sacrifice His Son, Jesus Christ and the compassion of Christ to bare all our sins on the cross, so we may enter into Heaven dead to sin and have eternal life, glorifying GOD forever.

Monday ~ December 2

STAY ON THE PATH

Read: Matthew 7:13-14

“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”

“The hardest thing for a Christian to do is to be a Christian outside of church. There are times when sin is not only easier, but also more fun, and it will make certain people like you. Having people around you who don't believe in Christ makes it very difficult to be a strong follower of Him. How does God feel about all of this? There are few people in the world who will get to heaven due to the narrow path described in Matthew 7:13-14. Staying on the path and getting people to join you, especially if you don't like them, is very hard. Jesus was a gift to all people, and gifts as great as He is are meant to be shared. Sharing Christ with people we don't get along with can be challenging, and it's harder to talk to them. However, Jesus loved all people, and we should do the same. We need to remember that Heaven is beyond amazing, and we cannot reach it unless **we follow the narrow path. And unless we share God's gift and His light, other people can't get to Heaven either. This Christmas, instead of giving people presents, give them the love of Jesus. Because this gift will change their life forever, and will be everything they will ever need.**

~submitted by Faith Millin

Prayer: Lord, thank you for all of the blessings you have given me. I pray that you encourage me to share your gift and follow your path for me. Help me to be strong in my faith and guide me to You, Amen.

Thought for the day: If every Christian told one person about Jesus, imagine how many more people would be followers of Christ.

Tuesday ~ December 3

JESUS DOES NOT NEED MY BOAT

Read: Matthew 14:25

Matthew 14:25 says, “During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.” This seems like a straightforward Scripture, but the part that challenges me is this: Jesus does not need my boat.

Our boat is anything we possess that enables us to do our job, fulfill our calling and arrive at our God-chosen destination. It could be our experiences, titles, education, salary, family connections or possessions. But Jesus, after making disciples get into the boat and encounter a storm, walked across the water to be with them. Jesus did not need their boat.

Too often we (which means, of course, primarily me) assume that God has brought us to this certain place, endowed us with these certain gifts, allowed us to experience those particular things because He is going to use them for this particular purpose. But we deceive ourselves when we think we have the plans of God all figured out. Jesus does not need our boat.

There was a time, of course, when Jesus chose to use our boat. In Luke 5:1-3, **Jesus used Peter’s boat in order to teach the crowds that had gathered around Him.** Afterward, Jesus instructed Peter to go back out and fish, even though they had fished all night and caught nothing. Their **catch after obeying the Lord was so large it almost sank Peter’s boat** (Luke 5:7).

Later in our walk with Jesus, He shows us He has other means of accomplishing the purposes of God for our life. He wants us to grow beyond the safety and security of our known talents and abilities. Jesus **wants us to learn that just about the time we think we’ve got the methods and motives of God figured out,** He purposely sends us into a storm so that He can scare the wits out of us by appearing in a form we least expect.

Sometimes the storm is a financial scare so He can appear in the form

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of our Provider. We thought we were providing everything for our family, but God reminds us that everything we have comes from Him (1 Chron. 29:14)

Other times we think it is our education or vocational connections that **will land us that career we've always wanted, but then a call comes from someone we don't know and we enter into a career we never imagined.**

After four years of Bible College and two years of completing a Masters in Ministry, I'm finding that **everything I thought I know about being a pastor** has brought me headlong into a storm that seems to be taking me further and further from the shore of church ministry. For some reason, I **find that my life's testimony is more effective on a construction site than in a church classroom**, and unsaved men are changing their behavior because I walk into a room. However, I know it is not me they are responding to, but the Jesus within me.

Only now am I starting to realize that Jesus doesn't need my boat - my education, teaching techniques, study habits, etc. - to lead me in His direction. And to tell you the truth, the vision I am now getting of God is scary, amazing, and unknowable all at the same time. I sometimes feel **like I'm in the middle of a lake, pulling against the oars and drifting further and further from my goal.** However, I know that one day I will arrive on the shore of His choosing, at the time of His appointing, to do the work of His anointing. We may not arrive there in my boat, but we will arrive there just the same.

*~Posted by Jim Thornber, Nov. 1, 2010; Jim Thornber's blog
- Submitted by Mindy Singo*



Wednesday ~ December 4

PAUSE TO PRAY

Read: Phillipians 4:4-9

A meteorologist in Mississippi went viral for uttering six simple yet profound words during his weather forecast on March 24, 2023. Matt Laubhan was tracking a severe storm when he realized a catastrophic **tornado was about to bear down on the town of Amory. That's when Laubhan paused on live TV to say this prayer heard worldwide: "Dear Jesus, please help them. Amen."** Some viewers later said that prayer prompted them to take cover. His spontaneous and heartfelt prayer may have saved countless lives.

Our prayers can make a difference too. They don't have to be longwinded. They can be short and sweet and can be said at any time of the day. Whether we're at work, running errands, or on vacation, we can "pray continually" (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

God loves to hear us pray throughout the day. The apostle Paul reminds us that **we don't have to be prisoner of worry or fear but can take all our cares and concerns to God: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phillipians 4:6-7).**

Whether we're enjoying a sunny day or being hit by the literal or figurative storms of life, let's remember to pause and pray throughout the day.

~By Nancy Gavilanes

~Submitted by Cindy Miller

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You that I can pray to You at any time. Amen.

Thought for the day: How can you be more intentional about praying throughout the day? How has your prayer life grown over the years?

Thursday ~ December 5

DRUMMER BOY

Read: Philippians 4:4-9

“The Little Drummer Boy” is a popular Christmas song written in 1941. It was originally known as “Carol of the Drum” and is based on a traditional Czech carol. Although there isn’t any reference to a drummer boy in the Christmas story in Matthew 1-2 and Luke 2, the point of the carol goes straight to the heart of the meaning of worship. The carol describes how a boy is summoned by the Magi to the scene of Christ’s birth. Unlike the wise men, however, the drummer has no gift - so he gives what he has. He plays his drum, saying, “I play my best for Him.”

This echoes the worship Jesus described when He told of the widow and her two coins: **“Truly I tell you, He said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on” (Luke 21:3-4).**

All the drummer boy had was a drum and all the poor widow had were two coins, but the God they worshipped was worthy of their all. He is worthy of our all as well, having given His all for us.

~Written by Bill Crowder, Our Daily Bread

~Submitted by Jill Heiple

Prayer: All to Jesus, I surrender, all to Him I freely give; I will ever love and trust Him, in His presence daily live. Amen.

Thought for the day: Your little is a lot when you give your all.

Friday ~ December 6

THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Read: 2 Timothy 2:24-26 ERV “As a servant of the Lord, you must not argue. You must be kind to everyone. You must be a good teacher, and you must be patient. You must gently teach those who do not agree with you. Maybe God will let them change their hearts so that they can accept the truth. The devil has trapped them and now makes them do what he wants. But maybe they can wake up to see what is happening and free themselves from the devil’s trap.”

As Christmas approaches do you find ourselves getting down because of all the hype and advertisements. Are we turned off by the sales, events and distractions that take us far from the true meaning of Christmas? Do we ever feel like giving someone a piece of our mind because they do not see the Christ in Christmas? I mean how else should we feel? Let us look at some scripture that may give insight as to how we should react to all the commercialization and misrepresentation of the holiday. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 gives us an idea about how we should deal with those who do not share our views. We are to be kind to them and not argue. It is not our job to change them. That process is between them and God. Our job is to demonstrate how they will act and respond after they change. So, throughout this Christmas season we should be doing our best to model the life of Jesus. When others change because they were inspired by our actions, Jesus deserves all the glory. He saved us and he can save others. That is the true meaning of Christmas.

~Submitted by Gary Weimer

Prayer: Heavenly father, as we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, help us to remember those who do not know him. Give us the opportunity and spirit to tell others about the birth of Christ and what it means for them. Be with us throughout the holiday season. In Jesus name, Amen.

Thought for the day: Am I reacting with the love of Jesus?

Saturday ~ December 7

NEWS WORTH CELEBRATING

Read: 2 Timothy 2:8-13

For more than two centuries, the hymn placed first in the Methodist hymnbook was “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing.” Written by Charles Wesley and originally titled “For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion,” the song was composed to commemorate the radical renewal sparked by his faith in Jesus. It has eighteen stanzas proclaiming the glory of God’s goodness to those who repent and follow Christ.

Such faith is worth celebrating-and worth sharing. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul encourages Timothy to remain steadfast in his faith and to persevere in sharing it. He noted, “This is my gospel, for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal’ (vv.8-9). Rather than second-guess his choices, Paul reminds Timothy to remember the good-news message: “Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David” (V. 8), came not to rule but to serve and ultimately to die for the sins of the world so that we may have peace with God. Death didn’t win. Jesus rose from the grave.

And just as it set free those who believe, the message itself isn’t bound. “God’s word is not chained,” said Paul (v. 9), not even from places where death seems to have won: prison cells, hospital beds, gravesides. In Christ, there’s hope for all people. That’s news worth celebrating!

*~Taken from Our Daily Bread Devotional
~submitted by Connie Pletcher*

Prayer: Father, thank You for saving me and giving me opportunities to share the good news with everyone.

Thought for the day: How do you celebrate the good news of Jesus in your daily life? Whom can you share the good news with?

Sunday ~ December 8

WITH GOD, YOU WILL HAVE SUCCESS

Read: Proverbs 1:2-4, 7



This past fall, I was fortunate enough the travel to Colorado with my dad and grandfather to hunt elk in the Rocky Mountains. I praise God for allowing me to be able to go on a trip like this for the west is truly a magnificent sight. I went into this hunt **with expectations of being successful, but that isn't how it played out, or so I thought.** I had multiple opportunities at elk but none of them ever **panned out how I had hoped.** Every time a plan didn't go as I had thought it would, my hope and expectations of killing an elk lowered. I frequently prayed to God, asking for him to guide us in the right direction to help us to become successful. It continued to get harder to carry on after each failed attempt at an elk but I knew I had to keep faith in God. It **came down to the last day of the season and I still hadn't killed an elk.** It was a windy, snowy morning and we just happened to blunder upon a herd of elk on the side of a mountain. The conditions were certainly not ideal but I had no other options but to take a long-distance shot. Unfortunately, this opportunity did not go as planned either, and the elk got away.

The more I got to thinking about the hunt, I started to realize that **even though I wasn't successful with killing an elk, I was successful in growing my faith with God.** I prayed for him to guide us in the right direction and for us to be successful, and he did just that. The lord showed me a beautiful landscape that only God himself can create, as well as kept my grandfather, dad, and myself safe in the journey. He also guided me to the right locations to spot elk and learn from my mistakes so that I can become a better hunter. These lessons that he has taught me are the exact same lessons I need to apply to my faith in God. I have to learn from the sinful mistakes I have made and apply them to future, to help myself become a better Christian, and become closer to God. Even when bad things happen, we need to remember that God makes everything happen for a reason. He puts us in the right locations at the

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right times to have things happen that we will learn from to become better Christians. Even though it may not be the trophy that I had originally pictured, God truly gave me a trophy that is far better than antlers, and that is wisdom and guidance to bring me closer to him. We may not always understand why things happen, but God always has a reason for everything and you need to trust that he will always take care of you even when things seem impossible.

~submitted by Glen Millin

Prayer: Dear God, help us to always have faith and trust in you, even **when things don't go as we have planned for ourselves.** Help us to always know that you have a plan for each and every one of us and that if we trust in you, we will have ever-lasting life with you in heaven. Amen.

Thought for the day: God always has a plan for us, even when things seem to go wrong.

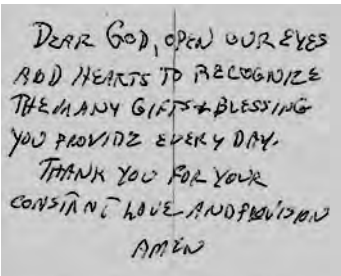


Monday ~ December 9

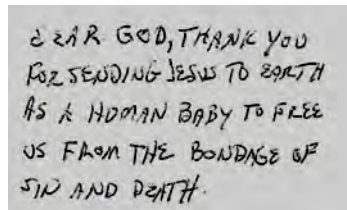
LOVING FATHER

Read: Proverbs 22:6

Shortly after my dad passed away (mom passed away 3 years before) we had to clean out their apartment. A task harder than I thought it would be. After all it wasn't my childhood home but it was where I spent a lot of time with them because of their failing health. In the bedroom was a desk my dad read his bible at each morning. He had several scripture quotes taped on it and 2 handwritten notes (see below). I imagine he read these each day. To have his words in his hand writing I knew I couldn't throw them away. It is now something I read each morning when I do my devotions and I think about my dad (and mom). The peace it brings me is hard to explain. I am so thankful for God giving me loving parents who taught me about God and Jesus. My dad wasn't a man of many words but he lived out his faith especially when his health was failing.



DEAR GOD, OPEN OUR EYES
AND HEARTS TO RECOGNIZE
THE MANY GIFTS & BLESSINGS
YOU PROVIDE EVERY DAY.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR
CONSTANT LOVE AND PROVISION
AMEN



DEAR GOD, THANK YOU
FOR SENDING JESUS TO EARTH
AS A HUMAN BABY TO FREE
US FROM THE BONDAGE OF
SIN AND DEATH.

-Submitted by Michele Klein

Prayer: Heavenly Father thank you for those in our lives who have taught and shown us Jesus.

Thought for the day: Who are you teaching to know our Loving Heavenly Father?

Tuesday ~ December 10

FIRM EXPECTATIONS

Read: Psalm 62:5-6

In the silence of winter evenings, there is an invitation to find peace in the wintery stillness. No matter what this Christmas season has brought to the surface, Jesus remains the same. He is unmoved by stresses and the demands of others. He is constant in bold confidence. Let us set our expectations on Him as we wait in the stillness of the night. He is coming to your aid. He is your defense.

May your soul find rest in the perfect presence of Emmanuel. As we look **to the celebration of Jesus' birth, remember that He has already come. He has already won!** He is the God of our salvation. Stand upon the rock of His faithfulness; He cannot be shaken. As we rely on His power in our lives, we will not be moved from the great mercy of His love.

~written by Sara Perry, "Jesus, You're All I Need", Broadstreet Publishing

~submitted by Linda Henry

Prayer: Savior, thank You for meeting us with peace in the stillness of these moments with You. Come in close with the liquid love of Your presence and increase our hope, joy, and confidence as we look to You. In **Your Son's name, AMEN.**

Thought for the day: Wait in firm expectation that Jesus is unchanged and steadfast in all times.



Wednesday ~ December 11

DO NOT BE AFRAID

Read: Luke 1:30

God loves each of us equally, with His grace and mercy. However, He **created with “free will”**.

Have you ever thought about what would have happened if when the angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her about giving birth to Jesus? **What if she had said, “Whoa! No way do I want this assignment.”**

She was preparing to marry Joseph and what would he and other people say? Rumors and scandals would fly, about her pregnancy without Holy matrimony.

Gabriel told her she had found favor with God and do not be afraid. **Mary’s unhesitative and unwavering of God’s will for her life is a testimony to Mary’s faith and trust in God.**

Mary, to me, was one of the first persons to say, “Let me be a God pleaser instead of always a people pleaser.” She received the word from the Lord as an honor to do His will.

God loves us so much that He wrapped Himself in flesh to be born in a broken world to keep us from perishing because of our sin. Without this miracle of a baby born in a barn, there is no salvation journey.

- submitted by Connie Kammerer

Prayer: **Father, we are so grateful for Your love for us that by Jesus’s birth into this broken world, it begins the journey that we can be saved from our sins. We open our hearts to receive Your mercy and grace. As we look to a new year, may we look to You for guidance for only “good “ overcomes “evil”. May we try to be more like Mary to become a God pleaser rather than just a people pleaser. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

Thought for the day: This birth of our Savior is the beginning of the journey to our ultimate salvation.

Thursday ~ December 12

MY TESTIMONY

Read: Hebrews 9:25-58, 1 Thessalonians 1:5-10, Revelation 22:20

Christmas - The First and Second

He came that first Christmas to become the Lamb of God, to “put away our sin by the offering of Himself.” He is coming again “the second time apart from sin unto salvation to those who are looking for Him.” (The second Christmas)

Sixty-two years ago, like those believers in Thessalonica 1900 years ago, I too in repentance and faith “...turned to God from idols (my sin and self) to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven...” (The second Christmas)

Sixty-two years later I am still serving (however imperfectly) the True and Living God waiting for that second Christmas, the return of His son to take us home to continue to love, serve, and worship Him there.

~ In loving memory and submitted by Pastor Jim Walter in 2013

Prayer: **“Thank You oh my Father**
For giving us Your Son,
And sending us Your Spirit,
Til Your work on earth is done.”
“Behold I come quickly, Amen.”
“Even so come Lord Jesus.”
(The Second Christmas)

Thought for the day: Smile! God Loves You!

Friday ~ December 13

TAKE TIME TO BE STILL

Read: Psalm 73:28, Psalm 91:14-16, Psalm 139, Psalm 34:18, Psalm 145:18 and James 4:8

My husband has always had a knack for filling our house with just the right music. Usually it is jazz during breakfast - most often Vince Goudraldi Trio, with the Charlie Brown Christmas album coming out on Thanksgiving. Then **it is often a new Christian song he's found after breakfast, and later in the day he might play a song "from the past" while we clean up from dinner. I can still hear America's "Ventura Highway" and see my little boys dancing around the kitchen with towel and plates in hand, and little Brooklyn doing what she could while she twirled to the music.**

Sometimes my husband chooses a specific song, chosen by him to tell one of us something. Last year it was Touch the Wall, by Ben Shive for our son who swims. Then there was a song with a good electronic beat for our other son who is into technology. Often my husband will send me songs that speak into the season of life we are going through. Today I want to share two of those songs with you. I will put the lyrics below, and also links to listen online. I pray these thoughts and songs will encourage you and quiet your hearts in this season to ponder His nearness - our good - a gift He gave at Christmas.

The first song, "Be Near," is not a Christmas song, but it speaks of the nearness of God. My husband brought me this song during our first year of marriage, when I was pregnant with our first child, a baby boy. It would take pages to tell, but for now I will say that though our baby made it and he is now a thriving young man, things were not going well at the time. The prognosis was not good, and after our son was born, he spent four months in the NICU. When he came home I found myself the mama of a very precious, but medically fragile baby. Our son is truly a miracle, and God gets the glory for that. But those days and weeks and months were very hard. And in that hard season, God was near to me, to us, to our baby, daily meeting our practical needs, also giving us grace and peace and help and comfort "abundantly more than we could ask or imagine."

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My husband shared the second song, “Hush,” with us during the pandemic. Everything was closed. You know this. It was getting closer and closer to Christmas, and how does a pastor hold a Christmas Eve service when the church is...“closed”? **We recorded church from our home through a camera,** and others recorded songs and readings to share, and our son put everything together and broadcasted Christmas Eve service through the computer. **My husband included the song, “Hush”, in the service.** It says, “Holy in our hearts, holy in our homes, Glory’s come down, heaven’s come to us...” and God was near to all of us and drawing us to Himself...in our homes.

All of us have experienced God’s nearness during hard times and we know others who have. It’s a promise we hear at church and in our Bibles. We know He never leaves or forsakes us. We sure do want that and we need it, and we’ve learned, or are learning, that His nearness is our good. **“But as for me, the nearness of God is my good...”** (Psalm 73:28). Psalm 91 tells of the promises of His care, especially His very words to us in verses 14-16. Also consider His nearness told to us in Psalm 139, Psalm 34:18, Psalm 145:18, and James 4:8.

God is and wants to be near in our hard times - and also in our hidden, ordinary every day living at home, at our jobs, in our schools, in the car. God came near at Christmas, a gift given to be received with a thousand and more blessings in Christ, providing a way for us to be near Him.

I pray we can take time to be still this Christmas season, to “hush”, savoring the season and pondering His desire and offer to be near. I pray He will be holy in our homes, holy in our hearts, holy - and so very near (thank you Lord Jesus!) - wherever we are and in whatever season we find ourselves in. Be blessed!

~submitted by Amy Monteith

Thought for the day: Please take time to listen to these songs

Be Near, by Shane and Shane

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=f4VqDdqfJqU>

Hush, by Passion, featuring Melodie Malone and Kirby Kaple

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=BLm4toY5rdY>

Saturday ~ December 14

BE THE LIGHT

Read: Matthew 5:14-16

As our church secretary, I've found myself spending a lot of time within our church walls alone. Besides being in God's beautiful creation, the peace I find there is unmatched.

I was working late one evening so the only lights on were in the hallways. I came out of the fellowship hall and looked within the pitch-black sanctuary. From there I saw the glow of the golden cross that adorns our altar. Somehow, in that completely dark room, the cross took on some light shining from within the hallway and seemed to be a **reflective glow. I couldn't help but be amazed, and it got me thinking** about how we need to glow, to be the light in this dark world and share **God's love with others.**

Since that evening I've found myself saying hello to complete strangers, sharing a smile or kind word to others, telling folks to have a blessed day, and in certain occasions, sharing my testimony. I have found complete joy in reflecting my light that I've found through the glory of Christ Jesus.

~submitted by Shanna Breegle

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, we believers do not have inherent light, but rather reflective light. Allow us to behold the glory of the Lord, and reflect it. Help us to know we need to make sure that nothing comes **between us and Lord's light. Amen.**

Thought for the day: Do not light your lamp and place it under a basket, however, place it high on that hillside so that it cannot be hidden.

Sunday ~ December 15

HOPE FOR TODAY

Read: Romans 5:5

With the Christmas season here reminding me of the birth of Jesus, coming down to earth as our Savior, this devotion regarding hope seemed very appropriate.



When you wake up in the morning, what is your first thought? Is it your coffee, that meeting you have to attend, or the blessing of being a child of God? It is human nature to plan for the events of the day, but each day also needs a dose of hope - the hope that comes from knowing that the God of the universe is also our personal friend and Savior. The hope that we are never alone, and that no task is too difficult with our heavenly Guide along to support and strengthen us.

The world today at times seems a bit hopeless. We don't need to go into all the reasons why, we just need to recognize that we are travelers here, not permanent residents, so the events of today aren't as important as they may seem at times. Fearful about the future? That dissipates as well when it is confronted by faith. A famous saying goes like this: "Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. And lo, no one was there."

~from Dr. David Jeremiah's daily devotional

~in loving memory and submitted by Leon Ohler in 2019

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to always remember we belong to you. Our hope comes from our belief in Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Thought for the day: May your hope and faith be strong.

Monday ~ December 16

ADVENT

Read: Matthew 7:8, Job 1:21, Psalm 136:1

Christmas is a jolly time; sleigh bells ringing, children singing, bells, and presents. **But Christmas is not just that. It is Christ's birth! Sure it's nice to get a few presents here and there, but can you hear jingle bells in Christmas? Is it Jingmas? Is it your birthday? Is that why you get presents? It is not your birthday. Like I said before; it's Christ's Birthday! Don't get me wrong; it's not a sin to make a Christmas list, Jesus is so very kind, he wants us to have all those presents! So in turn for all his kindness, how can we make him happy? Do we give him presents? No. We can do what the advent candles are!**

The advent candles are three purple and one pink with a white one. The first week is a purple candle. It is hope. You can trust and have hope. **God will be there by your side. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened to you."** (Matthew 7:8) this means that if you ask God for something, if it's something God wants, he'll do it. It may take time, but he'll listen.

The second week of advent is also a purple candle. This is peace. One way you can have peace within you is to not cause violence or cause arguments. To make peace is different. If two someones you know are fighting, ask God to help you stop it. God will surely tell you what to say. One example of no peace is when Saul (before he was Paul) threw the Christians into jail. Saul was blinded by God after that.

The third week of advent is joy. It is a pink candle. A fun game for all ages is the "glad game"— or in this case, the "joy game". **Job was joyful.** His wealth was taken away. His children were taken away. Yet he tore up his robe, shaved his head, and fell to the ground in worship and said, **"Naked am I from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."**(Job 1: 21) The glad game may not be easy, but Job played it well (though the glad game isn't mentioned in the Bible). His sons and

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daughters were taken away from him, and yet he praised God. He was joyful through sorrow.

The fourth week of advent is love. It is a purple candle. One way to have love is to forgive. Another is to love God more than anything else. "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever." (Psalm 136:1) For the whole chapter, it says something and then repeats "His love endures forever". See how important love is? "Love your neighbor as yourself" is somewhere in the New Testament. It is repeated throughout the Bible.

The last candle is white. It is the Christ candle. For this one, just celebrate Christmas!

~submitted by Brooklyn Monteith



Tuesday ~ December 17

STAND FIRM

Read: Ephesians 6:10-11

Earlier this fall I went on a hunting trip with my dad and my son. During our return trip home, we stopped at a truck stop one evening to eat dinner. The restaurant was decorated with all sorts of patriotic symbols, along with lots of quotes from famous people. As I sat at my table, a quote on the **booth across from me caught my eye. It read “Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm” -Abraham Lincoln.**

This quote by one of our greatest presidents carries a lot of truth. It conveys the message that you should be aware of your position. Have you thought it through? Is it a position that you can uphold? Do you really have faith in where you are standing? If so, you need to stick to your convictions and not be moved. Although great advice, this statement can also be deceiving depending on what your viewpoint is.

What is the position that you are defending? How do you know whether it is truly right or not? What if the stance that you have taken is actually the wrong one? Many strong and intelligent people have found their selves on the wrong side of history believing that their stance was fully in the right. **Thankfully, Paul’s letter to the Ephesians lets us know how to be sure of our position.**

He instructs us to “be strong in the Lord”. (v.10) To “take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.” (v.13) Only by “being strong in the Lord” and looking to Him for strength and truth are we able to truly take up a firm stance on solid ground. You need to know His word, to accept it and to have faith in it. Jesus told us that “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Matthew 7:24

Jesus is the Word of God. He is the Truth. He is the Rock. Trust in His words, place yourself on His foundation and then stand firm to the end.

~submitted by Mark Millin

Prayer: Lord, help us to know your word. I pray that you will imprint it on all of our hearts so that we may know you and follow your way wherever we are. I ask that you will strengthen us so that we may stand firm in you and resist the wickedness that may surround us. We trust in you alone Lord Jesus. Amen

Wednesday ~ December 18

THE BEST TIME TO PRAISE GOD

Read: Exodus 15:2

When is the best time to praise God? In church? Before dinner is served? At bedtime? None of the above. The best time to praise God is all day, every day, to the greatest extent we can. Dr. Wayne Oates once admitted, **“Many of my prayers are made with my eyes open. You see, it seems I’m always praying about something, and it’s not always convenient - or safe - to close my eyes.”** Dr. Oates understood that God always hears our prayers and that the position of our eyelids is of no concern to Him.

So, find a little more time to lift your concerns to God in prayer, and praise Him for all that He has done. Whether your eyes are open or closed, **He’s listening.**

*~taken from VeggieTales, 365 Bedtime Devotions for Boys
~submitted by Flint Breegle & Reed Breegle*

Prayer: Dear Lord, today and every day I will praise You. I will praise You, Father, with my thoughts, my prayers, my words, and my actions...now and forever. Amen.



Thursday ~ December 19

BITTERSWEET

Read: Psalm 18:2

This year Tyler and I were blessed to harvest a whitetail buck with our bows. Hunting with a bow has been one of my greatest pleasures since I got my first bow at 12 years old. My father got it for me at Christmas and I loved shooting one ever since. Now my son enjoys hunting with a bow also. As great as this season was, especially sharing with my son the huge buck he had taken, there was something missing. What was missing for me was the first person I would call to tell...my dad. I would always go and get him and he would be part of getting the deer out of the woods. He was my biggest supporter and never doubted my ability with a bow, even when my confidence wasn't that good. My father was always there for me. I also was able to observe that through his relationship with his grandchildren. With his passing this past March, it has left a hole in my heart that will never be healed, nor do I need it to be healed. I believe you never recover from grief, you just get through it. Which brings me to how a person gets through grief. There are different ways, some become hard, some bitter, and some angry with the loss. Another option is that you realize it is not about you and you turn your focus onto something solid. There isn't anything more solid than a rock and that is one of the terms you would use to describe Christ. You see, when you stand on "The Rock" and everything around you seems to be sinking, you are at peace because what you are standing on is solid.

I praise the Lord that I am a child of God and every day I am given the comforter (Holy Spirit) as he has promised. My compassion and empathy is at a level I never knew possible. My heart truly aches for those that are hurting and without the Lord. I am so thankful that when bitterness tries to take root I am reminded that I am a child of God and there is no room in

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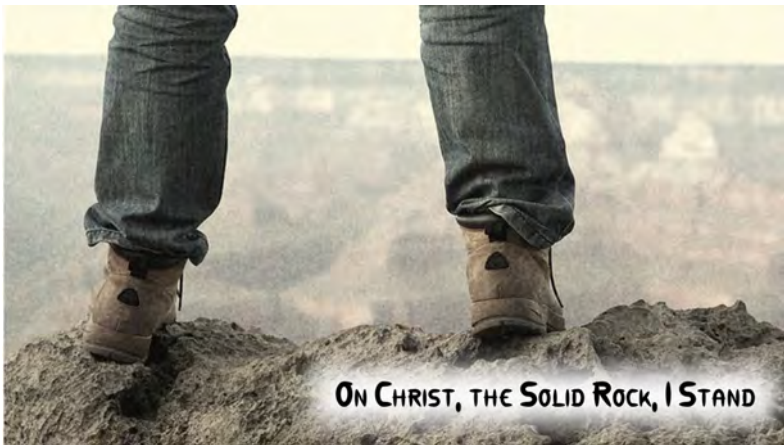
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me for that. None of this is my doing for I know I am a wretched man, but because of the Grace, Mercy and Love, and slowness to anger of my Lord, He... not me kept me standing on solid ground. For that I will always give Him praise. I will miss my earthly dad until the day my heart stops. I know I will have many more bittersweet times, but it will all take place with me standing on the Solid Rock.

~submitted by Todd Pritts

Prayer: Lord I give you all the praise. I am so thankful that you placed me on the Solid Rock, and that you sustain me in good and bad. I am truly a blessed man because of you.

Thought for the day: Where are you standing today?



Friday ~ December 20

DON'T JUST GROW IN HEIGHT, GROW IN FAITH

Read: John 3:16, Matthew 4:17, Deuteronomy 5:12, Isaiah 50:5

This is actually something I learned from my aunt, Angie Millin, at **Agape**. Though I'm changing it up a bit, it still has the same concept. Each year you might measure yourself to see how tall you got, or if you go get a check-up you can't wait till they measure you. That's great! If you eat your BROCCOLI you'll definitely get taller.

Let's look at the word BROCCOLI for a moment and maybe you'll learn something new about that word that you may have never known before. The B in the word stands for Believe. It tells us in the Bible that we need to believe in Jesus to get to Heaven. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever Believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

The R stands for Repent. Matthew 4:17 "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent for the kingdom of Heaven is near.'" In this verse Jesus is saying that you have to ask God to forgive your sins.

The O stands for Observe. Deuteronomy 5:12 "Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD you God has commanded you.

The C stands for Concentrate. When you are praying, you are always supposed to Concentrate on God and give Him your full attention.

The second C is for Call. It says in the Bible that you are to Call upon the name of the LORD. This means that when you have a worry, instead of trying to fix it yourself, you can ask God to help you.

The second O stands for Obedience. Isaiah 50:5 "The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back."

The L means Love. It is told in the Bible that you are able to love your neighbor as you love yourself.

The I means Important. God is so, so important. None of us are worthy of His love, but He chose to have mercy on us.

But wait! What does all of this have to do with what I'm talking about?

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Believe, Repent, Observe, Concentrate, Call, Obey, Love, and Important **are all ways that you can let God's light shine through as a Christian and** get closer to Him. So even though broccoli helps you grow taller, us BROCCOLI to help you grow in faith and become a better follower of Jesus.

~submitted by Grace Sechler

Prayer: Dear God, please help us to grow in faith and not just in height. If we are more like You, maybe others will want to be in Your presence someday too. Amen.

Remember your



BROCCOLI

Saturday ~ December 21

IS MY NAME IS WRITTEN THERE?

Read: Daniel 12:1, Psalm 139:16, Revelation 20:15

Ahh this is perfect! When my youngest grandson was born I wanted to find something that was personal. Since I am not a great sewer, knitter or crocheter anything like that was out of the question. So I found this **really cute book that puts the child's name throughout and then his picture at the end**, just what I was looking for. A few days later I was listening to Billy Graham and he was talking about the book of life. I lovingly thought of the book I had just gotten and how it reminded me of Gods book of life. Then he said that years ago there was a song written about it, and was an old hymn. I didn't remember it, so I set out to find it. I was able to find an older version of it, like it would have been sung at a Billy Graham Crusade. It was written by Mary Ann Kidder in 1876:

Is My Name Written There

Lord I care not for riches, neither silver nor gold; I would make sure of Heaven, I would enter the fold. In the book of Thy kingdom, with its pages so fair, Tell me, Jesus, my savior is my name written there?

Is my name written there, On the page white and fair? In the book of Thy kingdom, Is my name written there?

Lord, my sins they are many, like the sands of the sea, But Thy blood, O my Savior is sufficient for me; For the promise is written in bright letters that glow, "Though your sins be as scarlet I will make them like snow."

Is my name written there, On the page white and fair? In the book of Thy kingdom, Is my name written there?

Oh! that beautiful city, with its mansions of light, With its glorified beings, in pure garments of white; Where no evil thing cometh to despoil what is

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fair; Where the angels are watching, yes, my name's written there.

Is my name written there, On the page white and fair? In the book of Thy kingdom, Is my name written there?

I particularly like the part of the last verse " yes, my name's written there."

God sent His Son born in a manger so long ago, who grew up and went to the cross to die for our sins. Seek His face today, walk in obedience and know without a doubt that your name is written there. How many people stepped into eternity today thinking they had tomorrow? Make the decision for Christ now, and have your name written there.

~submitted by Tracy Pritts

Prayer: Father God, how can we know our name is written there in your Book Of Life ? Because authentic belief and abiding faith are our assurance of our salvation. Thank you Father for the gift of your Son. In Jesus Name, Amen

Thought for the day: Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting Life, and shall not come into judgement, but has passed from death into life.

Sunday ~ December 22



CHRISTMAS BELLS

Read: Isaiah 9:6

For many, Christmas is a magical time, created by the unique ingredients of faith, family, tradition, and a wonderful soundtrack. And every Christmas carol contributes to that soundtrack, lending it own unique story.

The carol "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day" is based on the poem "Christmas Bells" by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. It was written the year our church was founded, 1863. This was a dark time. The cloud of the Civil War hung heavily over America where seemingly every household suffered the loss of loved ones and dreadful news of wounded sons, fathers, brothers, and husbands.

Longfellow's heart was heavy as he approached the Christmas season of 1863. His loving wife had died two years earlier. In addition, his son had enlisted in the Union Army and was severely wounded by a Confederate bullet. Receiving word of his son's condition, he searched among the wounded until he found him. He wrote in his diary that caring for his son and younger children took so much of his time that he had little time for his work.

As Christmas Day dawned, he struggled to find "Peace on Earth and Good Will Towards Men". Then, he heard the peal of church bells ringing, calling Christians to worship. He picked up his pen, dipped the quill in the ink, and began to write:

*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!*

While the Civil War ultimately ended, Peace remains elusive. We are bombarded daily with videos, pictures, and sounds sowing hatred, strife, and even war. He found the bells inspiring. We, however, can be

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comforted by the knowledge that the words in his next to last stanza remain true

*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!*

It's easy to get overwhelmed by feelings of hopelessness as we experience the tensions brought on by conflict around us and across the world. Let us remember that Jesus is still the Light of the world. In him alone is lasting peace.

~submitted by Tom Skelton

Thought for the day: John 16:33: These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but **take courage; I have overcome the world.**"



Monday ~ December 23

THAT FEELING OF CHRISTMAS

Read: Romans 15:13

Christmas is not just a scheduled celebration on the calendar. Christmas is a feeling. Think about all the things that clutter your mind this time of year. The shopping, the baking, the decorating, the wrapping, the cards and the parties. Satan has worked hard to distract us from the true meaning of Christmas and, in doing so, he has robbed us of the full joy that it brings. Adults tend to be so stressed out over the holidays that they completely miss the point. We should be more like little babies when they look at the lights on a Christmas tree. Just filled with awe and wonder. God sent His Son to save the world! If you believe that with your whole heart, that Christmas feeling of love, hope, peace and joy will be all wrapped up inside of you and the light of Christ will shine in you. Planning a celebration can be a true blessing, but not when we forget what we are celebrating. Make efforts to declutter your holiday festivities and make Christ the reason for the season. By doing less of the stress, you will find more time to bless and be blessed. Take some extra time while putting up that nativity scene to reflect on the love of God. Read devotions around your Christmas tree and share a bible verse in those Christmas cards. Be the light and shine for Him. May the God of hope bless you and your family this Christmas.

~submitted by Angie Millin

Prayer: Father God, thank you for that feeling of Christmas. Thank you for the gift of salvation through Jesus. Help me to focus on Him this holiday season and to share your love with others so that they may know **the joy and peace in believing. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

Thought for the day: Do less of the stress, so that there is more time to bless and be blessed.

Tuesday ~ December 24

THREE CHURCHES

Read: Psalm 100

I was recently thinking about the churches I grew up in and wanted to share about these churches. Growing up my family lived on a farm in the country and Beulah United Methodist Church was not far from us. We used to attend Vacation Bible School (VBS) every summer and also church on Sunday as well. Every time we went to Bible school we would all line up outside in our respective class and we would march into church singing **“on time, on time to Bible school today, on time, on time I could not stay away...”** I’m sure my sisters and brothers still remember that song as well. We had a big picnic and game day on Friday with families to celebrate the end of Bible school.

As we got to be teenagers, we attended Mt. Laurel United Church of Christ. My grandparents would take us to church each Sunday as my parents were busy finishing the barn work. I can remember our **“assigned seats”, we always sat on the left side of the church in the second pew.** This is the church we joined as teenagers. We were part of the **youth group, helped with VBS, and during our church’s annual picnic we were in charge of games and also participated in the music production the church always put on.** Our church made (and still makes) the best ham pot pie! Rob and I were married in this church 31 years ago as well. I was recently back in this church for a funeral and even though we were sad to have a family member that passed away, it was nice being back in this beautiful church.

When Rob and I first got married, we attended Mt. Laurel for awhile, but slowly quit going as the church was about 40 minutes or so away. **Little did I know that one of Rob’s customers was telling him about Wesley Chapel.** Mark Sechler invited us to church and we took him up on this offer and started attending church every Sunday. I transferred my membership, Rob was baptized and became a member, and then both kids were baptized and became members as well. Thanks Mark for the invitation!

I had three churches that each played a very important part in my Christianity. What I can tell you about each of these churches is that

each church had someone that shaped me into the person I am today. Each church had a love of God and wanted to share that love with other. Where would each us be today without love with others? Where would **each of us be today without Jesus? As we prepare to celebrate Christ's** birth may we each tell others about the love of our Jesus and invite others to join us in celebrating Jesus every Sunday in church. This is our church's mission and should be our personal mission as well.

~submitted by Christine Singo

Prayer: Lord, as we enter the Advent season may our hearts be filled with the knowledge of Your love, grace, and mercy for us. Amen.



Wednesday ~ December 25

ADVENT:SEEING THE GIFT WITH FRESH EYES

Read: Isaiah 9:6

Preparing to move, moving, and arriving, have an effect on one's life. As boxes were packed and packed, something became known to me. Gifts had been given to us over the years, which I had forgotten the value of to me. Sure, I knew in my heart that they meant a great deal to me. Yet, life, busyness, and simply the passage of time caused them to fade from my memory and the forefront of my heart and life. As time and life moved on, the gifts, still meaningful to me, were placed on shelves, in boxes, and set aside. However, as we moved, I saw the gifts with fresh eyes. I saw anew the great love, time, effort, and value each gift meant in the giving of others to me and the receiving by me.

As we enter the season of Advent, unpack Christmas decorations, prepare to give gifts and remember gifts given with love during past years, I invite you to see Christmas with fresh eyes. Move closer to the Manger and look more closely at the gift given to us. God, the Father, has wrapped for us a gift unlike any other in all eternity, the Messiah, His One and Only Son, and placed him in a manger, under a star and announced by the singing of angels, with the **greatest of love. Take time to be silent and still, to hear the angels sing, "Good news and favor of God is given to us in this one wrapped and placed in a manger, Jesus."**

He will be unwrapped to be placed on a cross, for our forgiveness. He will be wrapped and placed in a tomb. On the third day, He will unwrap Himself, step out of the grave, and give to us in His nail scarred hands the gifts which only He, God, can give, resurrection and eternal life!

Like the shepherds, let me encourage us to move from where we are, to the Manger. Let us take time to meditate, think on, ponder in our hearts, and receive with fresh eyes the gift given to us this Advent and Christmas Season.

~submitted by Pastor Tim Monteith

Prayer: LORD, Thank you for coming unto us. Thank you for giving unto us. Lead me by the Holy Spirit, to see, ponder in my heart, and receive Jesus. Thank You for your great love and mercy, grace, forgiveness, and resurrection. What a gift! Let me respond with love and gratitude to You and love toward others this Advent and Christmas Season. In Jesus Name, Amen.

*Merry
Christmas*

*May the
Blessings of
the LORD
be upon you*

*God
Bless*



Rivers

